



Forest Society and Colonialism (Easy notes for class 9th)

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Introduction:-

Have you ever thought about how forests influence our daily lives? From the paper in your books to the spices in your food, and even the oil in chocolates—so much comes from forests! Forests also provide homes to countless species, with places like the **Amazon forests** and **Western Ghats** boasting as many as **500 plant species** in one patch.

But this diversity is under threat. Over centuries, forests have been cleared for industries, farming, and fuel. In this chapter, we'll explore how forests have shaped societies, the impact of colonial rule on forest resources, and how [forest conservation](#) became a global concern.

Why Deforestation?

Meaning:- Deforestation refers to the **disappearance of forests** due to human activities, like clearing land for agriculture or urban development.

Reasons for Deforestation:- Deforestation has been occurring for a long time, but it began to spread rapidly during colonial rule. Here are the causes :-

1. **Change in Land Use for Farming:-** In **1600**, only about **one-sixth** of India's land was under cultivation, but today it has increased to nearly **half**.
 - As the population expanded, people began **removing forests** to create more farmland.
2. **Commercial Exploitation of Forest Resources:-** The British promoted the farming of crops like **jute**, **cotton**, and **sugar** to meet Europe's demand.
 - The colonial rulers believed that clearing forests for farming would generate more agricultural products and income.
 - From **1880 to 1920**, the area used for cultivation expanded by **6.7 million hectares**.
3. **Infrastructure Development:-** The construction of **railways**, **roads**, and **urbanization** for the growing British-controlled economy led to the large-scale clearing of forests for space.

Colonial Demand for Timber:

In the early 1800s, **oak forests** in England were disappearing. This caused a shortage of strong timber for building ships, which were needed to maintain **imperial power**.

- England needed timber for its navy. By the 1820s, search parties went to India to find forest resources.
- Large-scale **tree cutting** began, and timber was **exported** from India.
- In the 1850s, railways became important for **colonial trade** and troop movement.
 - Locomotives (powerful engine) and sleepers (railroad ties) needed wood to support the railway tracks. Each mile of track required 1,760 to 2,000 sleepers.
- By 1890, workers laid over 25,500 km of railway tracks. By 1946, the tracks expanded to 765,000 km.
- As railway tracks spread across India, people cut down forests. In Madras Presidency alone, contractors cut 35,000 trees every year for sleepers.

Remember:- The dates and data are just to show the scale of change. You don't need to remember exact numbers for your exam (except a few) . Therefore, It's enough to understand if the change was big or small, and how much impact it had.

Colonial Government and Plantations:-

- Colonial rulers cleared forests to create space for tea, coffee, and rubber plantations.
 - It was to meet Europe's growing demand.
- The colonial government took control of forests and gave large areas to European planters at cheap rates.
 - They enclosed the land, cut down the forests, and planted crops like tea and coffee.

The Rise of Commercial Forestry:-

The British government realized the importance of forests for their ships and railways but feared that local use and reckless tree cutting could destroy them.

To manage and conserve forests, they introduced strict policies and systems in India.

Appointment of Dietrich Brandis:

- They invited **Dietrich Brandis**, a German expert, as the **first Inspector General of Forests in India**.
- He emphasized the need for a systematic approach to forest management
- Also, he introduced training in the **science of conservation**.

Establishment of Forest Services:

- In **1864**, Brandis established the **Indian Forest Service**.
- After that, he played a key role in enforcing the **Indian Forest Act of 1865**.
- Later, the **Imperial Forest Research Institute** was founded in **Dehradun in 1906**.

Introduction of Scientific Forestry:

- In **scientific forestry**, **natural forests** were cleared and replaced with **plantations** of a single tree species planted in rows.
- Forest officials:
 - **Surveyed** and **recorded** forest areas..
 - **Estimated** areas with different tree types.
 - Created **working plans** for cutting and replanting.

Forest Act Amendments:

- The Forest Act was amended in **1878** and **1927**.
- It categorized forests into three types:
 1. **Reserved Forests**: No access for villagers.

2. **Protected Forests:** Limited access for daily needs.
3. **Village Forests:** Allowed for essential use like fuel and house construction.

How were the lives of people affected?

- Villagers and forest officials had different ideas of what a good forest should look like.

Villagers:-

1. Villagers wanted forests with a mix of species for their daily needs like fuel, fodder, fruits, and herbs.
2. They used many forest products in their daily lives such as, Mahua tree fruit, tubers, herbs, Gourd, bamboo, Siadi creeper, Semur tree bark, tendu leaves etc.

Forest officials:-

Forest officials, on the other hand, focused on trees suitable for building ships and railways, like teak and sal.

Impact of the Forest Act on Villagers:-

- After the **Forest Act**, villagers faced great hardship:
 - **Daily practices** like cutting wood, grazing cattle, hunting, and fishing became **illegal**.
 - Consequently, it forced many to **steal wood** to meet their needs.
- Furthermore, **Forest guards** often demanded bribes and food from villagers.

How did Forest Rules Affect Cultivation?

European colonialism had a major impact on [shifting cultivation](#) (also known as swidden agriculture).

European foresters saw shifting cultivation as harmful to the forests.

Thus, Colonizers put ban on shifting cultivation.

Shifting cultivation:- It is a farming method where people clear small parts of the forest, burn the trees, and grow crops on the land. After a few years, they leave the land to rest and grow back into a forest.

- In India, this practice is known by various names like **jhum**, **bevar**, and **poda**.
- In other parts of the world, it's called **lading**, **milpa**, and **chitemene**.

Impacts of Forest Rules:-

- The forest rules displaced many communities from their land.
- They could no longer practice their traditional farming methods.
- Some people had to change their way of life and find new work.
 - *It was because farming was no longer an option.*

Resistance against Rules:-

- Many communities resisted the forest rules through small and large rebellions.

- Moreover, they tried to protect their right to use the forests for cultivation.

Who could hunt?

- The new laws banned hunting, and those caught were punished.
- The British turned hunting large animals, like tigers and wolves, into a sport.
 - They believed killing these animals would “civilize” India.
 - Moreover, the British offered rewards for killing animals
 - It is because they considered animals a threat to farmers.
 - **For Example:-** From 1875 to 1925, more than 80,000 tigers, 150,000 leopards, and 200,000 wolves were killed for rewards.
 - The Maharaja of Sarguja killed 1,157 tigers and 2,000 leopards.
 - A British officer, **George Yule**, killed 400 tigers.
- Eventually, people realized the need to protect these animals, rather than kill them.

New Trades, New Employments, and New Services:

- Forest laws caused hardships, but some communities gained through new trades.
- Many left traditional jobs and started trading in forest products.
 - Example: **Mundurucu people of Brazil** shifted to collecting latex for rubber trade.
- Forest product trade existed since medieval times (elephants, hides, bamboo, spices, etc.).
- Nomadic groups like the **Banjars** were involved in trade.

Impact of British Rule:

- British controlled forest trade and gave rights to European firms.
- Local people, like **Korava, Karacha, Yerukula**, lost livelihoods due to restrictions.
- Some were labeled as “criminal tribes” and forced into factory and plantation work.

Plantation Work:

Forest communities (e.g., **Santhals, Oraons, Gonds**) worked in tea plantations.

Conditions were poor, wages low, and returning home was difficult.

Rebellion in the Forest:-

Forest communities rebelled due to **colonial changes** in forest management and restrictions on their traditional rights.

Leaders of Movements Against the British:

- **Siddhu and Kanu** (Santhal Parganas).
- **Birsa Munda** (Chhotanagpur).
- **Alluri Sitarama Raju** (Andhra Pradesh).

The People of Bastar

Location & Geography:-

- Bastar: Southern **Chhattisgarh**, bordering **Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Maharashtra**.
- Key features: **Plateau (central), Chhattisgarh plain (north), Godavari plain (south), and Indrawati River**.

Communities:-

- Inhabitants: **Maria and Muria Gonds, Dhurwas, Bhatras, Halbas**.
- They Shared **customs and beliefs**, despite different languages.

Beliefs & Practices:-

- Locals saw their Land as a gift from **Earth**.
- They honored it through offerings at festivals.
- Also, they respected nature including **rivers, forests, mountains**.

Forest Management:-

- Villages manage resources within set boundaries.
- **Fee (devsari, dand, man)** for using another village's forest.
- Forest guards funded by **grain contributions**.

Annual Gatherings:-

- Village leaders used to meet to discuss forest and community issues.

The Fears of the people:-

- The British proposed Forest reservation in 1905.
 - They reserved **2/3 of forests**, banned **shifting cultivation, hunting for Locals, and forest produce collection**.
 - Also, they created '**forest villages**' where some villagers had to work for free for the forest department.
- Many villages uprooted without **notice or compensation**
 - Thus, they had to face displacement.

Reasons for Rebellion:-

1. **Exploitation**: High land rents, forced labor, and demands for goods by colonial officials.
2. **Famines**: Severe food shortages (1899-1900, 1907-1908).
3. Forest reservations became the **breaking point**.

The 1910 Rebellion:-

- The Dhurwas of the Kanger forest initiated the rebellion.
- No single leader, but Gunda Dhur from Nethanar village became a key figure.
- Messages for rebellion (mango boughs, earth, chillies, arrows) were circulated among villages.
 - Villagers **attacked** bazaars, **set fire** to government buildings, schools, and police stations.
 - Moreover, they **redistributed** grain, **targeting** colonial officials, traders, and anyone connected to the British regime.

British Response:-

- The British **deployed** troops to crush the rebellion.
- Leaders **attempted** negotiations but **faced** attacks.
- Villages **emptied** as people **fled** into the forests.
- Hence, the British **suppressed** the rebellion successfully in 3 months (Feb–May 1910).

Outcome:

- Later, the forest reservation **was cut** to half of the original plan.

Post-Independence Exploitation:-

- **Continuity of Practices:** Many forests remained reserved for **industrial use**.
- **1970s Protest:** Local environmentalists stopped a World Bank plan to replace **sal forests** with pine plantations for paper industries.

Forest Transformation in Java:-

- Like India, Indonesia was also under the colonial rule of Dutch.
- Before becoming colonized the java people of Indonesia enjoyed living in forests.
- Java's population in 1600 was approximately 3.4 million.
 - They had a huge area covered with forest.
 - They practiced rice cultivation.
 - And many who lived in mountains practiced shifting cultivation.
 - *Note:- Java is now a major rice-producing island in Indonesia.*
- However, Dutch colonizers started to change everything in Java.
 - They (Dutch) established control over its forests by implementing policies similar to British forest policies in India.
 - It led to disruptions in local ways of life.
 - Also, it sparked the tensions between the Dutch and the local communities.

The Woodcutters of Java:-

- **Kalangs of Java:** They were skilled forest cutters and shifting cultivators harvested teak and built

palaces.

- In 1755, the Mataram kingdom (of 6,000 Kalang families) in Java split into two smaller kingdoms:
 1. **Yogyakarta (Yogya) Sultanate**
 2. **Surakarta (Solo) Sultanate**
- In 1770, Kalangs attacked a Dutch fort at Joana but lost.

Dutch Scientific Forestry:-

- **Enforcing Forest Laws:** Dutch restricted villagers' access to forests and controlled wood cutting and grazing.
- **Punishing Villagers:** Authorities penalized unauthorized grazing, wood transport, and use of forest roads.
- **Fulfilling Timber Demand:** In 1882, Java exported 280,000 sleepers for shipbuilding and railways.

Challenges Under Dutch Control:-

- The Dutch imposed rents on forest land cultivation.
- They later exempted some villages from rents if they provided free labor and buffaloes for timber work. This system was called **blandongdiensten**.
- Eventually, villagers received small wages instead of rent exemption, but their right to cultivate forest land was restricted.

Samin's Challenge:-

- In 1890, **Surontiko Samin** of Randublatung questioned state ownership of forests.
- Samin argued that the state didn't create natural elements like wind, water, and earth, so it couldn't own them.
- His movement grew, with Samin's sons-in-law helping to organize it.
- By 1907, 3,000 families supported his ideas.
- Some Saminists protested by lying down on land during surveys or refused to pay taxes, fines, and perform forced labor.

War and Deforestation:-

- The World Wars affected forests.
 - In India, British cut trees freely for war needs.
 - In Java, the Dutch destroyed sawmills and burnt teak logs to prevent the Japanese from using them.
- The Japanese recklessly exploited the forests for war industries, forcing villagers to cut down trees.
- After the war, villagers expanded cultivation in the forests, making it hard for the forest service to regain control of the land.

New Developments in Forestry (1980s onwards):-

- Governments in Asia and Africa realized that keeping forest communities out caused conflicts.
- Protecting forests became more important than cutting trees for timber.
- Furthermore, villages helped protect forests by maintaining sacred groves
 - such as, [sarnas](#), [devarakudu](#), and [kan](#).
- Local people started patrolling forests themselves, taking turns instead of relying on guards.
- New ideas for forest management are being created, involving local communities and environmentalists.

The chapter is now complete! I hope each concept was easy for you to understand and you feel confident about the material. If you're ready to test your knowledge, you can try the section-wise practice by clicking on the links below to help you prepare even better. Lastly, a lot of effort has gone into providing you the best learning experience. Feel free to share your feedback and comments on the notes posted. Your thoughts are always welcome!

Now, here is the Link for quiz questions on Forest Society and Colonialism:-

[Forest Society and Colonialism \(Quiz\)](#)

*"Success is the sum of small efforts, repeated day in and day out."
– Robert Collier*

Category

1. Class 9th

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