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Mains Practice Questions

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Q. During the Industrial revolution the deplorable working conditions of labourers especially for the women and children negated the sense of employment. Comment. (150 words)

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Approach

- Briefly explain industrial revolution and working conditions at that time.
- Discuss the working conditions during the industrial revolution.
- Highlight the issues with respect to women and children workers.
- Conclude suitably.

Introduction

The transformation of industry and the economy in Britain between the 1780s and the 1850s is called the first industrial revolution. This had far-reaching effects in Britain. Later, similar changes occurred in European countries and in the USA. In most of these countries overall working conditions of labour were poor and sometimes even dangerous. Unlike today, all the workers during the Industrial Revolution were expected to work long hours or they would lose their jobs.

Body

After the Industrial Revolution, women and children got work all round the year unlike the seasonal jobs in farms. Their income rose to usher in them economic self-reliance. However, the deplorable working conditions in the factories and mills negated this sense of self-development:

- **Monotonous and inhumane working conditions:** There was no arrangement for aesthetics and leisure for labourers even when the factories had long unbroken hours in the same kind of work. Besides, the women and children were subjected to stricter discipline and sharp forms of punishment.
- **Absence of safety:** Machinery like the cotton spinning jenny was designed to be used by child workers with their small build and nimble fingers. Children were often employed in textile factories because they were small enough to move between tightly packed machinery. Cases of permanent injury without adequate compensation were quite common in those times.
- **Exorbitant working hours and cruelty:** The long hours of work, including cleaning the machines on Sundays, allowed them little fresh air or exercise. Children caught their hair in machines or crushed their hands, while some died when they fell into machines as they dropped off to sleep from exhaustion.
- **Exploitation of vulnerabilities:** The earnings of women and children were necessary to supplement men's meagre wages. As the use of machinery spread and fewer workers were needed, industrialists preferred to employ women and children who would be less agitated about their poor working conditions and work for lower wages than men.

- **Employment in hazardous mines:** Coal mines were also dangerous places to work in. Roofs caved in or there could be an explosion, and injuries were therefore common. The owners of coal mines used children to reach deep coal faces or those where the approach path was too narrow for adults. Younger children worked as 'trappers' who opened and shut doors as the coal wagons travelled through mines, or carried heavy loads of coal on their backs as 'coal bearers.'
- **No standards on minimum working age:** Factory managers considered child labour to be important training for future factory work. The evidence from British factory records reveals that about half of the factory workers had started work when they were less than ten years old and nearly one-fourth when they were under 14.
- **Absence of welfare measures:** Lack of social security, insurance, safe working conditions and amenities like creche made the children and women workers suffer even more.

Conclusion

Thus, women and children may have gained increased financial independence and self-esteem from their jobs in the Industrial revolution but this was more than offset by the humiliating terms of work they endured.