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History

## The age of industrialization

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### Before the Industrial Revolution

Proto-industrialisation is referred to the phase which existed even before factories began in England and Europe. There was large-scale industrial production for an international market not based on factories. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, merchants from Europe moved to the countryside, supplying money to peasants and artisans, requesting them to produce for an international market. Merchants were restricted to expand their production within towns because rulers granted different guilds the monopoly right to produce and trade in specific products. In the countryside, poor peasants and artisans eagerly agreed so that they could remain in the countryside and continue to cultivate their small plots. The Proto-industrial system was thus part of a network of commercial exchanges controlled by merchants.

## The Coming Up of the Factory

In the 1730s the earliest factories in England were set up, but only in the late eighteenth century, the number of factories multiplied. Cotton was the first symbol of the new era and its production boomed in the late nineteenth century. Richard Arkwright created the cotton mill where costly machines were set up and all the processes were brought together under one roof and management.

## The pace of industrial change

First: In Britain, the most dynamic industries were cotton and metals. Cotton was the leading sector in the first phase of industrialisation up to the 1840s, followed by iron and steel industry. Second: The new industries found it difficult to displace traditional industries. Third: The pace of change in the 'traditional' industries was not set by steam-powered cotton or metal industries, but they did not remain entirely stagnant either. Fourth: technological changes occurred slowly.

James Watt improved the steam engine produced by Newcomen and patented the new engine in 1781. His industrialist friend Mathew Boulton manufactured the new model. Steam engines were not used in any of the other industries until much later in the century.

## Hand Labour and Steam Power

There was no shortage of human labour in Victorian Britain. Industrialists had no problem of labour shortage or high wage costs. Instead of machines industrialists required large capital investment. The demand for labour was seasonal in many industries. In all such industries where production fluctuated with the season, industrialists usually preferred hand labour, employing workers for the season.

## Life of the Workers

The workers' lives were affected by the abundance of labour in the market. To get a job, workers should have existing networks of friendship and kin relations in a factory. Till the mid-nineteenth century, it was difficult for workers to find jobs. In the early nineteenth century, wages were increased. The fear of unemployment made workers hostile to the introduction of new technology. Spinning Jenny was introduced in the woollen industry. After the 1840s, building activity intensified in the cities, opening up greater opportunities for employment. Roads were widened, new railway stations came up, railway lines were extended, tunnels dug, drainage and sewers laid, rivers embanked.

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