

NCERT Solutions for Class 9

Social Science

Chapter 4 – Forest Society and Colonialism

1. Discuss how the changes in forest management in the colonial period affected the following groups of people:

i. Shifting cultivators

Ans. During the colonial period, the new forest laws barred shifting cultivation. Many indigenous tribes who were shifting cultivators who depended upon this method of agriculture for centuries faced the loss of their livelihood. They did not have their land and banning this agricultural method forced them to migrate and take up other occupations. Many shifting cultivators had to take up working in the tea plantations.

ii. Nomadic and pastoralist communities

Ans. Nomadic and pastoralist communities depend on forest resources for their livelihood. During the colonial period, the new forest laws took away their rights to graze animals in the forest land. Hunting, gathering forest products such as grass, leaves, bamboo, spices, honey etc. without permission became criminal offences. Thus, those nomadic communities who depended on forests lost their livelihood. They were declared as criminal tribes. Many Nomadic and pastoralist communities had to shift towards working in factories, plantations, logging mills under government management.

iii. Firms trading in timber/forest produce

Ans: During the colonial period, the new forest laws brought forests under the hold of the British government as resources. Companies dealing with timber production and other forest produce could take lease of the forest from the government. The market was booming for forest products especially timber due to its use in infrastructure, furniture making, ship making etc. Thus, firms engaged in the timber trade and forest products made good profits.

iv. Plantation owners

Ans. During the colonial period, the plantation owners could get forest land at cheaper rates. Members of indigenous forest communities were recruited for minimal wages as plantation labourers. Due to new policies, the plantation labourers could not leave to go back to their villages. Thus, Plantation owners gained not only ownership of the forest lands but also cheap labour to maintain the business. Thus, the plantation business became profitable in colonial India.

v. Kings/British officials engaged in shikar

Ans. Though hunting was made illegal to the indigenous forest tribes and common mass in colonial India, the same became a sport for Kings, zamindars and British officials. British viewed killing large animals such as tigers, wolves, leopards as a process to make India a civilised nation. Between 1875–1925 approximately 80,000 tigers, 1,50,000 leopards and 2,00,000 wolves were killed alone in India. Thus, the population of wild species certainly declined.

2. What are the similarities between colonial management of the forests in Bastar and Java?

Ans. The colonial management of forests in Bastar district of India and Java of Indonesia can be noticed plainly. The colonial government took away the rights of the forest dwellers and forced them to choose a different occupation. The forest dwellers of both areas had to migrate and take on work in plantations under British landowners.

3. Between 1880 and 1920, forest cover in the Indian subcontinent declined by 9.7 million hectares, from 108.6 million hectares to 98.6 million hectares. Discuss the role of the following factors in this decline:

i. Railways

Ans. The British government started the construction of the railways in India after establishing colonial rule. To supply a large number of wooden sleepers for the

railway track, a large number of sal trees were cut. The government gave the contractors full access to get timbers to form the forest. The forests around the railway tracks soon disappeared.

ii. Shipbuilding

Ans. The British depended upon their navy for the expansion and maintenance of large colonial areas over the world. The main trade routes during 1880–1920 were shipping routes. Thus, shipbuilding was a booming industry in Britain. The colonial government used Indian forest as the resource for shipbuilding raw materials such as Oak timbers. Thus, this industry contributed to the disappearance of forests in India.

iii. Agricultural expansion

Ans. The growing population of Europe needed a large supply of food grains. The British government used India as a supplier of grains. To meet the demand, new forest areas were cleared to make way for agricultural land.

iv. Commercial farming

Ans. Before the colonial period, farmers mainly cultivated food grains. To supply raw materials for the textile industry of Britain, the colonial government forced the farmers to grow cash crops like cotton and indigo. Thus, Indian agriculture became commercialized. To increase the cash crop production, new forest lands were cleared to turn them into agricultural land.

v. Tea/coffee plantations

Ans. British brought tea and coffee cultivation in India as demand for them increased in Britain. The climate of southern India was suited for coffee cultivation and thus in many places of Karnataka coffee plantations were established. Similarly, the northeastern hills and Darjeeling became the hubs for tea cultivation. British individuals began to buy forest lands at a cheap rate and forest dwellers were forced into plantation work for minimal wages. The forest lands were cleared and plantations were built.

vi. Adivasis and other peasant users

Ans. The forest dweller Adivasis depended on the forest for their livelihood. They had always protected the forest lands. But forest law issued by the colonial government left them without any rights over forest lands. So, they have less impact on deforestation during 1880 – 1920. But at the same time, other peasants took the opportunity to increase agricultural land areas.

4. Why are forests affected by wars?

Ans. During wars, forests become resources to supply wood. The bombings and fire destroy forest cover and kill many plants and animals. Forests are cut down to build new military bases, air stations. As the world had observed, during World War II, the Dutch burned down sawmills and teak logs in the jungle area in Java to keep those resources out of the Japanese army's hands. The destroyed forest became exposed for agriculture and was never returned.