

Industrial Revolution

Questions:

(1) What do you know about '*the Industrial Revolution*'? How was English life affected by it?

Or

(2) What is meant by the term '*the Industrial Revolution*'? In what way was agriculture affected by it in the eighteenth century?

Ans. An Industrial Revolution has been defined as "*the change that transforms a people with peasant occupations and local markets into an industrial society with world-wide connections* (**Encyclopaedia Britannica**). England witnessed a distinct Industrial Revolution between 1760 and 1790. In this age of **Walpole** there was a rapid expansion of British trade and the opening of new markets both at home and abroad. Demands for goods increased; but there was a shortage of labour. Industrialization thus was the only means to invest the huge capital which England had. Furthermore, population was increasing. And in order to fulfil the needs of the increasing population the Industrial Revolution was the best source.

The industrial revolution brought about momentous changes in English Society. The results of the industrial revolution were the increase of national wealth, growth of population, advent of the capitalist class, rise in factories, employment of women and children in these factories and the need for parliamentary reform. The most revolutionary developments were in technology, in transport, and in methods of industrial organization. There was a remarkable progress in the textile industry. A large number of cotton mills, wool factories cropped up. Some iron and steel factories also were set up. The goods manufactured in these units were sold in every nook and corner of the world. England was a supplier of coal to every part of the world. The growth of factories and industries were responsible for the development of industrial towns like Manchester, Lancashire, Sheffield etc.

By 1850, Britain was "*the workshop of the world.*" By 1760 the improvement of river navigation had reached its limits. There was a widespread expansion of country banks. Production in agriculture also increased. The most fundamental change was the suppression of open by enclosed fields.

The Industrial Revolution brought profound changes in the social and economic life of the country. It bred a new attitude of mind to the old problems of society—poverty, crime, debt, disorder, and waste, and, of course, a critical attitude to the ancient and constitutional machinery which bore so little relation to the needs of society. With the change in outlook, attention was paid to drinking water problem, improved food, the use of pottery instead of pewter, the widespread use of cheap cotton clothes, which could be washed, the removal of filth and dirt from the streets, the foundation of hospitals, the increased knowledge of medicine, all contributed to create a rapidly expanding population.

An evil consequence of the Industrial Revolution was the exploitation of the child-labour. Children are tractable and easy to discipline. Furthermore they had none of the ingrained antipathy to factory work common among adult workers. So more and more children were absorbed in factories and mines. Certainly it was a hard world for poor children.

“For the poor who worked in factories, life was bitter and hard. They had less of life’s uncertainties, perhaps, than the lone worker, but it was a bitter life they led. Discipline in factories—especially with children—was harsh, frequently cruel. Living conditions were desolate and drab. They were faced with the wearisome and endless repetition of a simile process, haunted by the fear of unemployment and starvation. Disease, poverty, fear, malnutrition, this was the common lot of the children of the age, and all the restless energies of the ‘improves’ could not save them from it.

‘But salvation of a kind they found. It was provided by religion,’ by John Wesley. The Industrial revolution paid no attention to parish boundaries. The mine ignored the parson. So that, by the middle years of the century, there were scores of industrial villages and suburbs that were without any church or priest. Ignorance of the most elementary facts of the Christian religion was astonishingly widespread. Only a fundamental constitutional reform of the Established Church could have coped with this situation, but such reform was unthinkable, for it would have disturbed the entire structure of government. Dissent, too, failed to realise its opportunities and obligations; for complex, obscure, and largely internal reasons, the old non-conformist churches were moribund. It was left to Wesley and his disciples to reap the rich harvest of neglected souls.”
(John Plumb, *England in the Eighteenth Century*, 1714-1815).