

# HISTORY

## Chapter 4: Forest Societies and Colonialism



## Forest Societies and Colonialism

Forests are not only the providers of food, fruits, fibers, fuel, and fodder but also give shelter to various tribes and people. Since ancient times, forests have been the abode of people. As civilisation developed and the population increased, people began to clear forests for agricultural purposes.

### Deforestation

In 1600 CE, only one-sixth of India's land was under cultivation. At present, about half of the land is under cultivation. Many reasons have been attributed towards the destruction of forests.

- The increase in the demand of food crops led to the clearing of forests for agricultural purposes.
- The British in order to maximize their revenues encouraged the production of commercial crops such as indigo, sugar, cotton and jute.
- The British colonialists regarded forests as unproductive. To them, the best way to increase their productivity was by bringing them under cultivation.
- Because of the diminishing forest cover of England, Indian wood was felled for building ships for England. Forests were recklessly felled, and the wood was exported from India to England.
- The beginning and expansion of railways in India led to the destruction of forests on a large scale. In 1850s, in Madras Presidency alone, about 35,000 trees were felled. The contractors felled trees indiscriminately for supplying timber to the Government. Apart from it, many forests were also felled in regions where railway lines were laid down.

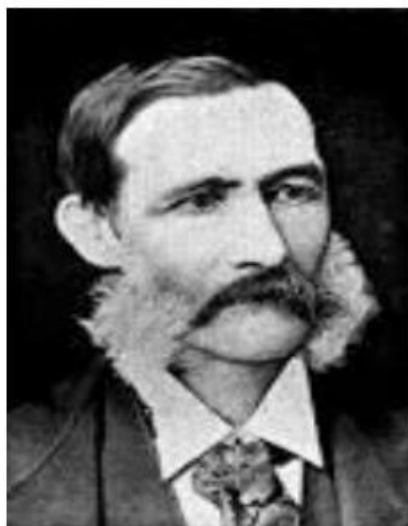


**Forests provide fibre, food, fruits, fodder and fuel to the villagers.**

### **The Rise of Commercial Forestry**

The British in India were worried over the fast-depleting forest cover in India. They felt that the felling of trees by local people and contractors was destroying forests. They invited a German

forest expert, Dietrich Brandis, to plan the conservation of forests and appointed him as the Inspector General of Forests in India. Brandis set up the Indian Forest Service in 1864 and helped in the formulation of the Indian Forest Act of 1865. The Imperial Forest Research Institute was also set up at Dehradun in 1906. He formulated the system of 'scientific forestry'. Some features of scientific forestry in India:



**Dietrich Brandis**

- In degraded natural forests, one type of tree is planted in straight rows; this was called plantation.
- Areas under forests were measured, forests were surveyed and working plans were made for forest management.
- The forests were systematically felled, and trees were replanted again.
- The Indian Forest Act was passed. It divided the forests in India into three categories:
  - Reserved forests
  - Protected forests
  - Village forests
- The villagers were not allowed to fell trees in the reserved forests. They could only collect wood from the protected and village forests for building their houses or for fuel.

### **Impact of Scientific Forestry on the Lives of Forest Dwellers and Villagers**

The villagers and tribals depended on forest produce to fulfil their daily needs. Forests provided them with food, tubers, fruits, seeds, nuts, fuel, fodder, leaves and medicinal herbs. Leaves were stitched together to make baskets. The Forest Act imposed limited restrictions on the following activities:

- Cutting wood for building houses
- Collecting fruits and roots
- Hunting and fishing
- Shifting cultivation

Forest guards appointed by the Government often demanded bribes from the villagers in order to collect forest produce.

### **Shifting Cultivation**

The British Government imposed restrictions on the practices of shifting cultivation. In shifting cultivation, a part of the forest field was cleared, trees were burnt, and their ashes were sprinkled on the field. Seeds were sown and plants were grown. After cultivating the field for

about two to three years, a piece of land was left fallow for the forests to grow back. Another patch of forests was then cleared for cultivation. The Government banned shifting agriculture because trees of good quality could not be immediately grown on fallow lands. Burning of trees could also lead to forest fires. It also became difficult for the Government to calculate

taxes. Many forest communities like the Baigars in central India suffered immensely because of the ban on shifting cultivation. Forest laws deprived people of their customary rights to hunt for food; however, hunting itself became a great sport of the colonialists. Many rewards were also offered by the British Government for killing wild animals such as tigers and lions. It was believed by the colonialists that these animals posed dangers to farmers who were cultivating forest lands.



**In shifting cultivation, a patch of forest is burned to clear land for cultivation.**

### **New Traders and Employment**

- After the Forest Department took control of Indian forests, many employment opportunities were created. Many communities traded in forest goods. However, the trade was completely regulated and supervised by the Government.
- Trading rights in Indian forests were also given to many European firms.

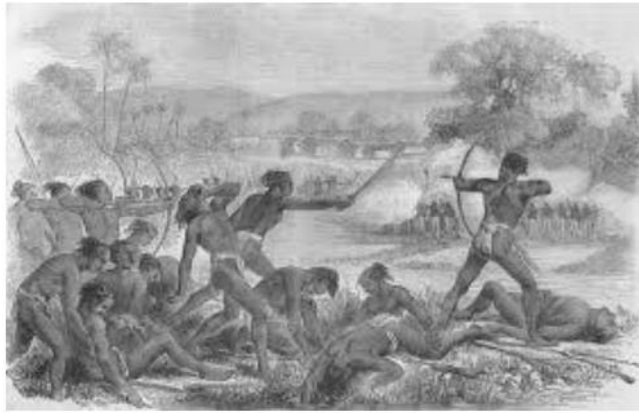
However, after restrictions were imposed by the colonial government on using forest produce by the forest communities, many tribals began to work on plantations. They worked on extremely low wages and were exploited.

### **Rebellions in the Forests**

As a result of the Government's excessive control over forests, many forest communities revolted against the Government.

### **Revolt in Bastar**

- Bastar is located in the southern part of the present state of Chhattisgarh. Many tribal communities such as the Gonds, Dhurwas, Bhatras and Halbas lived in the region. These communities used forest produce for satisfying their basic needs.
- When the forests were declared as reserved forests, many villages lying near the forests were displaced. Some villages were allowed to remain but in return they had to help the Government in transporting trees from one place to the other.
- Many forest communities gathered to talk about the excesses of the Government. The Dhurwas took the initiative. Many people of the surrounding villages began to collect mango boughs, chilies and arrows to invite people to rebel against the Government. Gunda Dhur was an important leader of the rebellion.
- In the rebellion that followed, bazaars were looted, police stations were burnt, and seized grains were distributed.
- The rebellion was suppressed by the British. They surrounded the camps of the tribals and the villagers and fired upon them. Those people who participated in the rebellion were either punished or killed. Many people fled into the deep forests. The British however were not able to capture Gunda Dhur.
- What is sad to note is that even after Independence, the people of Bastar were kept out of the forests and the woods were used for industrial purposes.



**People in Bastar revolted against the Government because their rights in the forests were denied.**

### **Forest Transformation in Java**

- Java is an island of Indonesia. It was a heavily forested region during the 1600s. There were many villages in the fertile plains in Java. The Kalongs of Java were a community which specialised in forest cutting and shifting cultivation.
- When the Dutch colonised Java, they began to control the forests and subdued the Kalangs and made them work for them in the forests.
- The Dutch enacted the forest laws in Java. The access of villagers into the forests was restricted. They could cut trees only for building houses or for making river boats. Villagers were not allowed to graze their cattle in young stands and could not transport wood without permission.
- Forests in Java were however used by the Dutch for their own use. Forests were destroyed to build railway sleepers which were exported. This required labour.
- The Dutch imposed rents in cultivated forests but exempted those who were willing to provide free services to the Government for cutting and transporting timber. This came to be known as the 'blandongdiensten' system. Later, instead of rent exemption, forest villagers were given small wages.
- In the 1890s, Surontiko Samin of Randublatung village began to question the ownership of forests by the state. His ideas quickly spread to the other villages. Many Saminists refused to pay taxes to the Dutch.
- During the Second World War, the Dutch burned sawmills and piles of teak wood so that



these do not fall into the hands of the Japanese. When the Japanese occupied Java, they destroyed the forests by using timber for their own war needs.

- Villagers were also forced to cut down the forests. This also led to the expansion of cultivation into the destroyed forest lands.



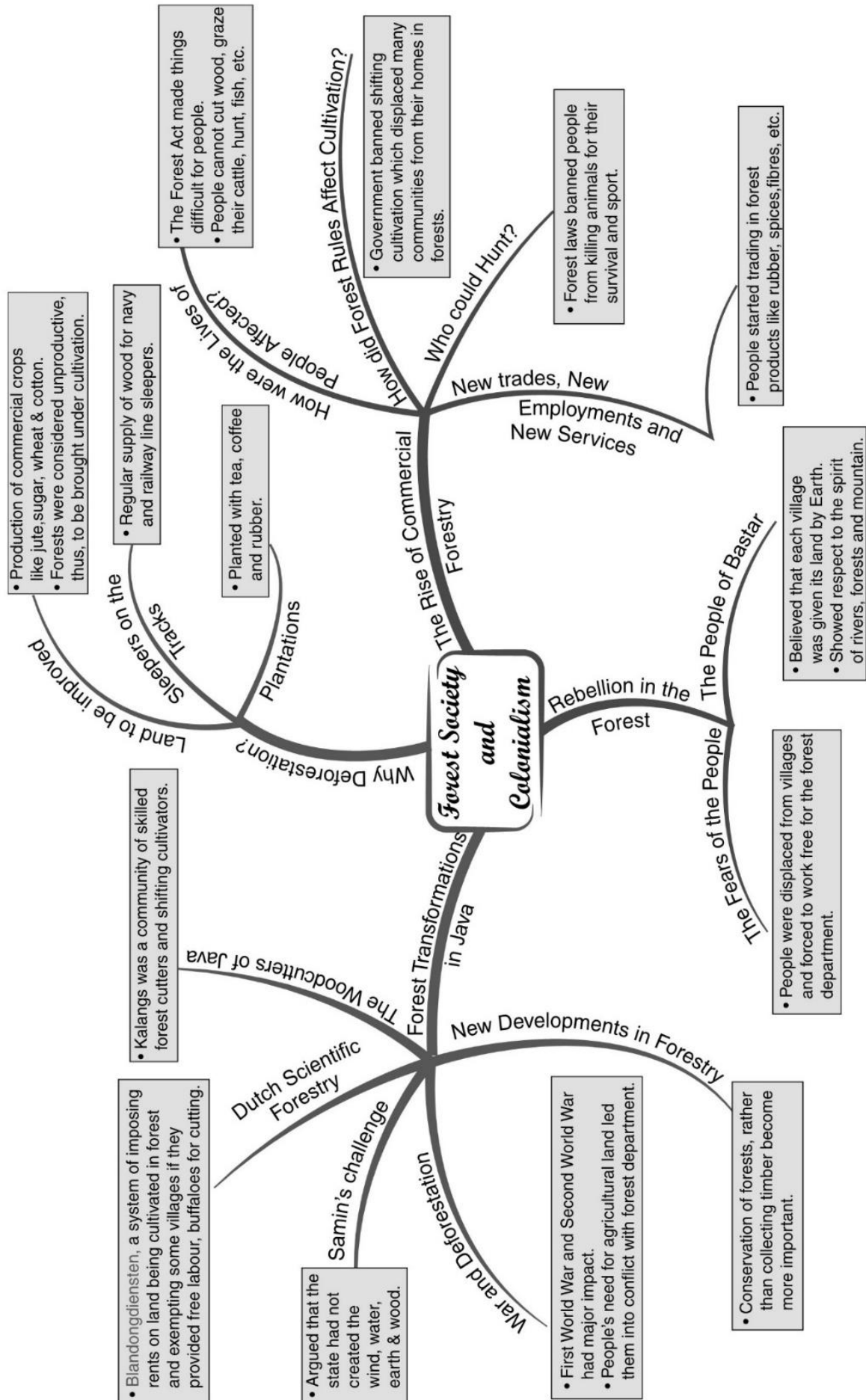
Java is a rice-producing island in Indonesia. Earlier it was a heavily forested area.

### Views Regarding Scientific Forestry

Many governments in Asia and Africa have now begun to see the disadvantages of scientific forestry. It has been realized that keeping the forest communities out of villages have resulted in several conflicts. In scientific forestry, attention is given to cutting of timber rather than conservation of forests. It has now been realised that in order to conserve forests, forest communities should be involved. In India, forest communities played an important role in protecting forests. Many chunks of forests were considered 'sacred groves' which were protected by villagers. The forests of Mizoram and Kerala have survived because of the protection of sacred groves. Many ideas and plans are being formulated in order to conserve and protect forests through a better system of forest management.



# CHAPTER- 4 FORESTS SOCIETY AND COLONIALISM



## Important Questions

### Multiple Choice questions-

Question 1. Where was first Imperial Forest Research Institute set up?

- (a) At Dehradun
- (b) At Shillong
- (c) At Shimla
- (d) At Uttarakhand

Question:2. Which of the following is not the name of shifting or swidden agriculture/Cultivation?

- (a) Milpa
- (b) Chitemene or Tavy
- (c) Podu/Penda
- (d) Taungya

Question 3. Where is Bastar located?

- (a) In Andhra Pradesh
- (b) In Orissa
- (c) In Southernmost parts of Chhattisgarh
- (d) In Madhya Pradesh.

Question 4. In which country the similar situation prevailed as in the forest of Bastar?

- (a) In Somalia
- (b) In Indonesia
- (c) In Malaysia
- (d) In Sri Lanka

Question 5. Which of the following is the causes of Forest Act enacted in 1865?

- (a) Forests were divided into four categories.
- (b) Forests were divided into three categories.
- (c) Villagers could take nothing from these forests.
- (d) Villagers could take anything from these forests.

Question 6. Between 1700 to 1995, how much area of forest cover in the world cleared for industrial use?

- (a) 9.3%

(b) 8.3%

(c) 3.9%

(d) 8.5%

Question 7. Which of the following community or tribe live in Bastar?

(a) Maria

(b) Gaddis

(c) Gonds

(d) Halbas

Question 8. Who were Kalangs?

(a) Community of skilled Laboure's

(b) Community of skilled craftsperson's

(c) Community of skilled forest cutters and shifting cultivator

(d) Skilled laboures and craftsperson's who lived in central Java.

Question 9. Dutch began their scientific forestry in.

(a) Sumatra

(b) Java

(c) Kalimantan

(d) West Irian

Question 10. Sacred Groves are known as:

(i) Sarnas (ii) Devarakudu (iii) Kan (iv) Rac

(a) (i) and (iv)

(b) (iii) and (iv)

(c) only (iv) is correct

(d) All are correct.

Question 11. India's landmass under cultivation in 1600 AD was:

(a) About 1/6th of the India's landmass

(b) About 1/8th of the India's landmass

(c) About 1/4th of the India's landmass

(d) About 1/3rd of the India's landmass

Question 12. India forest service was set up in:

(a) 1764

(b) 1794

(c) 1864

(d) 1866

Question 13. When was Indian Forest Act implemented?

(a) In 1795

(b) In 1865

(c) In 1845

(d) In 1885

Question 14. What was the total length of railway tracks in 1890?

(a) 765000 km

(b) 66500 km

(c) 25500 km

(d) 45500 km

Question 15. How many trees were alone cut down annually in Madras Presidency in the early 1850s to build sleepers ?

(a) About 30800 trees

(b) About 35000 trees

(c) About 40000 trees

(d) About 40500 trees

### Very Short:

1. How are forests useful to us?
2. Which common feature is found in the Amazon forests and the Western Ghats?
3. 'What is deforestation?
4. Mention the reason for increased landmass under cultivation in India.
5. Why did the British encourage the production of commercial crops in India?
6. What are sleepers?
7. Why did oak forests in England disappear?
8. Why was wood needed for railways?
9. How did the forests around railway tracks start disappearing.
10. Name the plantations for which large areas of India's natural forest were cleared

### Short Questions:

1. What is deforestation? How did cultivation expand rapidly during the colonial period?
2. Who was appointed as the first Inspector General of Forests in India? Explain any three reforms introduced by him.
3. What is scientific forestry? How did the forest officials implement it?
4. Why is it necessary to increase area under forests? Give three reasons.
5. Why did the government ban shifting cultivation? What was the result?
6. Why was hunting popular in India and what were its effects?
7. What was the impact of regulation of trade in forest products by the British government in India?

### Long Questions:

1. How did commercial farming lead to a decline in forest cover during colonial period?
2. Why was Dietrich Brandis invited by the British government? What steps were taken by him to protect forests?
3. What was the practice of shifting cultivation? Why did European foresters want to unfollow it.
4. The new forest laws changed the lives of forest dwellers. They could not hunt'. How?
5. Describe the life of the tribal people of Bastar.

### Answer Key:

### MCQ:

1. (a) At Dehradun
2. (d) Taungya
3. (c) In Southernmost parts of Chhattisgarh
4. (b) In Indonesia
5. (d) Villagers could take anything from these forests
6. (a) 9.3%
7. (b) Gaddis
8. (c) Community of skilled forest cutters and shifting cultivator
9. (b) Java
10. (d) All are correct.
11. (a) About 1/6th of the India's landmass

- 12.(c) 1864
- 13.(b) In 1865
- 14.(c) 25500 Km
- 15.(b) About 35000 trees

### **Very Short Answer:**

1. Forests provide bamboo, wood for fuel, grass, charcoal, packaging, fruits, flowers, animals, birds and many other things.
2. It is possible to find as many as 500 different plant species in one forest patch in the Amazon forests and the Western Ghats.
3. The disappearance of forests is referred to as deforestation
4. Over the centuries, population increased, demand for food went up so peasants extended the boundaries of cultivation, clearing forests and breaking new land.
5. The demand for the commercial crops like jute, sugar, wheat and cotton increased in the 19th century Europe. Food grains were required to feed the growing urban population and raw materials were needed for industrial production.
6. Wooden planks laid across railway tracks, to hold them in position are called sleepers.
7. Oak forests in England were disappearing fast because oak wood was needed to build ships.
8. Wood was needed as fuel to run the locomotives and to lay railway lines sleepers to hold the tracks together.
9. The railway tracks expanded; trees were being cut for sleepers. The government gave out contracts to individuals to fulfil the supply and they cut the trees indiscriminately.
10. Large areas of natural forests were cleared for the cultivation of tea, coffee and rubber plantation.

### **Short Answer:**

**Ans: 1.** The disappearance of forests is referred to as deforestation. Cultivation expanded rapidly during the colonial period in the following ways.

(a) The British encouraged the production of commercial crops like sugar, wheat, jute and cotton.

(b) Large areas of forests, considered to be wilderness was brought under cultivation.

(c) Large areas of natural forests were also cleared to make way for tea, coffee and rubber plantations to meet Europe's growing need for these commodities. (any two)

**Ans: 2.** Dietrich Brandis, a German expert, was appointed as the First Inspector General of



forests in India by the British Government to save the forests.

The following were the main reforms introduced by Dietrich Brandis.

(a) In 1864, Dietrich Brandis set up the 'Indian Forest Service' (IFS) and helped formulate the Indian Forest Act of 1865.

(b) He encouraged/advised for 'scientific forestry' where in place of natural forests, one type of trees were planted in straight rows.

According to the Forest Act of 1878, there were three categories of forests—reserved, protected and village forests. Villagers were not allowed to take anything from the forests.

According to the plan/reform, Forest officials surveyed and planned that every year how much of the plantation will be cut and replanted so that trees remain always ready to be cut again, in some years.

(c) In 1906, the Imperial Forest Research Institute was set up in Dehradun.

**Ans: 3.** In scientific forestry, natural forests, which had different kind of trees, were cut down. In their place one type of trees were grown in straight rows.

Forest officials surveyed the area and estimated how much of the plantation was to be cut. The area was then replanted and trees could be cut after a few years.

**Ans: 4.** (a) Forests are useful as the people use forest products in a variety of ways. Fruits and tubers were eaten because they were nutritious and herbs were used for medicinal purposes.

(b) Bamboo was used to make fences, baskets and umbrellas. The wood was used to make agricultural implements like yokes and ploughs.

(c) A dried scooped-out gourd was used as a portable water bottle. Oil for cooking and lighting lamps was acquired from the fruit of the Mahua tree.

(d) The siadi creeper was used to make ropes and leaves could be used, usually stitched together to make disposable cups and plates.

**Ans: 5.** European foresters regarded the practice of shifting cultivation as harmful. They felt:

(a) the land which was used for cultivation every few years could not grow trees for railway timber.

(b) when the forests were burnt, there was a danger of flames spreading and burning valuable timber.

(c) It became difficult for the government to calculate taxes.

Many communities were forcibly displaced from the forest, some had to change their occupations.

**Ans: 6.** Founding of big game was a popular sport in India. It was a popular sport among the

emperors and

nobility. Many Mughal paintings show emperors and princes enjoying a hunt. Under colonial rule, hunting increased to such an extent that many species became extinct. For the British, large animals was a sign of primitive society. They believed that by killing large animals, they would civilise India. Tigers, leopards and wolves were killed, because they posed a threat to the villagers. Over 80,000 tigers, 150,000 leopards and 20,00,00 wolves were killed. Only then did environmentalists and conservators advocate that these animals had to be protected.

**Ans: 7.** Following was the import of regulations of trade in forest products by the British government in India.

(a) Trade in forest products was completely regulated by the British government. It gave many large European trading firms the sole right to trade in the forest products of particular areas in Indian Forests.

(b) The grazing and hunting by local people were restricted. In the process many nomadic communities like the Koravas and Karachi lost their livelihood.

(c) Some of them began to be called 'criminal tribes' and were forced to work in factories and plantations under government supervision.

### **Long Answer:**

**Ans: 1.** The factors which led to deforestation during the colonial rule are as follows:

(a) The British encouraged the production of commercial crops like wheat, sugar, jute and cotton. The demands for these crops increased in the 19th century Europe because food grains were needed to feed the growing urban population and raw materials were required for growing industries.

(b) In the 19th century, the colonial government thought that forests were unproductive. The land had to be brought under cultivation, which would increase food production and revenue. Between 1880 and 1920 cultivation area rose by 6.7 million hectares. The forests had to be cleared. As the population increased and demand for food went up, the forests were cleared for the expansion of agricultural land.

(c) The oak forests were fast depleting. It became a problem to supply timber for the Royal Navy. Ships could not be built without a regular supply of timber. Ships were needed to protect the overseas colonies. By 1820 search parties were sent to explore forest resources in India. Trees were being cut on a large scale and exported to England.

(d) Wood was needed as fuel to run locomotives and to lay sleepers which could hold the railways tracks. As early as 1850, 3500 trees were cut annually in Madras presidency for sleepers.

(e) Large areas of forests were cleared to make way for tea, coffee and rubber plantations.

**Ans: 2.** The Britishers feared that the reckless felling and cutting of trees by traders destroyed the forests. So they invited Dietrich Brandis for advice and made him the first Inspector General of Forests in India.

The steps taken by Brandis to protect the forests were:

- (a) A proper system was adopted to manage forest and people to conserve forests.
- (b) Rules about the use of forest resources were framed.
- (c) Felling of trees and grazing of land was restricted, so that forests could be used for timber production.
- (d) Anyone who did not follow the system was punished. Brandis set up the Indian Forest Service in 1864.

**Ans: 3.** One of the major impacts of European colonialism was on the practice of shifting cultivation or Swidden agriculture.

This practice was followed in Asia, Africa and South America. In shifting cultivation, parts of the forest are cut and burnt. After the first monsoon showers, seeds are sown in the ashes and crop is harvested in October-November. Such plots are cultivated for a few years and then left fallow for 12 to 18 years for the forest to grow.

European foresters did not want the cultivators to follow this practice. They felt that the land which was used for cultivation for a few years could not grow trees to provide timber for railways. When the forests were burnt, there was a danger of flames spreading to other parts of the forest. It was also difficult for the government to calculate taxes. So they decided to ban shifting cultivation.

**Ans: 4.** The forest laws changed the lives of forest dwellers significantly. Before the forest laws, many people who lived in or near the forests lived by hunting deer, partridges and a number of small animals. The customary right of the forest dwellers was prohibited by the forests law. They were punished for poaching, if caught hunting.

Hunting of big game became a sport under colonial rule. Hunting increased so much, that various species became extinct. British believed large animals were a sign of primitive society and by killing dangerous animals they would civilise India. People were rewarded for killing tigers, wolves and other animals because they were a threat to the cultivators.

**Ans: 5.** (a) Bastar is located in the southernmost part of Chhattisgarh and borders Andhra Pradesh, Odisha and Maharashtra. A number of different communities such as Maria and Muria Gonds, Dhurwas, Bhatras and Halbas live in Bastar. They speak different languages but have common beliefs and customs.

(b) The people in Bastar believe that the Earth gave land to each village and in return they look after the land and make offerings at each agricultural season.

- (c) They also show respect to the spirit of the rivers, mountains and the forests.
- (d) The local people of the village look after the natural resources of the village. If people wanted wood from another village, they had to make payments, called devsari, dand or man. Some people also engaged watchmen to look after their forest and each household contributed some grain to pay them.
- (e) Every year the headmen of the villages met and discussed issues concerning the forest.