

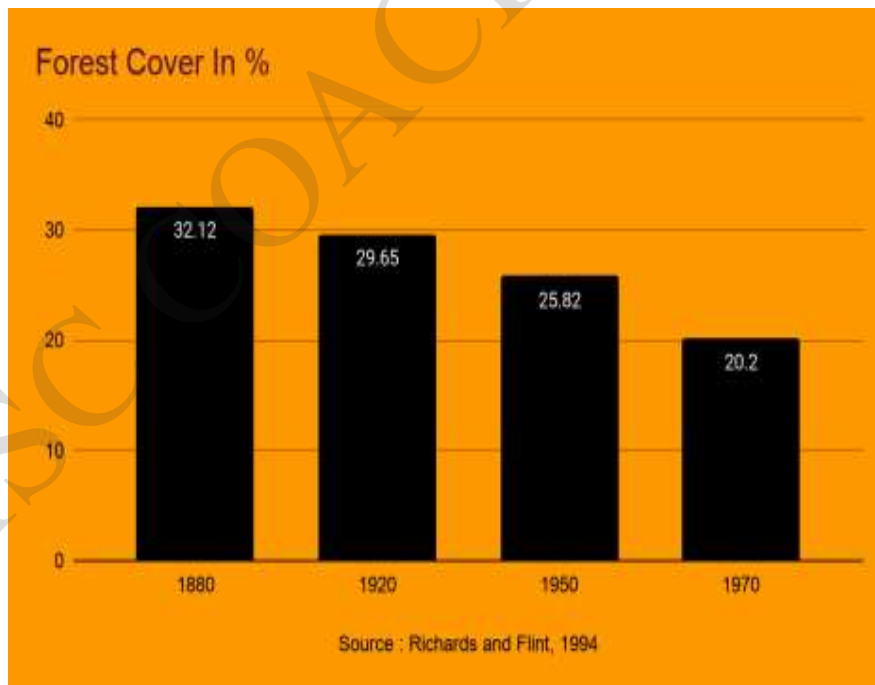
Revision Notes

Class - 9 History

Chapter 4 – Forest Society and Colonialism

Despite the fact that we are living in a hyper-industrialized period, woods continue to play an important role in our lives. The paper for your books and copies comes from the forest. The cooking oil, gum, coffee, honey, the fruits you eat, the material with which tires are made, a lot of medicines, timbers, and a whole lot of other things come from the forest. How come so many things are available in the forest? Because forests house a variety of trees, not just one or two kinds. However, the trees in the forest are fast disappearing to make way for the growing population and their cultivation needs. CBSE Class 9 Social Science History Chapter 4 is dedicated to the historical analysis of the forest society in India, how it suffered when the British Raj came, and what happened afterward.

a) The trend of the decline in forest cover in the colonial and post-colonial India



b) Why Were the Forests Cleared?

The felling of trees and deforestation is not a sickness of the modern world. It has its roots in the past - even before the British came to India. But when the British came, this deforestation became an organized affair. The rate of deforestation increased too. So what was the reason for the deforestation?

c) The Need for More Land to Cultivate

With the increase in population, people had to clear forests to increase the land for cultivation. As your book informs, in the 1600s only one-sixth of the land was used for cultivation. Now, almost half of the landmass is used for cultivation.

- As the British settled in India, the rate of cultivation increased manifold.
- During the 17th and 18th century the population of Europe exploded. To feed this huge population the British wanted to export sugar, wheat, barley, etc.
- On the other hand, the British also wanted India to be the primary exporter of raw cotton so that English industries could have a steady supply of raw materials.
- Because of these reasons, they encouraged cultivation. And as a result, the British supported the clearing of the forests.
- The British were of the opinion that the forests were useless and more and more forests should be cleared so that cultivation could happen which would increase the income of the state.

d). The Export of Timber

- England faced a severe shortage of oak forests in the 19th century.
- This resulted in the short supply of timber for the Royal Navy.
- So, once again India became their favorite destination to plunder. From 1820 to 1830 and thereafter, they started growing a vast number of trees and exported the timbers to England.

e). The Emergence of Railways

- From 1850 onwards, the colonial government started establishing railways in India (for their benefit). Because of the following reasons:
- Wood was used as fuel to power the steam engine in the trains.
- Wooden planks were used to keep the railway tracks in their place. These are called sleepers.
- Contractors were hired and they started cutting trees indiscriminately.

f). The Demand for Cash Crops

On one hand, there was a demand for traditional crops like sugar or cotton, on the other hand, England saw an increase in demand for tea, coffee, and rubber. So the European planters grabbed the land at extremely cheap rates and started growing these cash crops. So, more forests were cleared.

g). The Role Dietrich Brandis

Gradually the British realized that the indiscriminate felling of trees will prove disastrous to the forests of India. Furthermore, they were of the opinion that the usage of the forest products and plants by the local people will contribute more to the decrease in the forest cover.

So to save forest (not from a moral perspective but from an economic perspective), the British government invited a German botanist Dietrich Brandis to formulate a plan and a system that would help the British to continue exploiting the forest without the fear of the annihilation of the forests.

- Brandis became the Inspector General of Forests.
- In 1865, the Forest law was passed.
- Later in 1878, the Forest Act was passed. It was the colonial government that became the owner of the forests.
- In 1906, under his leadership, the Imperial Forest Research Institute was established.
- The institute taught scientific forestry there.
- According to the Forest Act, forests were divided into three categories - reserved, protected, and village. Villagers were allowed to take materials from the protected and village forests only.

h). People Suffered Because of The Forest Act

- The villagers needed various materials from the forests. Thus, it was necessary for a forest to have different kinds of trees. But that was not the case after the Forest Act and Scientific Forestry came into being.
- People took fruits and tubers from the forest to eat. They used woods and herbs for agricultural and medicinal purposes respectively. They used gourds, leaves, roots, seeds for so many different purposes.
- But the British had mainly commercial interest. So, they planted trees like oaks which were otherwise valuable but of little use for the villagers.
- The Forest Act was later made more strict. They restricted the movements of the villagers even in the village category forest as well. So, the villagers had to enter the forests illegally. The day-to-day lives of the villagers became hard.

i). Shifting Cultivation Was Banned

- Before the British came to India, people practiced shifting cultivation whereby a part of the forest was burnt and when the monsoon came, the people planted seeds into the ashes. The crops were harvested in October-November. Usually, the land is used twice for cultivation.
- After the usage of the land for two years, it was left for the forest to recapture.
- The European foresters thought that this process of cultivation was bad for the forest. Once again - they were not thinking about the betterment of the environment. They had economic plans in mind. They thought that shifting cultivation would make the soil unable to grow trees that were perfect for making timbers. Along with that, there was a fear of environmental degradation.
- So, they banned shifting cultivation.
- The result - displacement of the people living in the forest. They also had to look for other means of livelihood. Some forest communities tried to resist as well.

j). Hunting Was Banned

- Along with the shifting cultivation, the British prevented the forest people from hunting animals like deer or partridges. So they lost another way of livelihood.
- However, ironically, the British encouraged the killing of wild animals like tigers.

k). New Ways of Livelihood

- Since the forest dwellers could not cultivate their land anymore, they started trading in forest products.
- This sort of enterprise was nothing new to India. The Adivasis traded with nomadic groups such as the Banjaras.
- Outsider Europeans, on the other hand, were given exclusive rights to trade in the forest by the British. The nomadic groups were forced to abandon their way of life.
- The Europeans hired Santhals from Assam, Oraons from Jharkhand, and Gonds from Chhattisgarh to work in the tea plantations. But the wages were too low and the working conditions were bad.

I. Important Questions and Answers

1. Write a short note on the rebellion by the forest communities of Bastar.

Ans: Bastar is a part of Chhattisgarh. Indigenous communities like Maria and Muria Gonds, Halbas, and Dhurwas live here. They are very close to mother Earth. Mother Nature, they think, has blessed each community in Bastar with the land. These villages have a friendly relationship between them.

So when the Forest Act came, the villagers of Bastar could not take part in shifting cultivation or hunting. To earn a livelihood some were displaced, some were forced to displace. A few of the villagers were allowed to stay in the reserve forest in exchange for free work done for the forest department. But then came the famines of 1899 and 1907. The hardship made them detest the reservation.

The locals intended to assault forest authorities, employees, and anybody who backed them under Dhurwas' leadership. After days of meticulous resource

gathering, the villagers attacked the houses of the forest officials and the forest product trailers and looted the bazaars and police stations.

Yes, the British troops crushed these villagers. The Adivasis' unstoppable energy, on the other hand, is an inspiration to many. In fact, it took the British three months to recapture these areas. The British were forced to leave half of the land to the villagers.

2. Discuss the role of railways in the decline of the forest.

Ans: The British started making railways from 1850 onwards in India. At that time, the trains were powered by steam engines. To produce steam, wood needed to be burnt. Also, a significant number of sleeper woods were needed to keep the railway tracks together. Because of these two reasons, the British needed more and more wood. As a result, they cleared woods and felled trees. This caused a huge decline in the forest cover.

3. Discuss the role of shipbuilding in the decline of forests in India?

Ans. In the 19th century, the number of oak trees declined in England. As a result, it became difficult to make ships for the Royal Navy - it was from the oaks that the timbers to build ships came. To fill this void, the British began exporting Indian woods. Thousands of trees had to be chopped down by the colonial administration to accomplish this.

4. Was scientific forestry truly scientific?

Ans. Scientific Forestry Was Actually Unscientific. Despite Brandis' affection for the forest, the rules he devised were not scientific. First and foremost, Brandis was mistaken in believing that a non-European country could successfully duplicate the European approach to forest protection. Secondly, the rules were quite rigid. Thirdly, Brandis supported monoculture. But monoculture was and is detrimental to the soil and the crops. Finally, Brandis' ideas failed because he failed to consider the British government's massive demand for forest resources.

5. What was the story of Java?

Ans. In Java, there was a community of skilled shifting cultivators who deftly cut forests. They were known as the Kalanga. The Dutch colonial overlords attempted to subjugate the Kalanga. But they refused and attacked one of the Dutch forts.

The connection between the forest and the inhabitants, however, was forcibly destroyed once the forest legislation was passed. The Dutch too needed wood for making railway tracks and for other purposes. But they had few workers to cut the trees and transport the woods. So, they forced the people of Java villages to work for them free of cost. How? They imposed rents on the lands that the villagers cultivated. Surontiko Samin of Randublatung village asked why they would accept the Dutches' possession of their property later in 1890. This realization made him raise his voice against the shameless colonial rulers. The people responded to his call and decided to resist the Dutch activity in their land. They refused to pay taxes, they refused to work for them, and obstructed their survey work.