

The age of industrialists

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The Peculiarities of Industrial Growth

European Managing Agencies were interested in certain kinds of products such as tea and coffee. They established tea and coffee plantations and invested in mining, indigo and jute. These products are used only for export purposes. In the late nineteenth century, Indian businessmen began setting up industries. The yarn produced in Indian spinning mills was used by handloom weavers in India or exported to China. The pattern of industrialisation was affected by a series of changes. When the swadeshi movement gained support, nationalists boycotted foreign cloth. From 1906, Indian yarn exports to China declined since produce from Chinese and Japanese mills flooded the Chinese market. Till the end of the First World War, industrial growth was slow. The war completely changed the whole scenario and Indian mills took advantage of the situation. They had a vast market to supply war needs: jute bags, cloth for army uniforms, tents and leather boots, horse and mule saddles and a host of other items. The industrial production boomed over the years and after the war, Manchester could never recapture its old position in the Indian market.

Small-scale Industries Predominate

Small-scale industries continued to predominate the rest of the country. Only a small proportion of the total industrial labour force worked in registered factories. The rest worked in small workshops and household units. Handicrafts production expanded in the twentieth century. In the twentieth century, handloom cloth production expanded. It happened because of technological changes as they started adopting new technology which helped them improve production without excessively pushing up costs.

Certain groups of weavers were in a better position than others to survive the competition with mill industries. Some of the weavers produced coarse cloth while others wove finer varieties. Weavers and other craftspeople who continued to expand production through the twentieth century did not necessarily prosper. They worked for long hours including all the women and children. But they were not simply remnants of past times in the age of factories. Their life and labour were integral to the process of industrialisation.

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