

8th Standard- Social Science

History-Weavers, Iron Smelters and Factory Owners

The industrialization of Britain had a close connection with the conquest and colonization of India.

From the 16th century, European trading companies began buying Indian textiles for sale in Europe.

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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 muslin, calico, etc.

Printed cotton cloths were called chintz, cossies 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.

The 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 example, Ahmedabad and Kanpur.

The textile factory industry faced various problems 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.

Chintz: It is derived from the Hindi word chintz which is a cloth with small and colourful flowery designs.

Bandanna: The word refers to any 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.

Spinning Jenny: A machine by which a single worker could operate several spindles on to which thread was spun. When the wheel was turned all the spindles rotated.

Charkha and takli: Household spinning instruments. The thread was spun on the charkha and rolled on the takli.

Rangrez: The dyer who dyed the thread.

Chhipigar: Block printer

Aurang: A Persian term for a warehouse—a place where goods are collected before being sold.

Smelting: The process of obtaining a metal from rock or soil by heating it to a very high temperature, or of melting objects made from metal in order to use the metal to make something new.

Bellows: A device or equipment that can pump air.

Slag heaps: The waste left when smelting metal.

1720 – The British government enacted legislation banning the use of printed cotton textiles—chintz.

1764 – Spinning Jenny was invented.

1786 – Steam engine was invented.

1854 – The first cotton mill in India was established in Bombay.

1912 – The Tata Iron and Steel Company (TISCO) began producing steel.

