

7 Weavers, Iron Smelters and Factory Owners

Lesson at a Glance

- The **industrialisation** of Britain had a close connection with the conquest and **colonisation** of India.
- English East India Company's interest in trade led to the occupation of territory and the pattern of trade changed over the decades.
- In the late 18th century the Company was buying goods in India and exporting them to England and Europe; making profit through the sale.
- With the **growth of industrial production**, British industrialists began to see India as a **vast market** for their industrial products and very soon manufactured goods from Britain began flooding India. This badly affected Indian crafts and industries.
- Just take the example of Indian textiles. Needless to say that Indian textiles were world famous for their **quality** and **craftsmanship**.
- From the 16th century European trading companies began buying Indian textiles for sale in Europe.
- Here it is worth mentioning that Indian textiles were famous in western markets under different names such as muslim, calico, etc.
- Printed cotton cloths were called *chintzo*, *cossanes* or *khassa* and *bandanna*.
- From the 1680s there started a craze for printed Indian cotton textiles in England and Europe mainly for their beautiful **floral designs**, **fine texture** and to **relative cheapness**.
- The popularity of Indian textiles during the early 18th century worried the wool and silk makers in England. They began protesting against the import of Indian cotton textiles.
- In fact textile industries had just begun in England at this time. Unable to compete with Indian textiles, English producers wanted a secure market within the country by preventing the entry of Indian textiles. The first to grow under government protection was the calico printing industry. Indian designs were now imitated and printed in England on white muslin or plain unbleached Indian cloth.

- Competition with Indian textiles led to a search for **technological innovation** in England. The invention of **spinning jenny** in 1764 and **steam engine** in 1786 revolutionised cotton textile weaving. Cloth could now be woven in large quantities and cheaply too.
- However, Indian textiles continued to dominate world trade till the end of the 18th century. European trading companies made huge profits out of this flourishing trade.
- In India, textile production was concentrated in four regions in the early 19th century — Bengal, Dacca in Eastern Bengal (now Bangladesh), regions along the Coromandel Coast and Gujarat.
- However, Indian textiles began to decline with the development of cotton industries in Britain and by the beginning of the 19th century, English-made cotton textiles successfully ousted Indian goods from their traditional markets in Africa, America and Europe.
- This badly affected the weavers of India. They lost their employment. Bengal weavers were the worst hit.
- English and European companies stopped buying Indian goods.
- Situation became worse by the 1830s when British cotton cloth flooded Indian markets. This affected both specialist weavers and spinners. Thousands of rural women who made a living by spinning cotton thread became jobless.
- However, handloom weaving continued to exist to some extent. This was because some types of cloths could not be supplied by machines. Machines failed to produce saris with intricate borders or cloths with traditional woven patterns.
- Many weavers and spinners who lost their livelihood now became **agricultural labourers**. Some **migrated** to cities in search of work and yet others went out of the country to work in **plantations** in Africa and South America.
- Some handloom weavers got employment in the new cotton mills that were established in different parts of India.
- The first cotton mill in India was set up as a spinning mill in Bombay in 1854. Afterwards mills came up in other cities too, for examples Ahmedabad and Kanpur.
- The Textile factory industry faced various problem in the beginning.
- The first major spurt in the development of cotton factory production in India was during the First World War when textile imports from Britain declined and Indian factories were called upon to produce cloth for military supplies.

- Indian Wootz steel which was produced all over South India, fascinated European scientists. However, the Wootz steel making process was completely lost by the mid-19th century. The reason behind this was that when the British conquered India, the imports of iron and steel from England began to displace the iron and steel produced by the crafts people in India. As a result several iron smelters lost their job. The demand for iron produced by them inevitably lowered.
- By the early 20th century, the artisans producing iron and steel faced a new competition with the coming of iron and steel factories in India.
- The Tata Iron and Steel Company (TISCO) began producing steel in 1912.
- Soon in 1914 First World War broke out. Steel produced in Britain now had to meet the demands of war in Europe. So imports of British steel into India declined and the Indian Railways, that was expanding at that time, turned to TISCO for supply of rails.
- It was the best moment for the TISCO to flourish.
- The war dragged on for several years and TISCO had to produce shells and carriage wheels for the war.
- By 1919 the colonial government was buying 90% of the steel manufactured by TISCO. Over time TISCO became the biggest steel industry within the British empire.

■ TEXTBOOK QUESTIONS SOLVED ■

Let's Recall

Q. 1. What kinds of cloth had a large market in Europe?

Ans. Chintz, cossaes or khassa and bandanna.

Q. 2. What is jamdani?

Ans. Jamdani is a fine muslin on which decorative motifs are woven on the loom, typically in grey and white.

Q. 3. What is bandanna?

Ans. Bandanna is a brightly coloured and printed scarf for the neck or head. Originally, the term derived from the word 'bandhna' and referred to a variety of brightly coloured cloth produced through a method of tying and dying.

Q. 4. Who are the Agarias?

Ans. A group of men and women carrying basket-loads of iron are known as the Agaria.

Q. 5. Fill in the blanks:

- (a) The word chintz comes from the word
- (b) Tipu's sword was made of steel.
- (c) India's textile exports declined in the century.

Ans. (a) chhint (b) Wootz
(c) 19th.

Let's Discuss

Q. 6. How do the names of different textiles tell us about their history?

Ans. European traders first saw fine cotton cloth from India carried by Arab merchants in Mosul in present-day Iraq. Hence, they began to refer to all finally woven textiles as muslino.

When the Portuguese first came to India in search of spices they landed in Calicut on the Kerala coast in south-west India. The cotton textiles which they took back to Europe came to be known as calico, which is derived from Calicut.

Printed cotton cloths called chintz, cossaes or khassa and bandanna were also in great demand. The chintz is derived from the Hindi word chhint, a cloth with small and colourful flowery designs. The word bandanna is referred to any brightly coloured and printed scarf for the neck or head. Originally, the term derived from the word 'bandhna' (Hindi for tying) and referred to a variety of brightly coloured cloth produced through a method of tying and dying.

Q. 7. Why did the wool and silk producers in England protest against the import of Indian textiles in the early eighteenth century?

Ans. Textile industry had just begun to develop in England in the early 18th century. The wool and silk producers in England found themselves unable to compete with Indian textiles. They wanted to secure market within

the country by preventing the entry of Indian textiles. Therefore, they protested against its import.

Q. 8. *How did the development of cotton industries in Britain affect textile producers in India?*

Ans. The development of cotton industries in Britain badly affected textile producers in India:

- (i) Indian textiles now had to compete with British textiles in the European and American markets.
- (ii) Exporting textiles to England became increasingly difficult since very high duties were imposed on Indian textiles imported into Britain.
- (iii) Thousands of weavers in India became unemployed. Bengal weavers were the worst hit.
- (iv) By the 1830s British cotton cloth flooded Indian markets. This affected not only specialist weavers but also spinners.

Q. 9. *Why did the Indian iron smelting industry decline in the nineteenth century?*

Ans. There were several reasons:

- (i) The new forest laws of the colonial government prevented people from entering the reserved forests. Now it became difficult for the iron smelters to find wood for charcoal. Getting iron ore was also a big problem. Hence, many gave up their craft and looked for other jobs.
 - (ii) In some areas the government did grant access to the forest. But the iron smelters had to pay a very high tax to the forest department for every furnace they used. This reduced their income.
 - (iii) By the late 19th century iron and steel was being imported from Britain. Ironsmiths in India began using the imported iron to manufacture utensils and implements. This inevitably lowered the demand for iron produced by local smelters.
- All these reasons caused the decline of the Indian iron smelting industry.

Q. 10. *What problems did the Indian textile industry face in the early years of its development?*

Ans. In the early years of its development the Indian textile industry faced several problems:

- (i) It found it difficult to compete with the cheap textiles imported from Britain.
- (ii) In most countries, governments supported industrialisation by imposing heavy duties on imports. This eliminated competition and protected newly born industries. But the colonial government in India refused such protection to local industries. However, during the First World War when textile imports from Britain declined Indian factories were called upon to produce cloth for military supplies. This boosted up cotton factory production in India.

Q. 11. *What helped TISCO expand steel production during the First World War?*

Ans. Before the First World War India imported British steel for rails. When in 1914 the war broke out, steel produced in Britain now had to meet the demands of war in Europe. So, imports of British steel into India declined and the Indian Railways turned to TISCO for supply of rails. As the war dragged on for several years, TISCO had to produce shells and carriage wheels for the war. By 1919 the colonial government was buying 90% of the steel manufactured by TISCO. Over time TISCO became the biggest steel industry within the British empire.

Let's Do

Q. 12. *Find out about the history of any craft around the area you live. You may wish to know about the community of craftsmen, the changes in the techniques they use and the markets they supply. How have these changed in the past 50 years?*

Ans. Students should visit the local library and collect information regarding it.

Q. 13. *On a map of India, locate the centres of different crafts today. Find out when these centres came up.*

Ans.

