

Chapter 4: Forest Society and Colonialism

Q.1. what is Deforestation? What are its causes?

The disappearance of forests is referred to as Deforestation.

Its causes are:-

Expansion of Agriculture:

As population increased over the centuries and the demand for food went up, peasants extended the boundaries of cultivation, clearing forests and breaking new land.

Ship Building:

By the early nineteenth century, oak forests in England were disappearing. This created a problem of timber supply for the Royal Navy. By the 1820s, search parties were sent to explore the forest resources of India. Within a decade, trees were being felled on a massive scale and vast quantities of timber were being exported from India.

Expansion of Railways:

The spread of railways from the 1850s created a new demand. Railways were essential for colonial trade and for the movement of imperial troops. To run locomotives, wood was needed as fuel, and to lay railway lines sleepers were essential to hold the tracks together. Forests around the railway tracks fast started disappearing.

Setting up of plantations:

Large areas of natural forests were also cleared to make way for tea, coffee and rubber plantations to meet Europe's growing need for these commodities. The colonial government took over the forests, and gave vast areas to European planters at cheap rates. These areas were enclosed and cleared of forests, and planted with tea or coffee.

Q.2. what are the causes for expansion of agriculture in the colonial period?

As population increased over the centuries and the demand for food went up, Peasants extended the boundaries of cultivation, clearing forests and breaking new Land. The British directly encouraged the production of commercial crops like jute, sugar, wheat and cotton. In the early nineteenth century, the colonial state thought that forests were Unproductive. They were considered to be wilderness that had to be brought under Cultivation so that the land could yield agricultural products and revenue, and enhance the income of the state.

Q.3. what were the steps taken by the British government for the forest management in India in the early period?

i) The British decided to invite a German expert, Dietrich Brandis, for advice, and made him the first Inspector General of Forests in India.

ii) Brandis set up the Indian Forest Service in 1864 and helped formulate the Indian Forest Act of 1865.

iii) The Imperial Forest Research Institute was set up at Dehradun in 1906. The system they taught here was called 'scientific forestry'.

iv) After the Forest Act was enacted in 1865, it was amended twice, once in 1878 and then in 1927. The 1878 Act divided forests into three categories: reserved, protected and village forests.

Q.4. How is forests classified according to the act of 1878?

The 1878 Act divided forests into three categories: reserved, protected and village Forests.

Q.5. How did the villagers and foresters differ in the ideas of a good forest?

Villagers wanted forests with a mixture of species to satisfy different needs – fuel, fodder, leaves, etc. The forest department on the other hand wanted trees which were suitable for building ships or railways. They needed trees that could provide hard wood, and were tall and straight. So particular species like teak and *sal* were promoted and others were cut.

Q.6. What are the different uses of forest products?

In forest areas, people use forest products – roots, leaves, fruits, and tubers – for many things. Fruits and tubers are nutritious to eat, especially during the monsoons before the harvest has come in. Herbs are used for medicine, wood for agricultural implements like yokes and ploughs, bamboo makes excellent fences and is also used to make baskets and umbrellas. A dried scooped-out gourd can be used as a portable water bottle. Almost everything is available in the forest –leaves can be stitched together to make disposable plates and cups, the *siadi* (*Bauhinia vahlii*) creeper can be used to make ropes, and the thorny bark of the *semur* (silk-cotton) tree is used to grate vegetables. Oil for cooking and to light lamps can be pressed from the fruit of the *mahua* tree.

Q.7. How was the lives of people affected after the Forest Act of 1865?

- i) The Forest Act meant severe hardship for villagers across the country. After the Act, all their everyday practices – cutting wood for their houses, grazing their cattle, Collecting fruits and roots, hunting and fishing – became illegal.
- ii) People were now forced to steal wood from the forests, and if they were caught, they were at the mercy of the forest guards who would take bribes from them.
- iii) Women who collected fuel wood were especially worried. It was also common for Police constables and forest guards to harass people by demanding free food from them.

Q.8. What was shifting cultivation or swidden agriculture ?

This was a traditional agricultural practice in many parts of Asia, Africa and South America.

In shifting cultivation, parts of the forest are cut and burnt in rotation. Seeds are sown in the ashes after the first monsoon rains, and the crop is harvested by October-November. Such plots are cultivated for a couple of years and then left fallow for 12 to 18 years for the forest to grow back. A mixture of crops is grown on these plots. In central India and Africa it could be millets, in Brazil manioc, and in other parts of Latin America maize and beans.

Q.9. Why did the British government ban shifting cultivation? What was the result? OR How did the changes in forest management in the colonial period affect the shifting cultivators?

1. They felt that land which was used for cultivation every few years could not grow trees for railway timber.
2. When a forest was burnt, there was the added danger of the flames spreading and Burning valuable timber.
3. Shifting cultivation also made it harder for the government to calculate taxes. Therefore, the government decided to ban shifting cultivation.

4. As a result, many communities were forcibly displaced from their homes in the forests. Some had to change occupations, while some resisted through large and small rebellions.

Q.10. Explain how hunting became a major cause for reducing the population of animals during the colonial period?

In India, hunting of tigers and other animals had been part of the culture of the court and nobility for centuries. They gave rewards for the killing of tigers, wolves and other large animals on the grounds that they posed a threat to cultivators.

Over 80,000 tigers, 150,000 leopards and 200,000 wolves were killed for reward in the period 1875-1925. Gradually, the tiger came to be seen as a sporting trophy.

The Maharaja of Sarguja alone shot 1,157 tigers and 2,000 leopards up to 1957. A British administrator, George Yule, killed 400 tigers.

Q.11. How did changes in the forest management in the colonial period affect the firms trading in timber/forest produce ?

With the coming of the British, trade was completely regulated by the government. The British government gave many large European trading firms the sole right to trade in the forest products of particular areas. Grazing and hunting by local people were restricted.

Q.12. How did changes in the forest management in the colonial period affect and pastoralist communities?

Grazing and hunting by local people were restricted. In the process, many pastoralist and nomadic communities like the Korava, Karacha and Yerukula of the Madras Presidency lost their livelihoods. Some of them began to be called 'criminal tribes', and were forced to work instead in factories, mines and plantations, under government supervision.

Q.13. How did changes in the forest management in the colonial period affect Plantation Owners?

New opportunities of work did not always mean improved wellbeing for the people. In Assam, both men and women from forest communities like Santhals and Oraons from Jharkhand, and Gonds from Chhattisgarh were recruited to work on tea plantations.

Their wages were low and conditions of work were very bad. They could not return easily to their home villages from

Where they had been recruited.

Q.14. What were the measures taken by the people of Bastar to protect forests and environment?

1. The people of Bastar believe that each village was given its land by the Earth, and in return, they look after the earth by making some offerings at each agricultural festival.
2. In addition to the Earth, they show respect to the spirits of the river, the forest and 3.
3. Since each village knows where its boundaries lie, the local people look after all the natural resources within that boundary.
4. If people from a village want to take some wood from the forests of another village, they pay a small fee called *devsari*, *dand* or *man* in exchange.

5. Some villages also protect their forests by engaging watchmen and each household contributes some grain to pay them.

6. Every year there is one big hunt where the headmen of villages in a *pargana* (cluster of villages) meet and discuss issues of concern, including forests.

Q.15. Why did the people of Bastar rebel against the British?

1. When the colonial government proposed to reserve two-thirds of the forest in 1905, and stop shifting cultivation, hunting and collection of forest produce, the people of Bastar were very worried.

2. Some villages were allowed to stay on in the reserved forests on the condition that they worked free for the forest department in cutting and transporting trees, and protecting the forest from fires. Subsequently, these came to be known as 'forest villages'.

3. People of other villages were displaced without any notice or compensation. For long, villagers had been suffering from increased land rents and frequent demands for free labour and goods by colonial officials. Then came the terrible famines, in 1899-1900 and again in 1907-1908.

Thus the colonial laws disturbed their life and they protested.

Q.16. How did the people of Bastar organize the rebellion against the British?

1. People began to gather and discuss their issues in their village councils, in bazaars and at festivals or wherever the headmen and priests of several villages were assembled.

2. The initiative was taken by the Dhurwas of the Kanger forest, where reservation first took. Although there was no single leader, many people speak of Gunda Dhur, from village Nethanar, as an important figure in the movement.

3. In 1910, mango boughs, a lump of earth, chillies and arrows, began circulating between villages. These were actually messages inviting villagers to rebel against the British.

4. Every village contributed something to the rebellion expenses. Bazaars were looted, the houses of officials and traders, schools and police stations were burnt and robbed, and grain redistributed.

5. Most of those who were attacked were in some way associated with the colonial state and its oppressive laws.

Q.17. Give an example of the practice of keeping the people out of the forest in the post-independence period?

In the 1970s, the World Bank proposed that 4,600 hectares of natural *sal* forest should be replaced by tropical pine to provide pulp for the paper industry. It was only after protests by local environmentalists that the project was stopped.

Q.18. What was the Blandongdiensten system?

The Dutch first imposed rents on land being cultivated in the forest and then exempted some villages from these rents if they worked collectively to provide free labour and buffaloes for cutting and transporting timber. This was known as the *blandongdiensten* system. Later, instead of rent exemption, forest villagers were given small wages, but their right to cultivate forest land was restricted.

Q.19. What was the Samin's Challenge?

Around 1890, Surontiko Samin of Randublatung village, a teak forest village, began questioning state ownership of the forest. He argued that the state had not created the wind, water, earth and wood, so it could not own it. Soon a widespread movement developed. Amongst those who helped organise it were Samin's sons-in-law. By 1907, 3,000 families were following his ideas. Some of the Saminists protested by lying down on their land when the Dutch came to survey it, while others refused to pay taxes or fines or perform labour.

Q.20. Why are forests affected by wars? OR How did the First World War and the Second World War affect forests?

The First World War and the Second World War had a major impact on forests. In India, working plans were abandoned at this time, and the forest department cut trees freely to meet British war needs.

In Java, just before the Japanese occupied the region, the Dutch followed 'a scorched earth' policy, destroying sawmills, and burning huge piles of giant teak logs so that they would not fall into Japanese hands.

The Japanese then exploited the forests recklessly for their own war industries, forcing forest villagers to cut down forests. Many villagers used this opportunity to expand cultivation in the forest. After the war, it was difficult for the Indonesian forest service to get this land back. As in India, people's need for agricultural land has brought them into conflict with the forest department's desire to control the land and exclude people from it.

Q.21. What are the New developments in Forestry?

Since the 1980s, governments across Asia and Africa have begun to see that scientific forestry and the policy of keeping forest communities away from forests has resulted in many conflicts. Conservation of forests rather than collecting timber has become a more important goal.

The government has recognized that in order to meet this goal, the people who live near the forests must be involved. In many cases, across India, from Mizoram to Kerala, dense forests have survived only because villages protected them in sacred groves known as *sarnas*, *devarakudu*, *kav*, *rai*, etc.

Some villages have been patrolling their own forests, with each household taking it in turns, instead of leaving it to the forest guards. Local forest communities and environmentalists today are thinking of different forms of forest management.

Q.22. What are sarnas, devarakudu, kav, rai, etc. ?

Sarnas, devarakudu, kav, rai, etc. are all sacred groves protected by communities. These forests are dedicated to Gods or snakes and cutting of trees in these areas are not allowed.