

Date:-31/05/20.

History

## Forest society and colonialism

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### Plantations

The British also introduced large plantations for growing tea, coffee and rubber. European planters were given vast areas of land at cheap rates so that they could develop plantations. The area was cleared of forests to make way for tea or coffee.

To properly control and manage the forest resources in India, the British appointed a German expert, Dietrich Brandis, as the first Inspector General of Forests in India. Brandis introduced a new system and began to train people in conservation of forest resources. The Indian Forest Service was set up in 1864 and the Indian Forest Act was introduced in 1865.

Grazing, felling of trees and any use of forest produce was made illegal and punishable offence. In the name of scientific forestry, they replaced natural vegetation with single type of trees like sal or eucalyptus. The modern conservationists tell this system as monoculture and argue that it is not good for the environment.

The Indian Forest Act was amended twice, once in 1878 and then in 1927. The 1878 Act divided forests into three categories: reserved, protected and village forests. They used to take food, medicines, firewood and many other raw materials from forests. The new laws made their life miserable. They could not longer take their herds for grazing nor collect firewood. They were now forced to steal wood from the forests. But there always was the risk of being caught and harassed by the forest guards.

### How did Forest Rules Affect Cultivation

Shifting cultivation has been prevalent among many tribal communities in India. This is a type of subsistence farming in which a small patch of land is cleared by slashing and burning the vegetation. Ash is then mixed with the soil and crops are grown. The patch of land is utilised for a couple of years and is then left fallow for 10 to 12 years.

The colonial officials regarded this practice as harmful for the forests. They were afraid that an accidental fire could destroy valuable timber. Moreover, the shifting cultivators were difficult to control in revenue collection. The government hence banned shifting cultivation.

This affected many families. Many people were forced to work in low paying jobs, some were forced to migrate to cities in search of job. However, some people tried to resist the new laws through small and large rebellions.

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