

## Decline of Traditional Industries: De-Industrialization

### Introduction

The establishment of British supremacy in India caused the disruption of the century-old union between agriculture and manufacturing industry. As a result, the traditional town handicrafts and village-based industries started to decline. This whole process is known as the de-industrialisation of the Indian economy. Till the first half of the 18th century, the East India Company found it profitable to carry on Indian manufactures export trade to England and West Europe. The Indian textile industry had developed European markets, and India at that time was providing a wide variety of artistic goods to the world.

### Causes of Decline

Towards the end of the 18th century and in the subsequent years, the economic policies followed by the British led to a rapid transformation of the Indian economy into a colonial economy, whose nature and structure were determined by the needs of the British economy. The influx of cheap British and non-British machine-made goods into India was the fundamental cause of the decline of village artisan industries. The steady growth of modern industry in India during the later period further accelerated this decline.

The economic position of village artisans was weakened due to the introduction of machinery in rural areas. The adoption of new devices such as the iron plough and iron cane-crushing machines seriously affected village craftsmen. The import of cheap aniline dyes severely affected the village dyeing industry. Similarly, the substitution of kerosene in place of oil for lighting affected the village oilmen. The growth of oil-pressing industries in towns reduced the importance of traditional oil producers.

The village tanner was perhaps the worst sufferer from these changes. In the pre-British period, villagers used carcasses of dead animals for tanning purposes. But later, with the development of tanning industries linked to the world market, the owners of dead animals found it more profitable to sell hides to representatives of these industries.

### Famines

The various famines also contributed to the decline of small-scale village industries. During famine periods, poor artisans, especially weavers, were forced to leave their crafts and seek other means of livelihood. While blacksmiths and carpenters could sometimes find work, artisans like weavers had to resort to manual labour. It became difficult for them to return to their traditional crafts after the crisis was over.

Some artisan industries continued only because of the poverty of the rural population. For example, the village potter still had customers because most people were too poor to buy costly metal utensils. However, the general tendency of all village industries was towards decline.

### Change in Status of Surviving Village Artisans

There was a significant difference between the conditions under which village artisans worked earlier and those in which they worked later. Previously, they were almost servants of the village community and received fixed shares of grain during harvest in return for their services. Now, they worked mainly on a caste basis and maintained limited economic relations with the village community.

The transition from the old system to the new one was slow and not always complete. Another important change was that artisans were increasingly turned into wage workers.

#### Steps Taken by the Government

Various attempts were made to stem the dissolution of village artisan industries and restore them to their earlier strength and status. The most important efforts were made by Mahatma Gandhi and the Indian National Congress. Gandhi urged people to use Khadi and boycott foreign machine-made goods, even if Khadi was not as soft or elegant.

However, these attempts did not yield much success. The fundamental reason for failure was that these efforts worked against the forward march of economic change. The All India Village Industries Association was organised on Gandhi's initiative with the aim of freeing villages from dependence on machine-made goods. It also tried to revive old techniques and make them more economical, but modern methods had already replaced them.

#### Consequences of the Decline of Village Handicraft Industries

The decline of village industries destroyed the unity of the village economy. It made villages dependent on external markets for industrial goods. The self-sufficient village was no longer an economic unit as it had been earlier.

The introduction of capitalist land relations and new land laws, which made the individual peasant the unit of revenue collection, further weakened village economic autonomy. A large number of artisans abandoned their traditional crafts, which they had followed for generations.

This ultimately led to important national consequences. The decline of the self-sufficient village helped in the growth of a common national life. Many artisans who left villages became workers in cities and formed the working class. They began to organise themselves and developed a national outlook.

Under the new conditions created by the transformation of the Indian economy, they were no longer members of isolated village communities but became part of larger economic classes, which were integral to the Indian nation.

#### Conclusion

Thus, the decline of traditional village industries not only destroyed the self-sufficient village economy but also brought significant social and economic changes. It led to the rise of new economic classes and contributed to the formation of a broader national life in India.