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## UNIT 12 THE PATTERNS OF CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION\*

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### Structure

- 12.0 Objectives
- 12.1 Introduction
- 12.2 The ‘Industrious Revolution’
- 12.3 The Role of European Marriage Pattern
- 12.4 Evaluation of ‘Industriousness’
- 12.5 Proto-Industrialization in Early Modern Europe
- 12.6 Critique of the Theories of Proto-Industrialization
- 12.7 Book Production, Literacy and Human Capital Formation
- 12.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 12.9 Answer to Check Your Progress Exercises

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### 12.0 OBJECTIVES

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After reading this Unit, you will understand the following aspects of consumption and production in the Early Modern Europe:

- notion of the ‘industrious’ revolution and its critical appraisal,
- role of European marriage pattern and its impact on nature of economy,
- concept of proto-industrialization and its evaluation; and
- nature of literacy, book-production and human capital formation.

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### 12.1 INTRODUCTION

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In traditional history, Industrial Revolution was regarded the most important event. However, the recent researches has made it clear that this ‘revolution’ was not a abrupt surge in the tempo of economic growth, but a gradual stepping up of growth, which cannot really be characterized as a clear ‘revolution’. ‘Proto-industry’ – rural, small-scale industries in which the labour force combined agricultural activities with industrial work for the world market – was discovered as an engine of industrial and demographic growth that had preceded the industrial change. The early modern period in Europe especially in the Western Part bordering the North Sea was not a stagnant period but as a dynamic one that led to a significant increase in urbanization, rapid growth in long-distance trade and finance, and increased output and productivity in the agricultural sector. Similarly, our understanding of how early modern people consumed, why consumed particular commodities and how this consumption impacted the society, has also changed. Earlier Marxist scholars naturally favoured the preponderance of production over consumption. It was believed that changes in consumption tend to follow those in production, commerce and technology. Now many scholars feel that consumption and its pattern were crucial for the socio-economic and cultural changes in the early modern Low Countries. The most important argument

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is that the growth of a 'consumer society' in the early modern Low Countries would have facilitated the development of 'industriousness', that might have resulted in economic growth and eventual industrial growth across Western Europe.

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## 12.2 THE 'INDUSTRIOUS REVOLUTION'

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Jan de Vries postulated an 'industrious revolution' that came before the onset of the industrial revolution. This view has become one of the most significant for re-examining the early modern European economic history. In 1975 De Vries' hypothesis was based on the consumption pattern of early modern peasants in Friesland in Holland. He argued that these peasants had the capacity to demand more goods and commodities and their increased purchasing power made it possible for them to consume more and more household commodities. He found the proof of it in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. He saw that the curtains for windows and mantel cloths were slowly used in peasant households. They started using different kinds of tables and chairs, new type of glasses, tin and pottery. They more frequently used table and kitchenware, and use of mirrors, clocks and books in peasant households became common. Although from the standpoint of individual peasant there was nothing revolutionary in these changes but if we take them together they demonstrate a slow and steady adoption of consumption behaviour of urban people or imitation of their cultural practices. The end result of all these was a different style of consumption in Dutch rural hinterlands. In his subsequent writings, De Vries again stressed that because of the increased consumption levels of the peasants, the nature of the household economy also got changed and this helped in development of proto-industries. Due to more supply of consumer goods in the market, households had to rethink about their economic strategies of how to re-allocate their resources and labour according to the prevailing conditions of the market. Peasant households now more and more began to produce for the market. They also became more dependent on the market for their own consumption needs All this resulted in the greater specialization and the division of labour. The ultimate result of this was more productive use of resources and higher production also meant lower relative prices of available goods and commodities. Thus, according to De Vries' view, it was the changes in consumer desires and demand particularly – 'the search for comfort, pleasure, novelty and identity' that define the 'active searching consumer' of his 'industrious revolution'. It was a drastic change that took place before the onset of the industrial revolution and subsequently led to large scale industrial production on factory lines. These slow and steady changes towards the Industrial Revolution were helped by certain economic trends such as growth of consumer demand. This manifested in the surge of consumerism, which involved demand for more and more new goods, and according to De Vries, this was what actually transpired in seventeenth century in Holland and England due to 'industriousness'. During the first half of the seventeenth century the spread of use of long-lasting and out of the ordinary goods paved the way for new needs and demands which the peasant households could only acquire by increasing their income levels. For a peasant household this meant three things:

- 1) they worked harder and more consistently and the process has been acknowledged as labour intensification;
- 2) they worked for longer hours (labour prolongation); and

- 3) they sold and/or bought labour in market more often, thereby increasing their participation in the labour markets (labour amplification).

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### 12.3 THE ROLE OF EUROPEAN MARRIAGE PATTERN

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Women played a significant role in 'Industrious Revolution', it is argued. A growing desire for market goods motivated households and especially women to re-allocate time from leisure and household production to income-earning work. Some scholars have argued that a new marriage pattern emerged in Europe in late Medieval and early Modern period which facilitated this. In the European Marriage Pattern women had more choice in choosing their life-partner and it was based entirely on the consent of a boy and a girl for marriage. The position of children, in particular when they started to contribute to the income of the household, was also relatively strong. Another feature of this pattern of marriage was that late marriages became common as a girl had to choose her own husband and establish her own household with a steady income. There was possibility of some girls remaining unmarried. The European Marriage Pattern was a new institutional adaptation of marriage or more generally of human reproductive behaviour in a period to get a job and when wages levels were generally high for about a century after the high mortality in the epidemic that is popularly known as the Black Death. In brief, in these circumstances when wage earnings were rather high, marriage patterns also started to change. The relationship between consenting marriage partners changed and it was influenced by market forces especially as the development of labour markets gained significance. The wage income component become important for household income. Not only labour markets were expanding but these households of wage earners also had right of entry to capital markets and to buy consumer goods from the accessible nearby markets. At the same time, they developed new mechanisms for long-term survival to adapt their life to new conditions and enhance chances for their children to utilize opportunities made available by emergence of markets all around. Compared to earlier times when nobody cared too much for schooling and training, now even families with modest means started to invest more in formal schooling of their children. They also made use of training facilities as apprentices or as servants in other households. Why people invest more in acquiring 'social capital'? In new marriage system, the traditional ties of extended larger families started to break and people had to adapt to solve the problems attendant on old age or single parenthood. So such investment in education and training would help them in improving their chances to earn more. This societal restructuring was taking place and making way for a remodeled society in the late Middle Ages in the North Sea region, in England and the Low Countries in particular.

In the North Sea region, compared to earlier period, wages were higher after the Black Death, and one can easily make use of expanding labour market for getting a job, although women were still at a serious trouble in the labour force compared to men. In this context, European Marriage Pattern emerged in the late medieval period. These catalysts were: the values taught by the Catholic Church, the manner in which resources were transferred among generation through family inheritance, creation of labour-markets due to employment of people for a wage outside the household, and the socio-economic impact of the Black Death. The power and authority of parents over their children and of men over women declined in the new marriage system that evolved in Europe in these circumstances. The emerging

commercial activities and market for labour and products also facilitated the emergence of this so called 'European Marriage Pattern'. The families became small and nuclear with only husband, wife and children and it became dependent on wage labour mostly. Use of credit markets and attempt to save some money for rainy day became essential to survival for people. The changes in nature and structure population, its employment, division of labour and creation of labour and credit markets went hand in hand. This was both the outcome and consequence of growing commercialization of economy and society in this age. It is estimated that a large number of people (about one-third to two-thirds of the population) became (to some extent) earned their livings through wage labour, and earning livelihood in this manner become a normal thing of life and its conditions. The extraordinary expansion of markets in late medieval and early modern Europe, especially in the area around the North Sea, should be seen in this light. The emergence of the 'European Marriage Pattern' had important other long-term effects. Transfer of income and resources between generations changed radically as a result of this new marriage system. Firstly, the younger people stood to gain because their parents now invested more in them so as to increase their value, in other words, parents were making increased investment in what we nowadays call the 'human capital.' Secondly, to some degree the 'European Marriage Pattern' increased the age of marriage and thereby restricted the number of children one could have in a short life-span of those times. With fewer children, parents invested more to improve their chances in life through their education and training. 'Investment in human capital' through formal schooling and on the job training was a new experience now the life cycle of young men and women, which must also have delayed their entering the marriage market. Thus, instead of being backward-looking, i.e. taking care of the lineage and the older dependent parents, the household became progressive in the sense that they began to invest in children more and more. The older people in such households, however, were probably the most important sufferers of the new demographic and social change. The power and authority of the older members of the household was diluted. They used to get some resources in older type of arranged marriages system but now when marriage became a more or less free choice between two consenting adults, this source of their older patriarchal privilege disappeared. It was possible for them to save from their earnings which were now relatively good due to higher wages and this could have offered them some safety. Some people feel that there may be some correlation between the emergence of the 'European Marriage Pattern' and the emergence of capital markets in Western Europe in the late medieval period. Now people might have started saving money for old-age security and investing that in newly emerging joint stock companies. The new marriage pattern, however, posed a new social security risk because as the households became smaller, there was more likelihood it's collapse if one of the parents died prematurely. So side by side, new social arrangements emerged that offered some degree of social security for the aged, the children, and the disabled. We may say that the 'industrious revolution' was a result of many social and economic changes that materialized during the late medieval period. The early modern period saw changes in the orientation of households that took advantage of the market opportunities, which resulted in an increased labour supply. Jan de Vries believes these changes preceded the Industrial Revolution of the eighteenth century, and he argues that women's and teenagers' labour was a key to understand the economic changes that occurred in the North sea region. The so called 'Dutch Golden Age' of the seventeenth century was created by this economic transformation. Increased employment of women and children

through labour markets, higher level of investment in education and training , and the general development of labour and capital markets were obviously associated with the appearance of the 'European Marriage Pattern'.

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## 12.4 EVALUATION OF 'INDUSTRIOUSNESS'

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It is important to note here that De Vries rejected the model of 'social-emulation' which is based on the hypothesis that consumption patterns of a higher social group or class reflected in tastes or needs, are transferred from and imitated by one social class to another. This poses the question that how these new consumption desires emerged suddenly in the seventeenth century and how industriousness was able to destroy idleness or traditional leisure time of the workers? Since there is no evidence of any mass diffusion of new tastes and new luxury commodities among general population before industrial revolution, De Vries bases his story and especially its time-line of its evolution on less sound empirical evidence, but it has been woven around the moral arguments, philosophical conjectures, and prevalent political economic thinking and observations by contemporary writers. In other words, there is hardly any material evidence to demonstrate the time-line of an actual 'industrious-consumer revolution', so he prefers to give many kind of literary evidences. These literary evidences only show changes in the connotations of sumptuousness, industriousness and idleness. They cannot be taken as the proofs of an abrupt and sudden change in the nature and intensity of consumption. Several studies exist on the late medieval and sixteenth-century commercial exchanges and articles and goods that were in domestic possessions. They are indicative of a notable increase of domestic sumptuous consumption in England, the so-called 'Low Countries', and even in Ireland and Denmark. This preceded what was later described as the 'consumer revolution'. But the evidence for penetration of consumerist behaviour among the lower classes and social strata is very thin. This was reasonable because there is historical evidence that shows that wages were declining in real terms and this trend persisted throughout most of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Western Europe. Jan de Vries' 'industrious revolution' provides us with a different explanation. In his view, fall in wages in real terms went alongside simultaneous increase in the level of consumption especially among the lower social classes. In order to reconcile these rather contradictory trends, he argues for a simultaneously growing input and intensification of labour. Other scholars have argued against him on the ground that for English rural poor labourers, the so called 'industrious revolution' might have meant more economic hardships rather than an increase of consumption level. There was also a prolonged economic stagnation after the commercial revolution of sixteenth century in Europe. Some little research has been done on probate inventories to investigate consumption standards. But they have not been very useful in providing information on the living standards of the lower social groups in early modern society. This is so because such inventories provide more information about the consumption of relatively better off social groups and classes. These classes were literate and make such inventories of their articles of consumption whereas we hardly find existence and survival of inventories. So the evidence of consumption level investigated through inventories is more skewed towards the middle social groups and higher classes. Therefore, scholars of inventories did not make any tall claims about change of consumer behaviour with regard to the lower social strata. Some scholars, however, still believe that

the change in the behaviour of consumers was more extensive and it occurred among the poor labouring classes too. But it can be safely said that there is a very little confirmation of the expansion of consumption among the lower social groups of society before the industrial revolution and corroborating evidence for it is lacking.

The ideas emanating from the 'industrious revolution' and the 'consumer revolution' both questioned the notion of a fixed working year for the labourers. They imagine an increase in the number of days worked per year as people earned surplus money to buy novel consumer goods like tea, sugar, books, and clocks. If the working year increased in this way, then labour inputs increased more rapidly than the population, leading this way to economic growth in pre modern period. In contrast to the usual approach in the real wage literature, which assumes that the working year was constant and then computes how much annual consumption changed as wages and prices varied, Robert C. Allen and Jacob L. Weisdorf (2010) in an empirical study of England workers between 1300-1830 assumed that workers acted to stabilize consumption over time and compute how much the working year had to change in order to achieve that given changes in wages and prices. Specifically, they used an analytical tool which they called 'a basket of basic consumption goods' and compute the working year of rural and urban day labourers on the basis of number of days required to work if they wished to buy commodities in that basket. They compared their result with independent estimates of the actual working year and found that there were two examples of 'industrious' revolutions among rural workers. In their analysis, however, these were results of economic hardships, and there was no indication of any 'consumer revolution'. In comparison to rural labourers, however, the evidence for urban labourers was different. Here, they saw that there was a widening gap between their actual working year and the number of days they were required to work to buy the basket. So in urban areas, there was more scope for a consumer revolution. The study was conducted for two groups of day labourers: farm workers in southern England and London building workers. For farm labourers, the work required to buy the basket agrees reasonably well with independent estimates of the actual working year. Since the consumption basket they used contained no novelties (no sugar, tobacco, tea, coffee etc), but only daily consumption goods that were readily available in early modern England, the fact that they largely match the actual working year suggests that something like a consumer revolution did not take place among pre-industrial farm workers. For London building workers, by contrast, a large and widening gap between their actual working year and the number of days they worked in order to buy the basket suggests that there was large possibility for a consumer revolution in the run up to the industrial revolution, harmonious with the notion of the 'industrious' revolution and the 'consumer revolution'. The empirical exercise carried out in this study also provided other insights into the work-patterns of pre-industrial day labourers. For farm workers, they found two episodes of steep increase in work-requirements: one between 1540 and 1616, and another between 1750 and 1818. The initial upsurge in labour input coincides with the removal of 49 holy days in England, conducted in 1536 as part of the Protestant Reformation. If this abolition of holy days was intended to help the poor maintaining their consumption by allowing them to work more days throughout the year, then it might have helped also more affluent groups of workers, such as urban labourers, to realize a higher desired consumption level, which in turn could have been a stimulus to the manufacturing sector. The apparent industriousness among farm labourers in

their study, though supporting the idea of households supplying more labour over time, does not seem consistent with a consumer revolution marked by more and new goods entering their consumption basket. Rather, additional labour input of farm workers stems from the fact that daily consumption goods become harder to obtain economically. Between 1500 and 1616, days of work required per year to obtain same basket of goods increased from around 160 to slightly more than 300 for the farm workers.

**Check Your Progress 1**

- 1) What do understand by term ‘industrious revolution’? Critically evaluate its impact on economy and society in Early Modern Europe.

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- 2) Analyse the role of ‘European Marriage Pattern’ in economic and social life of Early Modern Europe.

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**12.5 PROTO-INDUSTRIALIZATION IN EARLY MODERN EUROPE**

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Proto-industrialization was a notion that indicated the growth of domestic industries that produced goods and commodities for distant markets. The development of such industries was noticed in many regions of Europe between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries. These so called ‘proto-industries’ mostly grew in the rural areas and they co-existed and were developed alongside agriculture. They did not use any advanced technology. The labour force was also not centralized in the form of factory-production in such industries. This extensive industrial growth in domestic domain in early modern Europe evinced considerable interests although it was also a controversial theme. But in the 1970s, interest in the study of this theme was re-kindled and researchers focused attention on ‘proto-industry’. This became one of the explanations behind the transition from feudalism to capitalism and emergence of factory industrialization.

Franklin Mendels was first to use the term ‘proto-industrialization’ in his 1969 dissertation on the Flemish linen industry (published in 1981) and he published a famous article based on that research. His argument was that development of ‘proto-industry’ led to population growth. This demographic change in population led to further expansion of proto-industry to expand further, creating a kind of

self-sustaining development. Mendels argued that this sustained growth in domestic industry led to many of the economic changes viewed as essential for factory production such as commercialization of agriculture, accumulation of capital, growth of entrepreneurship, capture of overseas markets, and creation of an industrial workforce. Mendels claimed that 'proto-industrialization' was the beginning of industrialization. In the 18th century, like all pre-modern agrarian societies, agricultural operations were seasonal and such an agriculture created seasonal underemployment for rural people in Europe. But what was new was that now many rural people started producing through domestic crafts and they also started to export their produced goods to distant markets, far beyond their immediate markets and regions. As a result of this change, traditional urban institutions such as guilds that had previously limited industrial growth, began to lose relevance and began to disappear. This process simultaneously undermined rural institutions such as inheritance systems, communes, and manorial systems. In the traditional society, population growth and economic resources had a different kind of balance and equilibrium. Now that balance was disrupted. In 1974, David Levine also stressed the role of demographic change in the form of population as a result of development of proto-industry. He argued for role of these developments for the creation a wage-dependent 'proletariat' for industrial capitalism. In 1976 Joel Mokyr, while rejecting most of these arguments, claimed that proto-industry in the traditional sector created a pool of cheap surplus labour for the modern sector. Finally, in 1977, three German historians, Peter Kriedte, Hans Medick, and Jurgen Schlumbohm, shifted the focus away from industrialization, arguing that proto-industry broke down the demographic, economic, social, and cultural obstacles in traditional European society to the development of capitalism and modern industry. Initially there were only two major empirical studies on the topic Mendels' study of eighteenth-century Flanders, and Levine's of nineteenth-century Leicestershire.

Deyon and Mendels enlisted four main effects of proto-industrialization. Firstly, growth of 'proto-industries' stimulated population growth and culminated in land fragmentation as a result of undermining of traditional control by communes, landlords and inheritance systems over the rural populations. Secondly, profits earned in 'proto-industrial' production also helped in the accumulation of the capital for factory industrialization. Thirdly, 'proto-industries' trained traders and workers in the entrepreneurial skills that were prerequisite for factory industrialization. Lastly, proto-industrialization was a catalyst for agriculture and encouraged commercialization, Without a huge markets for agricultural goods, it would have been impossible to sustain urbanization and industrialization on a permanent basis. This is how proto-industry paved the way for factory industry – although the authors admitted that sometimes it had opposite effect of destruction of industries also.

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## 12.6 CRITIQUE OF THE THEORIES OF PROTO-INDUSTRIALIZATION

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The theories of proto-industrialization have been criticized on several grounds by the scholars. First problem with theory is that exact regional size and nature of a production unit is not precisely defined. Proto-industries may vary in their regional expanse and often went beyond economic zone of a single market town, or on the other hand they involved production by limited number of people of



only one or two communities situated in a specific area. In this sense, we can define the area of a particular proto-industry as a geographical area where people were engaged in production of commodities for sale in distant markets. But this appears to be very vague and ambiguous definition without analytical rigour. Secondly, scholars do not have consensus on the issue of the percentage of employment of labour of a particular area that must have been employed in non-agricultural field to define it as proto-industrial zone. There is no clarity also about the change in intensity and quantity of labour employment in the industrial production, sustainability of such a labour force in that particular economic activity in order to qualify as it as a case of 'proto-industrialization'. The implication of export markets for proto-industrialization is also problematic. Can 'proto-industrialization' sustain itself without existence of stable export markets or whether the export markets are absolutely essential for proto-industries to develop or what fraction of total industrial production need to be exported to designate it as a 'proto-industry'? Then what should be location of the export markets and their distance from the 'proto-industrial' zone to characterize them as 'supra-regional' or export-market rather than 'local'? These questions remained unanswered. The differentiation between local crafts and export-oriented 'proto-industries' remained a bone of contention among proponents of theory. The analytical rigour in such categories was too obvious to be ignored. The theory of 'proto-industrialization' also ignored other types of industrial production. The pre-industrial manufacturing was not solely based on cottage industry. The technology used in 'Proto-Industry' based on craft-production was rather of primitive variety. The centralized manufactories based on more technologically advanced crafts that employed skilled workers and was based in urban centres and was producing for export also existed in pre-industrial early modern period. Some historians have argued that pre-industrial manufacturing existed in diverse forms and that all type of industrial production should be considered for analysing the impact of industrial production on the economy before the onset of Industrial Revolution. Others argued that large urban-based export industries working in the putting-out system, and more sophisticated centralized industrial units, should also be added to the quantity of industrial production. The ignoring of technological factors and role of physical geography in sustaining various kinds of pre-industrial production was another major criticism. Mendels made a momentary reference to minimum inputs needed to produce a specific output (what contemporary economists call as the 'production-function') and significance of transport costs, but the role of these factors in details remained an unexplored territory. In short, Critics pointed out underplaying of role of technological, geographical, and institutional factors.

The theories had a prejudiced view about the 'traditional societies' in which changes were introduced by the growth of proto-industry, and these pre-conceptions were challenged. The 'Proto-industrialization' hypothesis borrowed uncritically from the ideas of Alexander Chayanov. Chayanov regarded peasants as irrational human beings that were hardly able to calculate economic variables like costs and profits. Their use of money or transactions in markets were not based on rational approach. But this perception of peasant and other non-agrarian producers of early modern period were not based on any verifiable empirical study. The subsistence orientation of the rural producers and consumers has been taken for granted. The peasants and even the proto-industrial workers were simultaneously engaged in a number of multiple roles such as traders, middlemen, putters-out, and sometimes as manufacturers. The economic decisions and

productive choices of pre-modern producers was changing due to demographic and economic factors, their viewpoints and perception were subject to change and they were not dominated by unchanging, immutable 'traditional mentalities'. The social changes around them compelled them to think in terms of economic calculations. Their decisions began to be guided and governed by rational-economic choices and they also felt the impact of market-forces. The demographic predictions of the theories were also found to be fallacious as more and more empirical studies poured in on the subject. Similarly, the impact of 'proto-industry' was also not uniform and it varied according to class, gender, region and other demographic factors. Its impact was vastly different on demographic variables like marriages, fertility, mortality and migration across the European societies. It had been postulated that all regions that experienced growth of 'proto-industries' also experienced increase in population, in terms of absolute numbers and higher density per unit area, and they demonstrate lowering of marriageable age, and an increase in fertility rates etc. The actual empirical studies, however, exhibited wide range of variations. Moreover, there was no direct correlation between these demographic changes and the growth of 'proto-industry'. The relationship postulated between commercialization of agriculture and 'proto-industry' was also uncertain. The agrarian relations in the areas of 'proto-industries' also have no homogeneity. The areas varied from subsistence cultivation to market centred commercial farming, and large chunk of areas that were still under feudal domination and were worked by serf labour. The craftsmen in Proto-industries were in many cases dependent partly on agriculture too. They were not simply consumers of agricultural produce like urban workers. The degree of survival of the traditional agrarian institutions and rural social structure also showed difference across regions. In some, they start to crumble but in others they continued to exist unaffected for much longer. So, the role of socio-political structures and institutions has also been positively amended. The stability and continuity of 'traditional' social structure and gradual penetration of markets is now acknowledged. Scholars now believe in the persistence of structures associated with guilds and their privileges, village communities and manorial institutions etc. for a much longer period. A final major criticism questioned the role of proto-industry in paving the way for factory production industrialization or as acting as a pre-cursor to industrial revolution.

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## 12.7 BOOK PRODUCTION, LITERACY AND HUMAN CAPITAL FORMATION

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In the late Middle Ages, the North Sea area already had encouraging conditions for investment in human capital, both in craftsmen's skills and in overall literacy (and probably general education). At the same time, during the fifteenth century, a revolution in the way knowledge was reproduced resulted in a very sharp decline in book prices, which in turn gave strong positive feedback to the production and reproduction of 'academic' knowledge. Book output increased enormously in the decades and centuries after 1455. Then there was a new system of spreading information already in existence. Two of the key events which defined the beginning of the early modern period were linked to ideas. The first was technological: the development of printing using type. Ideas had been circulating in manuscript for centuries, but the printing press provided an additional means of reproducing texts in very large numbers. Books were produced in both cheap and expensive editions. The production of cheap editions, coupled with the

increasing numbers of people who were able to read and write meant that people from across society were reading – the rich, the middling and even some working people had access to books and ideas. Printing affected all areas of life. For example, the availability of cheap books would have had a big impact on religion and culture. For the spread of the Protestant ideas, books and pamphlets were crucial. Reading and writing had existed in the European Middle Ages and Asian Empires but they remained restricted activities, largely limited to the clergy and the medieval scribes’ who tirelessly copied and re-copied. Literacy remained an elite privilege, and until 1500 CE, most likely not more than 10% of the world population could read or write. What changed then, in the Early Modern West, of course, was the arrival of Gutenberg’s printing press and movable type. Until Gutenberg’s invention, the only way to reproduce text was copying by hand, a laborious task. The printing press made books a mass commodity, and for precisely that reason, literacy became a mass phenomenon. The social history of ‘Book’ has been traced by Roger Chartier. Standardized typefaces made reading an easier activity, because readers no longer had to deal with the idiosyncrasies of another person’s handwriting. The errors so frequently made by scribal copyists were eliminated, and thus thousands of people could have access to the same, presumably error-free “standard edition” of a text. This introduced new modes of production, transmission and reception of written word. Although measuring literacy in pre-industrial societies and early modern Europe is a daunting task, but spread of literacy cannot be doubted. The geography of literacy indicate higher literacy in North and North-West Europe, however, there were inequalities across gender, occupations and estates. Literacy was predominantly linked to a person’s work and status.

Finally, the gap between common workmen and those engaged in mental labour and intellectual pursuits was bridged by the marked rise in literacy in the same region; this process probably began in the Low Countries (and northern France, and perhaps parts of Germany and Italy as well) during the one-and-a-half centuries after the Black Death, and spread to England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. At the end of the period, almost all skilled craftsmen in the North Sea region were probably literate; they were definitely able to read and write in the Low Countries, and increasingly so in Great Britain, Germany, and France. Efficient training institutions produced relatively high levels of human capital formation. The falling book prices and increase in literacy went hand in hand. The revolution in printing had a number of other socio-economic consequences. Several new roles emerged in society and the economy: 1) the intellectual, who lived from his pen, i.e. from the proceeds of his books (Erasmus was perhaps the first example), and 2) the publisher/printer, who often played a key role in bringing academics together, in commissioning new books, and developing new projects. The invention of the newspaper and the journal came later.

**Check Your Progress 2**

- 1) Was proto-industrialization a precursor of Industrial Revolution? Explain your position in detail.

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- 2) Briefly discuss the nature of book-production.

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## 12.8 LET US SUM UP

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In this Unit, we have basically demonstrated how the underpinning changes that led to rise of industrial production in the form of modern factory system were gradually gathering pace since the beginning of Early Modern Europe in what are commonly known as the Low Countries. The consumption and production patterns have respectively conceptualized as the ‘industrious revolution’ and ‘proto-industrialization’ by some scholars. These are conceptually controversial topics in history. The empirical proofs are also not conclusive despite large academic investment in the field. But one thing is certain that some divergence was visible in the society and economy of countries bordering the North Sea when compared to the rest of the world economy. The consumption and production patterns and development of institutions are indicators of this divergence.

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## 12.9 ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

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### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) See Sections 12.2 and 12.4
- 2) See Section 12.3

### Check Your Progress 2

- 1) See Sections 12.5 and 12.6
- 2) See Section 12.7