

CBSE Class 9

Social Studies

History Chapter 5: Forest Society and Colonialism

By

## **Net Explanations Teacher**

### **THINGS TO ANSWER AFTER READING THE CONTEXT**

1. What were the major causes of British government to promote deforestation in India?
2. How did development of railway lines contribute towards deforestation?

Forests are a very important resource for a country. A lot of our everyday needs are met through ingredients obtained from forests. Papers, desks, tables, color dyes, fruits, honey, oil, leather are some of the basic necessities which we acquire through plants. Apart from our necessities, forests are also home to a variety of birds and animals.

But in the past years, because of industrialization, most of the area of forest cover has been cleared to meet the needs of the industries. Between 1700 and 1995, 9.3 percent of the forest cover of the world was cleared.

### **WHY DEFORESTATION?**

Deforestation refers to removal of plants and trees to meet human requirements.

### ***LAND TO BE IMPROVED:***

- Initially, the cultivable land available was sufficient for agriculture. But as the population increased, so did the demand for food. To cope up with the demands, forests began to be cleared up to enhance agriculture.
- During colonial rule, the British government encouraged the cultivation of commercial crops like jute, sugar, wheat and cotton. These served as raw materials for the industries that were growing in the European countries.
- The British government considered forests useless. They thought it to be wild plants with no particular purpose. The government cleared large parts of forests to bring them under cultivation which would give more produce and hence more income.

### ***SLEEPERS ON TRACKS:***

- In England, the Imperial Navy faced a problem when oak trees started disappearing as the supply of strong and durable timber got hampered. The requirement was met by cutting of trees in large numbers in India and exporting the same to England.

- Expansion of railways from the 1850s was also a very important event that fastened deforestation. Railways started becoming a very important tool for the British government as it enhanced the movement of goods and troops to large distances in a short span of time.
  - Railways required sleepers of wood to keep tracks intact and at position. Just a mile of railway tracks required 1700 to 2000 sleepers. Railway tracks were laid down extensively which increased over the years. This led to the cutting down of trees. Forests started disappearing at a very increased rate, especially the areas near the places where railways were being laid down.

### **PLANTATIONS:**

Plantations are commercial crops, a single crop grown over a large area. Plantations of tea, coffee and rubber were grown extensively by clearing off forest areas. These were then exported to European market.

### **THINGS TO ANSWER AFTER READING THE CONTEXT**

1. Who was the first Inspector General of forests of India?
2. Explain scientific forestry devised by Dietrich Brandis.
3. How did forest laws affect the lives of forest people?
4. How were animals affected under the colonial government?

### **THE RISE OF COMMERCIAL FORESTRY**

A German expert named Dietrich Brandis was made the first Inspector General of Forests of India. This was done by the British government to restrict the use of forests by the local people and to control the cutting down of trees for use other than that required by the government. The government wanted to do so to have regular supply of timber for their ships and have no hindrance in setting up railway networks.

Dietrich Brandis believed that the objectives of the government could be achieved through implementation of laws and not abiding them would result in punishment. Accordingly, Indian Forest Service was set up in 1864 and Indian Forest Act of 1865 was formulated.

The Imperial Forest Research Institute in Dehradun was established in 1906 which taught 'scientific forestry'. Under this, forest covers that contained different types of trees and vegetation were cut down and a single type of tree was grown in rows. Officials estimated and planned the area that needed to be cut down for one plantation, so that after some years it could be replanted again.

The Forest act was amended in 1878 and 1927. In 1878, the forests in India were divided into three categories: reserved, protected and village forests. Villagers were not allowed to enter and use anything from reserved forests.

### **HOW WERE THE LIVES OF PEOPLE AFFECTED?**

Villagers and forest people had their lives entirely dependent on forests. Forests made everything made available to them – fruits, food, herbs as medicines, wood for ploughs and yokes, creepers (*Bauhinia vahlii*) as ropes, bamboo for fences, oil for cooking and lighting lamps and the list goes on.

When the forest's use was restricted, villagers' everyday life was severely affected – grazing the cattle, collecting roots and fruits, fishing, cutting wood for houses, etc. became a criminal offence. They had no choice but to steal from the forests. But if they were not lucky enough to escape, they were then either punished or bribed by the officials and forests guards. The villagers had their lives adversely affected by the laws.

Also, the government wanted trees which would provide hard timber for ships and tall and straight trees for railway sleepers. So, the forests containing a variety of trees were cut down and specific tree plantations were encouraged, such as teak and sal.

### ***HOW DID FOREST RULES AFFECT CULTIVATION?***

*Shifting cultivation or swidden cultivation:* It was a type of agricultural practice followed in many parts of Asia, Africa and South America. It is known by different names like lading in Southeast Asia, chena in Sri Lanka, milpa in Central America, tavy in Africa. In India also, it is known by different local names – nevada, jhum, khandad, kumri, dhya.

In shifting cultivation, an area of forest land was burned and after the first monsoon rains, seeds were sown in the ashes. Harvest was carried out in October-November. Cultivation was carried for some years and then the left was left undisturbed for the next 10 to 12 years for natural vegetation to grow.

The European government considered this practice dangerous. They feared the fire may spread to different areas and may burn down good timber. Also they believed that the area burnt down would not be able to grow trees required for railway sleepers. So, shifting or swidden cultivation was banned by the government. This led many village and forest families to shift their place or occupation.

### ***WHO COULD HUNT?***

Apart from obtaining various necessities from the forests, villagers also hunted deer, partridges and small animals. But where, on the one hand, Forest laws of India prevented the use of reserved forests by the villagers, it also prohibited them from hunting animals. And if caught, they were punished in the name of poaching.

But hunting was prohibited only for the villagers. Nobilities and officials, who hunted for pleasure and as a hobby, were not restricted. Infact, big animals such as elephants, tigers, leopards, wolves were considered harmful for cultivation and rewards were given by the officials to those who hunted down these animals. Consequently, over 80,000 tigers, 150,000 leopards and 200,000 wolves were killed during the period of 1875-1925.

The hunting down of animals became so excessive that many animals reached the verge of extinction. It was much later that the conservation of animals was sought upon and the hunting was brought under control.

### ***NEW TRADES, NEW EMPLOYMENTS AND NEW SERVICES***

Forest restrictions made people move out of their homes and look for other work or job opportunities. Many got involved in trading of forest products.

Before colonization, many nomadic tribes like Banjaras were involved in trading of forest products such as bamboo, spices, horns, silk cocoons, gums, resins. But later, the trading activities were regulated and were restricted to European trading firms alone.

The forest and nomadic tribes were forced to work in factories, mines and plantations. Those who resisted were punished and were called 'criminal tribes'. The work and living conditions in the factories and plantations were also not good. They had to work long and hard hours and were not easily given permission to go to their native places. Santhals of Assam, Oraons of Jharkhand and Gonds of Chhattisgarh are some examples of nomadic tribes who were forced to take up occupation against their free will.

### **THINGS TO ANSWER AFTER READING THE CONTEXT**

1. Write a brief note on the rebellion of people of Bastar against forest laws.

### **REBELLION IN THE FOREST**

After the imposition of forest laws, many rebellions took place in many parts of India. Some prominent leaders among them are Siddhu and Kanu from the Santhal Parganas, Birsa Munda of Chotanagpur and Alluri Sitarama Raju of Andhra Pradesh.

### **THE PEOPLE OF BASTAR**

Bastar is located in the southern part of Chhattisgarh. Chhattisgarh plain lies to its north while Godavari plain lies to the south of Bastar. The Indravati river flows through east to west. The people of Bastar believe that mother Earth has given them land to live and they should make some offering to it in return.

There lived many clusters of villages and each village knew its boundaries well. The people of a village took care of its resources and if they wanted anything from a nearby village, they paid a fee known as devsari, dand or man. Villagers also protected the village resources by employing watchmen, who were given grains from each household in return for their services. Village headmen met every year to discuss issues relating to villagers and forests.

### **THE FEARS OF THE PEOPLE**

In 1905, reservations on forest cover were decided to be made along with banishing shifting cultivation, hunting, use of forest products, making people anxious. The villagers were already suffering because of high land rents and frequent famines were adding to their miseries. So when reservations and restrictions were announced, the hatred among people for the colonial officials began to take roots deeply.

Villagers began to discuss issues and ideas about solving the problem at hand. They thought rebelling against the officials will put a stop to the atrocities made on them. Though there was no particular leader, Gunda Dhur, a villager of the Dhurwas of Kanger forest is mentioned in folktales.

Villagers began to make arrangements by circulating chillies, arrows, mango boughs and a lump of earth. Many contributed for the expenses of the rebellion. Soon, officials were attacked, bazaars and warehouses were looted, schools and police stations were attacked and burnt. Foodgrains obtained were then distributed among the villagers.

To suppress the rebellion, the colonial government sent troops. Adivasi camps were surrounded and attacked. Then they entered villages, punishing those who took part in the rebellions. Many left villages and fled to the jungles. It took three months for the colonial government to take control over the situation, but they were not able to capture Gunda Dhur. Though the rebellion was suppressed, the British government suspended the reservation of forests temporarily and also the forest area intended to be reserved was reduced to half the initial area.

Even after Independence, restrictions on forest use continued. The World Bank also demanded to replace natural sal trees with tropical pine trees to provide pulp for paper. But when local environmentalists began a rebellion, the project was dropped.

#### **THINGS TO ANSWER AFTER READING THE CONTEXT**

1. What was Samin's argument to forest laws?
2. What was the method adopted by Dutch to gain control over forests in Java?

#### **FOREST TRANSFORMATION IN JAVA**

Java is a rice producing island in Indonesia. But before cultivation took over, Java was covered with forests which were then cut down by the Dutch colonial government.

#### **WOODCUTTERS OF JAVA**

There was a community of forest cutters in java called the Kalangs of Java. They were very valuable to society. When the Mataram kingdom of Java split up in 1755, the 6000 families of the Kalangs were equally divided between the two kingdoms.

When the Dutch began to take control over forests, they wanted the Kalangs to work under them. But the Kalangs resisted by attacking the Dutch fort at Joana. But that uprising failed.

### ***DUTCH SCIENTIFIC FORESTRY***

The Dutch needed regular supply of timber for ship building and wood for producing sleepers. To have a regular and abundant supply of wood, the Dutch imposed forest laws. Accordingly, the villagers were restricted from entering certain forests, banished cattle grazing, transporting woods without permit, even travelling on forest roads with horse carts or cattle.

Initially, the Dutch government exempted certain villages from land rents if they agreed to work for the government by providing free labour and buffaloes. This system was known as the *blandongdiensten* system. Later, the government started to give small wages to the villagers but they were exempted from the right to cultivate on the land.

### ***SAMIN'S CHALLENGE***

Surontiko Samin was a villager from Randublatung village (a teak forest village). He argued that the forests were nature's production and so the government does not have any right to own it. The idea was popularized by his son-in-laws. Soon, the idea was accepted and followed by a large number of families. People protested the forest laws by either lying down on the grounds when officials came for inspection or by refusing to pay taxes and rents.

### ***WAR AND DEFORESTATION***

War caused the forest lands to deplete more extensively. In India, to meet the war needs, all other production works were put on halt and trees were cut down excessively. Similar situations were observed in Java, where the Dutch government burned down forests of teaks, sawmills – following a 'scorched earth policy' - so that the land did not fall under the hands of Japanese.

Such a situation was taken advantage of by the villagers who saw it as an opportunity to expand lands for cultivation. After the wars got over, it became very difficult for the officials to take the land back for preserving forest cover.

### ***NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN FORESTRY***

It was in the 1980s that the government began to realize that conserving forests was more important than collecting timber. They also realized that to do so, the forest people needed to be preserved and sought after. In India, many forests were able to be protected because the villagers took good care of it. They also patrolled forests at night instead of relying on forest guards.

Environmentalists and forest communities are now coming up with new strategies and plans to conserve forests and its varied varieties and species.

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