

Chapter 4: Tribals, Dikus and the Vision of a Golden Age

Activity: 1

Question: Look carefully at the tasks that Baiga men and women did. Do you see any pattern? What were the differences in the types of work that they were expected to perform?

Answer:

- Women were expected to cut the dried stalks of crops. These were used as fuel. On the other hand, men used to cut large trees for fuel needs.
- The women gathered fruits like sago, tamarind, and mushroom. They gathered edible roots or Kanda or Mahua seeds. The men used to hunt animals.
- The women gathered unburnt wood to use as fuel. Men worked in fields.
- So, we can see that there existed a division of Labour in the Baiga families. Men and women had separate works to do.

Activity: 2

Question: Find out whether the conditions of work in the mines have changed now. Check how many people die in mines every year, and what are the reasons for their death?

Answer: The conditions of work in the mines have changed and improved a lot, still, the workers are facing a number of problems. Some are as follows:

- Machines cause noise pollution, which sometimes causes hearing loss among the workers.
- Tremors due to drilling, occupational skin diseases, gas poisoning, etc. are common among the workers.
- Multiple injuries, head injuries, spinal injuries due to roof fall are seen among the miners. There are many safety issues to be addressed.
- There is usually found heat and gas inside the mines due to poor ventilation.
- There is generally a shortage of safety instruments like safety shoes etc. and the workers work only in their undergarments.

On average, about a hundred mining workers die per year due to various reasons. Some prominent reasons are as follows:

- Due to collapse of roof or walls of the mine.
- Due to flooding in the mines.
- Due to various occupational diseases and infections.
- Due to a lack of safety measures.

Let's imagine

Question: Imagine you are a jhum cultivator living in a forest village in the nineteenth century. You have just been told that the land you were born on no longer belongs to you. In a meeting with British officials, you try to explain the kinds of problems you face. What would you say?

Answer:

(1) Sir, for we people, the forest is everything. We start our life in the forests and it is the place where our life ends.

(2) Our culture, livelihood, belief everything is related to forests. If you will take away our natural right on the forest, water and the land we will be unable to procure our basic needs. Our economic activities like hunting, food gathering, fishing, cattle breeding, axes cultivation and plough cultivation will be disturbed.

(3) We get our food from fruits, roots, tender leaves, etc. that we collect from the forest. If you suddenly say that this does not belong to us anymore, where shall we people go? From where shall we have our meal?

(4) Sir, we graze our animals here. We get milk, meat, etc. from them. If forest lands are snatched from us, where shall we graze our animals? Please, sir, do not do this.

(5) Many of us worship rivers, trees in the forest. Many of our festivals are incomplete without forests. Sir, if you make us landless, our culture will be destroyed.

So, sir, I request you not to drive us away from this forest. If you do so a unique culture will be destroyed.

Let's recall

Question 1: Fill in the blanks:

- (a) The British described the tribal people as _____.
- b) The method of sowing seeds in jhum cultivation is known as _____.
- (c) The tribal chiefs got _____ titles in central India under the British land settlements.
- (d) Tribals went to work in the _____ of Assam and the _____ in Bihar.

Answers:

- A. savage/uncivilized
- B. scattering
- C. land
- D. Tea plantations of Assam and the coal mines.

Question 2: State whether True or False:

- (a) Jhum cultivators plough the land and sow seeds.
- (b) Cocoons were bought from the Santhals and sold by the traders at five times the purchase price.
- (c) Birsa urged his followers to purify themselves, give up drinking liquor and stop believing in witchcraft and sorcery.
- (d) The British wanted to preserve the tribal way of life.

Answers:

- a) False - Jhum cultivators were involved in shifting cultivation. They used to go to the different lands and prepared them for cultivation. They scattered the seeds on the field instead of ploughing the land and sowing the seeds.
- (b) True
- (c) True
- (d) False, the British did not want to preserve the tribal way of life.

Let's discuss

Question 3: What problems did shifting cultivators face under British rule?

Answer: The British were uncomfortable with the shifting cultivators, as they were always moving from one place to another in search of pasture lands. For administrative and economic reasons, the British wanted the shifting cultivators to settle down and become peasant cultivators.

The British thought it was easier to control and administer peasant cultivators than shifting cultivators. In addition to this, changes in forest laws had a considerable effect on tribal lives. The British extended their control over all forests and declared that forests were state property.

People were not allowed to move freely in these forests, practice Jhum cultivation, collect fruits, or hunt animals. Many of the shifting cultivators were therefore forced to move to other areas in search of work and livelihood..

Question 4: How did the powers of tribal chiefs change under colonial rule?

Answer:

- The tribal chiefs were important people. They enjoyed a certain amount of economic power and had the right to administer and control their territories. Under British rule, the functions and powers of these tribal chiefs changed to a great extent:
- They were allowed to keep their land titles over a cluster of villages and rent outlands, but they lost much of their administrative power and were forced to follow laws made by British officials in India.
- They had to pay tribute to the British and discipline the tribal groups on behalf of the British.
- They lost the authority they had earlier enjoyed amongst their people and were unable to fulfill their traditional functions.

Question 5: What accounts for the anger of the tribals against the dikus?

Answer: Missionaries, moneylenders, Hindu landlords, and British officials were considered dikus or outsiders. They caused anger among the tribals because:

- They were considered the cause of the misery and suffering of the tribal people.
- The land policies of the British were destroying their traditional land system.
- Hindu landlords and moneylenders were taking over their land.
- The missionaries were criticizing their traditional culture.

Question 6: What was Birsa's vision of a golden age? Why do you think such a vision appealed to the people of the region?

Answer: Birsa's Vision of the Golden Age

- Birsa was deeply influenced by many of the ideas he came in touch with.
- His movement was aimed at reforming tribal society.
- He urged the Mundas to give up drinking liquor, clean their villages, and stop believing in witchcraft and sorcery.
- Birsa also turned against missionaries and Hindu landlords as he saw them as outside forces that were ruining the Munda way of life.
- In 1895 Birsa urged Just followers to recover their glorious past.
- He talked of a golden age in the past a satyug (the age of truth)—when Mundas lived a good life,
 1. They constructed embankments.
 2. They tapped natural springs.
 3. They planted trees and orchards.
 4. They practiced cultivation to earn their living.
 5. They did not kill their brethren and relatives.
 6. They lived honestly.
- Birsa also wanted people to once again work on their land, settle down and cultivate their fields.
- The political aim of the Birsa movement made the British worried.
- He also wanted the government to set up a Munda Raj with Birsa at its head.
- The movement identified all these forces as the cause of misery and suffering.

Let's do

Question 7: Find out from your parents, friends or teachers, the names of some heroes of other tribal revolts in the twentieth century. Write their story in your own words.

Answer: Name of some tribal heroes,

1. Tana Bhagat	Lohardaga (Jharkhand)
2. Tilka Manjhi	Bhagalpur (Bihar)
3. Lakshman Nayak	Odisha
4. Sido Murmu Kanha Murmu	Santhal Pargana (Jharkhand) Santhal Pargana (Jharkhand)
5. Gunda Dhur	Bastar (Chhattisgarh)

Jatra Oraon:

He was a tribal freedom fighter from the Chhotanagpur region is the present day state of Jharkhand. During his leadership, Oraon movement took place against the British colonial rule during 1914-19.

He fought for Oraon Raj. He criticized liquor drinking and superstitious practices among Oraons. His religious movement gave way to a "no-rent payment" campaign. Jatra declared that his followers should stop ploughing the field of landlords and not work anymore as coolies or labourers for non-Oraons or for the government.

He also questioned the traditional leadership of the pahans and mahtos the village headmen. The basic idea behind this movement was that land was a gift of God and that no one had the right to interfere with the tribals right over land.

Jatra, along with his leading disciples was arrested in 1914. After his release, he abandoned the leadership of the movement. Later he came in contact with Gandhi and joined the Non-Cooperation Movement against the British.

Rani Gaidinliu:

Rani Gaidinliu was born in the present day state of Manipur. At the age of 13, she joined in the Indian freedom struggle with HasipauJodonang. Jodonang was the political and spiritual leader of Naga.

Jodonang started a movement to drive away the British from Manipur. He was captured and hanged by the British. After the death of her Guru, Gaidinliu assumed leadership of the movement. The British tried to suppress the movement. Rani went underground.

But, very soon she was arrested in 1932. She was sent to jail. Gaidinliu was released after India gained its independence. She was honored with Tamrapatra and Padma Bhushan awards, Jawaharlal Nehru called her 'Rani' of the Nagas. She passed away on February 17, 1993.

Question 8: Choose any tribal group living in India today. Find out about their customs and way of life, and how their lives have changed in the last 50 years.

Answer: India has 705 ethnic groups living in the country. They are officially recognized as the 'Scheduled Tribes'. Although there are more to this list, all of them are not officially recognized.

The Munda tribe is the largest tribe in India. They reside in the northern parts of the eastern states of India like Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa and West Bengal. The official language of the Mundas is the Mundari language. They belong to the Austro-Asiatic ethnic group in India. They came to India a hundred years ago.

Mundas are a patrilineal clan which means that property transfers from the father to the son. The Munda clans are called 'Killi'. They celebrate the Mage Parab, Phagu, Karam and several other seasonal festivals since they are involved in agriculture. Traditionally the Mundas have been farm labourers, Basket-weavers and wood-cutters. However Mundas today live in the city because of educational purposes. The Mundas regard themselves as Hindus. However orthodox Hindus do not consider them as Hindus or a part of the traditional caste system.

Mundas have developed a lot in the last 50 years. Although they practice the barter system and depend on forests for their food, they lead their lives respectfully. They know the cultures of the city people. Their children go to school and continue higher studies. Mundas are pursuing different occupations. Houses, hospitals, roads are also being constructed in places where they live.

Note: The first Mundari grammar was published by John Baptist Hoffman with the assistance of Menas Orea. He studied the customs, beliefs and the religion of the Munda people. The Mundas today have been placed under the category of Scheduled Tribes which means they are provided economic assistance and representation in public and educational spheres.

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