Modern History · GS - I

Examine how the decline of traditional artisanal industry in colonial India crippled the rural economy.

EXAM YEAR	PAPER	SUBJECT
2017	GS - I	Modern History

MARKS	WORD LIMIT
15	~250 words

Answer Hint

Deindustrialisation; colonial trade policies; decline of handicrafts; agricultural dependence; rural indebtedness; loss of livelihoods

Model Answer

Introduction

Traditional artisanal industries—including textiles, metalwork, pottery and handicrafts—formed an important part of India's pre-colonial economy. Their decline under colonial rule contributed to deindustrialisation and rural impoverishment.

Causes of Decline

- **British manufactured goods:** Machine-made imports, particularly textiles, competed with Indian handmade products.
- **Unequal trade policies:** Colonial policies and tariff structures favoured British industry and weakened indigenous producers.
- **Loss of royal patronage:** The decline of princely courts and traditional elites reduced demand for luxury crafts.
- **Changing production systems:** Industrialisation in Britain undermined India's established artisanal production networks.

- **Limited modernisation:** Many artisans lacked access to capital, technology and institutional support to compete.

Impact on the Rural Economy

- **Unemployment:** Weavers, spinners, metalworkers and other artisans lost traditional occupations.
- **Agricultural pressure:** Displaced artisans turned to agriculture, increasing pressure on limited land.
- **Rural indebtedness:** Irregular earnings and dependence on moneylenders deepened poverty.
- **Decline in local markets:** Reduced artisanal income weakened demand for agricultural and other rural goods.
- **Loss of skills:** Traditional knowledge and specialised production networks deteriorated.
- **Commercial dependence:** Rural producers became more vulnerable to intermediaries and colonial market fluctuations.

Conclusion

The decline of artisanal industries weakened rural employment, diversified livelihoods and local demand, intensifying the agrarian crisis. The experience highlights the importance of protecting local skills, supporting small enterprises and ensuring fair market access.

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