



Question-1

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

1. Shifting cultivators
2. Nomadic and pastoralist communities
3. Firms trading in timber/forest produce
4. Plantation owners
5. Kings/British officials engaged in shikar.

Solution:

Shifting Cultivators:

Shifting cultivation was a traditional agricultural practice in many parts of Asia, Africa and South America. Parts of the forest are cut and burnt in rotation. After the first monsoon rains, seeds are sown in the ashes and crops are cultivated. Cultivation is continued for a couple of years. Then the forest is allowed to grow in the area for 12 to 18 years. Then they are cut and burnt once more. This rotation is called Shifting cultivation.

The Colonial government banned Shifting cultivation, as European foresters felt that this would harm the forests and valuable timber would be lost. The Government also found it difficult to calculate taxes when Shifting cultivation was practiced.

The ban displaced many Shifting cultivators. Many of them had to change their occupation. A few Shifting cultivators agitated against the ban.

Nomadic and Pastoralist Communities:

Nomadic and pastoralist communities moved about in the mountains and deserts and in the plains and plateaus of India and Africa. The pastoralist communities formed an important part of the population in both the countries during the Colonial era. When the Colonial government established control over the forests it affected the pastoralist communities in a big way.

The pastoralist communities always moved from place to place with their cattle. When forests were destroyed by the government to expand agriculture, the Nomads lost grazing fields for their cattle. This brought a lot of hardship to the pastoralist communities.

Firms Trading in Timber/Forest Produce:

Large expanses of forests were cut for timber and forest produce. The Colonial Government was worried about this reckless felling of trees. It passed the Indian Forest Act in 1865. This Act was amended in the year 1878. Under this amendment the forests were divided into 3 categories, - reserved, protected and village forests.

Villagers and local firms trading in timber and forest produce could not take anything from the reserved or protected forests which had the best trees. This affected the traders immensely.

Plantation Owners:

Vast areas of forests were given to European Planters, at a very cheap rate by the Colonial government. Natural forests were cleared to cultivate tea coffee and rubber trees. There was a great demand for these commodities in Europe. These plantations were fenced off and others were not allowed inside.

Kings/British Officials engaged in Shikar:

Forest laws banned hunting of deer, partridges and small animals. People who lived near the forests were deprived of their livelihood

and food because of this ban.

Contrary to this ban hunting of big animals like the tiger, leopard and wolves became a sport for the kings and the British. The British felt that by killing dangerous animals they could civilise India. The indiscriminate hunting by the British and the Kings almost made certain species of animals extinct.

Question-2

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

Solution: Colonial management of the forests in Bastar and Java ran along the same lines. Bastar is located in India, while Java is an island in Indonesia.

The people of Bastar had great respect for mother Earth. The people of Bastar lived in harmony within their own limited boundaries. When the Colonial Government introduced the 'reservation of forests' the people of Bastar were worried about their future. Most villagers were displaced while a few were allowed to stay and work for free for the forest department. The villagers of Bastar were deeply upset by this. The famine in the early 1900s sparked a rebellion against forest reservations. But the rebellion was crushed by the British. The only victory for the villagers was that the colonial government reduced the 'reserved forests' by half. The plight of the forest-villagers in Java was very much the same as the people of Bastar. The Dutch were in control of Indonesia. The skilled forest – cutters of Java were in great demand. In the 18th century the Dutch slowly began to gain control over the forests in Java. The villagers rose in rebellion, but soon the uprising was suppressed. The Dutch enforced forest laws as in Bastar. The villagers were restricted from entering the forests and those who opposed the ban were severely punished.

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