Modern History · GS - I

How far was the Industrial Revolution in England responsible for the decline of handicrafts and cottage industries in India?

EXAM YEAR	PAPER	SUBJECT
2024	GS - I	Modern History

MARKS	WORD LIMIT
15	~250 words

Answer Hint

Industrial Revolution, mechanisation, British textiles, Indian handicrafts, deindustrialisation, tariff policy, colonial economy, raw materials, machine-made goods, artisans, changing markets

Model Answer

Introduction

The Industrial Revolution transformed Britain's manufacturing capacity and significantly contributed to the decline of Indian handicrafts. However, India's deindustrialisation resulted from the interaction of British industrial superiority with colonial economic and trade policies.

Role of the Industrial Revolution

1. Mass production: Mechanisation enabled British factories to produce textiles on a large scale at comparatively lower costs.

2. Market competition: Machine-made British textiles entered Indian markets and competed with traditionally produced Indian goods.

3. Technological advantage: Mechanised spinning and weaving increased productivity and reduced production time.

4. Changing trade pattern: India increasingly supplied raw materials such as cotton while becoming a market for British manufactured products.

Role of Colonial Policies

The Industrial Revolution alone does not explain the severity of the decline. British tariff and trade policies favoured British manufacturers and restricted the competitive position of Indian producers in overseas markets.

The expansion of British political control also weakened traditional sources of patronage. The decline of princely courts and sections of the traditional elite reduced demand for luxury handicrafts.

Consequences

Many artisans lost traditional markets and were compelled to shift towards agriculture or other low-productivity occupations. This increased pressure on land and contributed to rural underemployment.

However, Indian handicrafts did not disappear completely. Certain specialised crafts survived because of local demand, cultural preferences and adaptation to changing market conditions.

Conclusion

The Industrial Revolution provided the **technological basis** for the displacement of Indian handicrafts, while colonial trade policies, loss of traditional patronage and market restructuring magnified its effects. Hence, British industrialisation was a major cause, but not the sole explanation for Indian deindustrialisation.