

Chapter 6: Weavers, Iron Smelters and Factory Owners

Activity: 1

Question: Why do you think the Act was called the Calico Act? What does the name tell us about the kind of textiles the Act wanted to ban?

Answer:

- The Act was called the Calico Act because this Act banned cotton textiles which were generally called Calico in Europe.
- Indian cotton textiles.

Activity: 2

Question: Read sources 1 and 2. What reasons do the petition writers give for their condition of starvation?

Source: 1

“We must starve for food”

In 1823 the Company government in India received a petition from 12,000 weavers stating: Our ancestors and we used to receive advances from the Company and maintain ourselves and our respective families by weaving Company’s superior assortments. Owing to our misfortune, the aurangs have been abolished ever since because of which we and our families are distressed for want of the means of livelihood. We are weavers and do not know any other business. We must starve for food, if the Board of Trade do not cast a look of kindness towards us and give orders for clothes.

Proceedings of the Board of Trade, 3February 1824.

Source: 2

“Please publish this in your paper”

One widowed spinner wrote in 1828 to a Bengali newspaper, Samachar Darpan, detailing her plight:

To the Editor, Samachar,

I am a spinner. After having suffered a great deal, I am writing this letter. Please publish this in your paper ... When my age was ... 22, I became a widow with three daughters. My husband left nothing at the time of his death ... I sold my jewellery for his shraddha ceremony. When we were on the verge of starvation God showed me a way by which we could save ourselves. I began to spin on takli and charkha.

The weavers used to visit our houses and buy the charkha yarn at three tolas per rupee. Whatever amount I wanted as advance from the weavers, I could get for the asking. This saved us from cares about food and cloth. In a few years’ time I got together ... Rs. 28. With this I married one daughter. And in the same way all three daughters.

Now for 3 years, we two women, mother-in-law and me, are in want of food. The weavers do not call at the house for buying yarn. Not only this, if the yarn is sent to market it is still not sold even at one-fourth the old prices.

I do not know how it happened. I asked many about it. They say that Bilati 2 yarn is being imported on a large scale. The weavers buy that yarn and weave ... People cannot use the cloth out of this yarn even for two months; it rots away.

A representation from a suffering spinner.

Answer:

- They are weavers and do not know any other business.
- Their ancestors and they used to receive advances from the company, which have been stopped. The aurangs have been abolished.
- The weavers do not call at the house for buying yarn.
- If the yarn is sent to the market, it is still not sold even at one-fourth of the old prices.

Activity:3

Question: Why would the iron and steel making industry be affected by the defeat of the nawabs and rajas?

Answer: This was because the nawabs and rajas used swords and armor. So, the swords and armor-making industry died with the conquest of India by the British, and imports of iron and steel from England displaced the iron and steel produced by craftspeople in India.

Let's imagine

Question: Imagine you are a textile weaver in late nineteenth-century India. Textiles produced in Indian factories are flooding the market. How would you have adjusted to the situation?

Answer: I would have adjusted to the situation in the following ways:

- I would have begun to produce that types of clothes which could not be supplied by machines.
- I would produce saris with intricate borders, cloths with traditional woven patterns. These would have a wide demand amongst the rich and middle classes.
- I would also produce the very coarse clothes used by the poor people in India.

Let's recall

Question 1: What kinds of cloth had a large market in Europe?

Answer: Cotton and Silk had a large market in Europe. Different varieties of Indian textiles like Chintz, Cossaes or Khassa and Bandanna were sold in European markets.

Question 2: What is jamdani?

Answer: Jamdani is a fine muslin on which decorative motifs are woven on the loom, typically in grey and white. Often a mixture of cotton and gold thread was used.

Question 3: What is bandanna?

Answer: Bandanna is a brightly coloured and printed scarf for the neck or head. Originally, the term derived from the word 'bandhna' and referred to a variety of brightly coloured cloth produced through a method of tying and dying.

Question 4: Who are the Agaria?

Answer: The Agaria refers to a community of iron smelters. They were specialized in the craft of iron smelting.

Question 5: Fill in the blanks:

- (a) The word chintz comes from the word _____.
- (b) Tipu's sword was made of _____ steel.
- (c) India's textile exports declined in the _____ century.

Answers:

- A. Chhint (Hindi word)
- B. Wootz
- C. 19th century.

Let's discuss

Question 6: How do the names of different textiles tell us about their histories?

Answers: The names of different textiles tell us about their histories as mentioned below:

- (i) **Muslin:** European traders first saw fine cotton cloth from India carried by Arab merchants in Mosul in present-day Iraq. Hence, they named all finely woven textiles as muslin.
- (ii) **Chintz:** This name is derived from a Hindi word chhint, a cloth with small and colourful floral designs.
- (iii) **Bandanna:** This name is derived from the Hindi word 'Bandhna' that is referred to a variety of bright coloured and printed scarves for the neck or head.
- (iv) **Calico:** When the Portuguese first came to India in search of spices, they landed in Calicut. The cotton textiles which they took back to Europe came to be known as calico, which is derived from Calicut.

Question 7: Why did the wool and silk producers in England protest against the import of Indian textiles in the early eighteenth century?

Answers: At this time textile industries had just begun to develop in England. Unable to compete with Indian textiles, English producers wanted a secure market within the country by preventing the entry of Indian textiles.

So, by the early eighteenth century, worried by the popularity of Indian textiles, wool and silk makers in England began protesting against the import of Indian textiles. In 1720, the British government enacted legislation banning the use of printed cotton textiles — chintz. The Act was known as the "Calico Act".

Question 8: How did the development of cotton industries in Britain affect textile producers in India?

Answers: The development of cotton industries in Britain badly affected textile producers in India:

- Indian textiles now had to compete with British textiles in the European and American markets.
- Exporting textiles to England became increasingly difficult since very high duties were imposed on Indian textiles imported into Britain,
- Thousands of weavers in India became unemployed. Bengal weavers were the worst hit.
- By the 1830s British cotton cloth flooded Indian markets. This affected not only specialist weavers but also spinners.

Question 9: Why did the Indian iron smelting industry decline in the nineteenth century?

Answers: This has the following reasons:

- The new forest laws were enacted. When the colonial government prevented people from entering the reserved forests, it became difficult for the iron smelters to find wood for charcoal and to get iron ore.
- In some areas, the government did grant access to the forest. But the iron smelters had to pay a very high tax to the forest department for every furnace they used.

- By the late nineteenth century, iron and steel were being imported from Britain. This inevitably lowered the demand for iron produced by local smelters.
- By the early twentieth century, the artisans producing iron and steel faced a new competition.

Question 10: What problems did the Indian textile industry face in the early years of its development?

Answers: In the early years of its development the Indian textile industry faced several problems:

- It found it difficult to compete with the cheap textiles imported from Britain.
- In most countries, governments supported industrialization by imposing heavy duties on imports. This eliminated competition and protected newly born industries. But the colonial government in India refused such protection to local industries.
- However, during the First World War when textile imports from Britain declined Indian factories were called upon to produce cloth for military supplies. This boosted up cotton factory production in India.

Question 11: What helped TISCO expand steel production during the First World War?

Answers:

- As the First World War broke out in 1914, steel produced in Britain now had to meet the demands of the war in Europe. So, the import of British steel into India declined dramatically.
- Indian railways also turned to TISCO for the supply of rails. As the war dragged on for several years.
- TISCO had to produce shells and carriage wheels, for the war.
- By 1919, the colonial government was buying 90% of the steel manufactured by TISCO.
- Over time TISCO became the biggest steel industry within British rule.

Let's do

Question 12: Find out about the history of any craft around the area you live. You may wish to know about the community of craftsmen, the changes in the techniques they use, and the markets they supply. How have these changed in the past 50 years?

Answers: I found out about the history of carpets around my area. The origin of carpet weaving in our area is very ancient. This can be traced back to the Buddhist and Mauryan times. The carpet weaving craft is practiced by Mushhar and shepherds which are semi-nomadic. The generally traditional and strong influence of Tibetan and Persian Art is seen in the designs. The images of Hindu Gods and deities, natural scenarios of the hills and geometrical motifs, etc. are included.

The techniques of weaving have been changed to a great extent. Now electrical appliances are also used in this process. Its market has also expanded over time. However, due to the spread of education, many people have shifted to other jobs. Currently, many women from other communities have also taken to carpet weaving. Thus, it is expanding in our area.

Question 13: On a map of India, locate the centers of different crafts today. Find out when these centers came up.

Answer:

