

Impact of Colonialism in India

In Class VIII we studied how the colonial policies had an impact on the forests, in Andhra Pradesh. In this chapter, we will understand how forest, industrial and labour policies affected the lives of people across different parts of the country.

How Forests Were Used Before British Rule

From time immemorial, adivasis and villagers living in and near forests got many things they needed for their daily lives from the forests. In a way, they were the owners of the forests. They used the forests for hunting, gathering tubers, fruits, flowers and herbs and for grazing their cattle. In some places, they cut down and burnt the trees and cleared the land to cultivate crops. They cut wood to build their homes and to make implements. They took things for their personal use. If they had to sell some forest produce, it was only to buy other things they needed from the market, such as salt and iron. They did not sell the wood and other things they got from the forest to earn a profit.

Although large tracts of forests were cleared for making fields, and there were tensions between farmers and tribal people, large areas of land continued to remain under forest cover. The farmers and adivasis who used these forests also protected them. When they needed wood, they took care to cut only old trees and allowed new trees to grow. They did not blindly cut large tracts of forest, but only small patches so that the forest would not be destroyed.



Fig. 18.1: Forest in Andhra Pradesh.

- Underline four sentences that represent the situation of adivasis and their use of forests before British rule.

From time to time, the people living in forests gave valuable gifts of ivory, animal skins and honey to the kings and emperors. Those who cultivated land in the forests sometimes also paid taxes. Many adivasis farmed by shifting cultivation also known as jhum agriculture. As long as the forest dwellers did not threaten the security of the kingdoms, the kings and emperors left them alone and did not make laws or rules to control how they used the forests. So for many centuries, the adivasis lived in harmony with their forests, getting many of their daily needs from them and looking after them carefully.

How Forests Were Used During British Rule

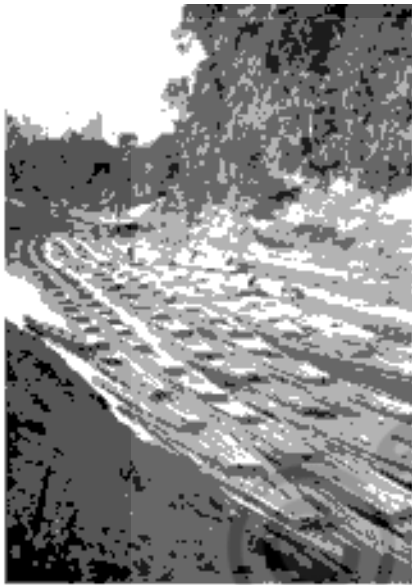


Fig. 18.2: Bamboo rafts being floated down the Kassalong river, Chittagong Hill Tracts.

The situation changed during British rule. At that time, large cities like Kolkata and Mumbai were coming up and the government was laying thousands of kilometres of railway lines all across the country. Huge ships were also being built and mines were being opened. Large quantities of wood were needed for all this, so the trade in timber increased rapidly.

Sleepers for Railway Lines

In 1879, there were almost 8,000 kilometers of railway lines in India. By 1910 more than 50,000 kilometers of railway lines had been laid. Each year, almost one crore wooden sleepers were needed to lay these new railway lines.

The wood for these sleepers was cut from the forests in the Himalayan and Terai regions. Wood was also cut and sold in huge quantities for buildings, mines and ships. This work was done by workers hired by timber traders and forest contractors.

Sleepers: Wooden planks laid across railway tracks; they hold the tracks in position

The British government and British companies made large profits from this trade. The government would hold auctions to sell the contracts for cutting forests. The contractors paid large sums of money to win the contracts, so the government earned a lot of money through these auctions.

Forests in Danger and the Need to Plant New Trees

As the trade in timber increased, the British government was worried. Where would it get wood for its

- Have you seen old wooden sleepers used in railway tracks? What are they being replaced with today? Discuss why this replacement is taking place.



Fig. 18.3: Converting Sal Logs into sleepers in the Singhbhum forests, Chhotanagpur, May 1897.

Adivasis were hired by the forest department to cut trees, and to make smooth planks which would serve as sleepers for the railways. At the same time, they were not allowed to cut these trees to build their own houses.

future railways, ships and houses if the forests were cut down so rapidly? The government felt that it should do something to ensure a regular supply of wood.

So it decided to plant new trees to replace the forests that were being cut down. But the government was not interested in planting trees that were useful to the common people, such as mango, mahua, neem etc. It wanted to plant only trees that provided the timber that was in great demand in the market. So it began to have trees like teak and pine planted in place of the forests that were being cut down.

The Government sets up a Forest Department

Most importantly, the government set up a Forest Department in 1864. The Forest Department made new laws and rules to protect the new forests it was planting. Through these rules it also tried to ensure that the old forests did not vanish completely but were cut more carefully. These rules and laws helped the government to control the forests. The Forest Department officials felt the forests needed to be protected from the people living in or near them.

Adivasi Revolts

We have seen how the conditions of the adivasi farmers who lived in the jungle worsened in British times. The Baiga, Muria, Gond and Bhil tribes of Madhya Pradesh and Chattisgarh, the Koya, Reddy, and Kolam tribes of Andhra Pradesh and the Saora adivasis of Orissa, were all no longer able to practice their old form of cultivation. They were having to become labourers for either the Forest Department or for contractors. Or they were becoming bonded labourers for moneylenders or farmers who had come from outside.

The places where roads and railway lines had reached became easy for people from outside to settle down in Adivasis' areas and seize their land. The power of the Forest Department also increased. Fining and beating up people at the smallest pretext, forcibly entering into people's homes to take away their things, ill-treating women, taking bribes, getting *begar* (free labour) done by people - all this became common.

Against such adverse circumstances, the adivasis protested in many places. During the protests they would burn down many police stations, posts of the Forest Department and houses of the moneylenders. In many places they would set fire to

the entire jungle. Such protests were made by the Santhal adivasis in Jharkhand in 1856, by the Koya adivasis of Andhra Pradesh in 1880 and 1922, by the Maria and Muria adivasis of Bastar in 1910, and by the Gond and Kolam adivasis in 1940.

The Santhal Revolt

From the beginning, the Santhals of Jharkhand had been resisting and protesting against British rule. In 1855-56 there was a massive revolt in which the Santhals began looting and killing the zamindars and moneylenders. The Santhals declared that British rule had come to an end and they were making a free state of the Santhals. But the Santhals were armed only with bows and arrows, and they could not hold their own against the gun-bearing British army. By the end of a fierce battle, 15,000 Santhals were killed and their revolt was finally suppressed.

The Revolt Led by Birsa Munda

Between 1874 and 1901, the Munda adivasis of the Chhotanagpur Plateau, which is now in the state of Jharkhand, came together under the leadership of a young man named Birsa to do away with British rule. Birsa was thought of as *bhagwaan*-god-and people were willing to follow his every word. They wanted to do away with the foreign government that protected the zamindars, the moneylenders and the courts of law that had deprived the Mundas of their lands and their rights over their forests. In the end, the Munda rebellion was suppressed by arresting the leaders and putting them behind bars. Birsa Munda died in prison in 1900. However, the government then felt compelled to make laws to protect the rights of the adivasis of Chhotanagpur.

Forest revolt in Kumaon (1921-22)

In the Kumaon region of Uttarkhand, the peasants refused to cooperate with the Forest Department in protest against the fact that their rights over the forest were being taken away by the government. They openly broke the rules of the Forest Department. Attempts were made to burn the jungles used by contractors. The people refused to do forced labour for the Forest Department.

Because of these movements the British government had to change its policies. In many places they made their rules less strict. In some areas they made new laws saying that people from outside could not purchase the land of the adivasis.

Alluri Seetha Rama Raju

Alluri Seetha Rama Raju was born on July 4, 1897 in Pandrangi village in the Visakhapatnam district. His mother was from Visakhapatnam and his father was a native of Mogallu, near Bhimavaram, and was an official photographer in the central jail at Rajahmundry. Raju's father died when he was in school and grew up in the care of his uncle, Rama Chandra Raju.



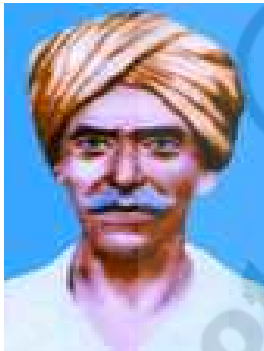
After the passing of 1882 Madras Forest Act, its restrictions on the free movement of tribal peoples in the forest prevented them from engaging in their traditional 'podu' agricultural system. Raju led a protest movement in the border area of East Godavari and Visakhapatnam districts of Andhra Pradesh. Inspired by the patriotic zeal of revolutionaries in Bengal, Raju raided police stations in and around Chintapalle, Rampachodavaram, Dammanapalli, Krishnadevipeta, Rajavommangi, Addateegala, Narsipatnam and Annavaram. Raju and his followers stole guns and ammunition and killed several British army officers, including Scott Coward near Dammanapalli.

In December 1922, the British deployed a company of Assam Rifles, near Pegadapalle under the leadership of Saunders. Raju, who had by then gone underground, resurfaced after about four months and continued the fight, strengthened by tribal volunteers using bows and arrows under the leadership of Mallu Dora and Gantam Dora.

The British campaign lasted for nearly a year from December 1922. Rama Raju was eventually trapped by the British in the forests of Chintapalli shot dead with a rifle in Mampa village.

Komaram Bheem

Komaram Bheem was born in the year 1900 at Sankepally village in Adilabad. His father was killed in an attack by the Forest Department when he was fifteen.



Then Bheem's family migrated to Sardapur village in Kerimeri mandal.

While he was leading his life by *Jhum* farming a jagirdar named Siddhiki, informer of Nizam occupied Bheem's land with rage he killed Siddhiki and escaped from police to hide in Assam. After that for five years he worked as a labourer in coffee, tea plantations. He experienced labour agitations. He learned how to read and write. He understood the situation in his place through his close friend Komaram Sooru, who was his secret informer. He was inspired by the agitations and battles for freedom by Alluri Seetha Rama Raju in Visakhapatnam and Birsa Munda revolt fought against Nizam's rule.

By that time Nizam's government used to collect tax in the name of '*Bambram*' for grazing cattle and collecting firewood for cooking. Adivasies were impressed and inspired by the message *Jal, Jangal, Jameen*, of Komaram Bheem to oppose the tax, and fight for tribal freedom and rights. Nearly 12 villages in Adilabad were ready to fight for land. Bheem formed a guerrilla army with the young men of Gondu and Koya. He gathered and trained tribal people to fight with weapon.

Jodeghat became the central place from where he started the guerrilla battle. Surprised by this battle Nizam attempts of attacks on Adivasies. At last on one full moon day Komaram Bheem died in the battle against Nizam army in Jodeghat forest. After his death Nizam appointed Haimendorf to do some research on the life of tribal people.

The British Government's Industrial Policy

In the 1850's some Indian cloth mills were set up with much courage, first in Mumbai and then in Ahmedabad. Thus cloth came to be made on machines in India too! Some educated people and factory owners demanded that a special tax be levied on cloth coming from Britain so that the cloth being made in India might get a protected market. The special tax would make the British cloth more expensive and this would encourage the sale of cloth produced in Indian factories.

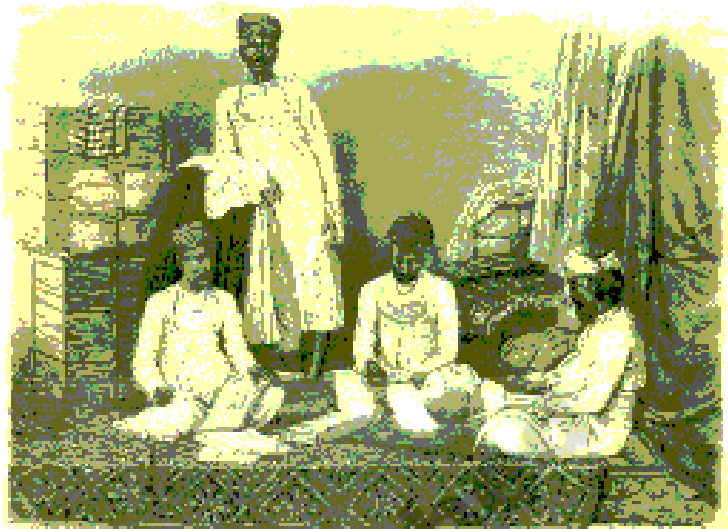


Fig. 18.4: Drawings of Some Marwari traders from Calcutta.

You know that in Britain the government had levied a special tax on cloth made by Indian weavers in order to help the cloth industry of Britain. But the government refused to levy a similar tax in India on British cloth to help Indian industry. The pressure of the British factory owners and traders on the government was so much that it could do nothing against their interests.

In the year 1896, the British government of India experienced a severe reduction in its income. The government began to think of ways in which it could increase its income. It was then, in its hour of difficulty, that the government levied a three and a half percent tax on cloth coming to India from Britain. But in order that this might not harm the sale of British cloth, the government simultaneously levied the same amount of tax (three and a half percent) on cloth being made in India as well.

This tax became the cause of a long drawn conflict between the Indian people and the British government. By imposing a tax on goods made in Indian factories, the government had made it clear that it would protect mainly the interests of the British factories. There was strong opposition to this tax in India and a persistent demand to remove it.

Even without government protection, factories producing cloth, thread, sugar, jute, paper, matches, cement etc. were set up in India. Their rapid development, however, took place only after 1914.

- Discuss what 'protected market' means.
- The Indians demanded that a tax be imposed on British goods coming to India. Do you think this was a fair demand? Should the government have treated British and Indian industries equally?

Indian Industry During The First World War



Fig. 18.5: An early sketch of Bankers in Delhi.

During the First World War (from 1914 to 1918), the import of foreign goods into India fell sharply. One reason was that cargo ships were diverted to war related duties, and hence there was a shortage of ships. Also, in the factories of Europe, things needed for the war were being made - so fewer goods meant for the Indian markets were available.

Under these circumstances, the factories that had been established in India started selling their goods in greater quantities. Enthused by these heavy sales there was a rapid development of industries. After the war came to an end, European machines were purchased in

large numbers for Indian factories and new industries were set up. Indian industrialists began demanding very forcefully that the government levy a tax on foreign goods so that the higher sales of Indian goods might continue in future as well.

For many reasons the government had to accept this demand. After 1917, taxes were levied on numerous foreign goods, one after the other. As a result, factories set up in India were able to develop speedily.

- Why did a rapid development take place in Indian industry during the First World War?

Problems of Indian Industry at the Time of Independence

After a long struggle, Indian industry had got a little help from the British government. Yet, a very large number of factories, banks, ships etc. were in the hands of Europeans, not in the hands of Indians. Being European had many advantages for these companies. They had easy access to all types of officers and authorities of the British government, whereas Indians were never likely to have such reach. All the foreign trade was in the hands of European companies, hence, they had no shortage of funds either.

Despite the influence of the Europeans, Indian industrialists advanced a great deal. For example Indian industrialists were in control of the textile industry. The

greatest example of the achievements of Indian industrialists was the setting up of a steel factory at Jamshedpur by an industrialist named Jamshedji Tata.

The help received by Indian industrialists from the government in the form of a tax on foreign goods, was important but hardly adequate. Many resources and facilities were needed such as railways, roads, electricity, coal and iron. However, the British government did not pay adequate attention to development in these areas.

Indian industrialists also had to buy all their machines from abroad. Industries that would manufacture machinery had simply not started in India.

For the development of industry, help was needed from scientists, engineers, and technicians. Educated workers at all levels were needed. But education was not given adequate importance in India. Foreigners had to be relied on for industrial development because the number of Indian scientists and engineers was very small.

In order to promote the interests of Indian industry, many organisations of industrialists were formed even during British times. One of the most important was the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industries (FICCI). Such organisations would keep bringing up the problems of the industrialists before the government.

With the end of the British rule in India and the formation of a free government of Indians the situation changed. The government of India gave encouragement to the growth of industries in a planned fashion.



Fig. 18.6: Some of the pioneers among Indian industrialists J.N.Tata, R.D.Tata, Sir R.J.Tata and Sir D.J. Tata.

- What industries were established in India during British rule?
- What were the difficulties in the development of Indian industries at the time of Independence?

Labourers in Indian Industries

Industrial Towns and Labour Settlements

From 1850 onwards, machine-based industries had begun to be set up in India. The biggest industry was the spinning and weaving of textiles. In 1905, around 2.25 lakh labourers were in the textile industry, 1.5 lakh in the jute industry and about 1 lakh in coalmines.

Needy farmers, labourers and artisans had begun coming from the villages to the cities in the hope of employment. Along with them or after them came their

relatives, neighbours, and friends. The number of labourers in cities mounted. All around factories, huts and tenements of labourers sprang up. Many cities of India, such as Kanpur, Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Kolkata, Chennai became large industrial cities.

Work Conditions

In the early phase, work in the mills would begin every day at dawn, and come to a halt only at sundown. Waking from sleep before the light of day, long rows of labourers could soon be seen wending their way towards the mills - men as well as women and even children.

Once they began work on the machines there was no question of stopping. There was no fixed break even for meals. Taking out 15 - 20 minutes from their work, and asking a fellow labourer to look after their work, the labourers would eat their food. There was no separate place to eat either.

The whole day would pass in the heat, humidity, noise, dust and suffocation of the mill. Only when the sun set and it became impossible to see in the dark, the machines would stop and work would end.

This would go on for months. Even a weekly holiday was not in the rules. Only for the major festivals of the year would the mill owner give a holiday.

However it is not possible to work every day of the year. Illnesses and family duties have to be attended to. People also get exhausted and tired of monotonous work. But whenever a labourer did not go to work, the day's wage would be lost.

In those days payment was made in proportion to the amount of goods produced. The owners laid the condition that "as much as you make, so much will you be paid." Sometimes things went wrong with the machines, or the supply of raw material was delayed or it was inadequate. Although this was not the fault or the responsibility of the labourer, yet the mill owners would deduct the labourer's money. Thus, labourers were not able to get any fixed income each month.

Not only that, at the end of the month, the mill owner would not even make the full payment to the labourers. He would keep some money till the end of the next month. In such a situation if labourers wanted to leave the work and go away they could not - because their earlier month's wages were still stuck with the owner.

There were also plenty of fines. The owners would fine the labourers on the smallest pretext - if they came late, if the cloth got spoilt, if the owner thought the labourer did not work sincerely - there would be fines and they were deducted from the month's wages.

All the labourers - men, women, children - had to work under such conditions for 14 hours in the summers and 12 hours in the winters.

Then, in 1880 something new happened. Electric bulbs began to be fitted in the mills. As the hours of light increased, the hours of work also increased. Now it was



Fig. 18.7: Men, women and children walking towards the mills.

not necessary to stop work when the sun set. And now it became common to take up to 15 hours of work each day from each labourer.

There were so many hardships at work and on top of it there was no security of employment either. If a mill suffered loss of profit, the owner would simply throw out some labourers and reduce the wages of those who continued to work.

However if the mill earned a profit, would the owner ever increase the wages? No, that hardly ever happened!

Labourers' Struggles

Labourers struggled against their oppressive working conditions. From 1870 itself there was one strike after another in Mumbai. To begin with there were no organisations or unions of the labourers. The labourers of each mill would get together to go on strike and would put pressure on the owners.

For instance, in 1892, mill owners of Mumbai were thinking of making a reduction in the wages of labourers. In such a situation labourers of all the mills geared themselves up for a struggle. The government had appointed an official for the inspection of factories. This is what the factory inspector wrote about the labourers: "If a reduction in the wages is actually made, it is possible that there will be an overall strike in Mumbai. Though there is no organised trade union of the labourers, most of the labourers belong to common castes, clans, villages and can easily unite and take steps."

Here's one example of how the labourers would struggle to protect their own interests. In 1900-1901, some 20 mills of Mumbai reduced the labourers' wages by 12½%. In response to this, 20,000 mill workers stopped work and came out on

In the early days of factories in India:

- What were the rules regarding work and rest for labourers?
- What were the rules regarding payment of wages?
- For what reasons would there be cuts and reductions in the labourers' wages?



Fig. 18.8: A picture depicting labour meeting.

strike. All the 20 mills remained closed for 10 days.

Similarly in 1919, when the cost of living was rising but the labourer's wages were not being increased, the labourers of all the mills of Mumbai came out on strike and the mills were closed for 12 days.

The labourers not only fought for their wages, they also fought against the British for the freedom of India. In 1908, the British sentenced the famous Indian freedom fighter, Lokmanya Tilak, to 6 years of exile from India. In a flash, the labourers of all the mills of Mumbai went on strike against this for six days. In this way the labourers participated in the freedom struggle on many occasions through strikes.

- Why did labourers go on strikes?
- Why were strikes used instead of any other action?

Addressing Labourers' Problems

The strange thing was that in the beginning most of the educated people of India paid no heed to the problems of the labourers. What was uppermost in their minds was, how industries could be developed in India. In the earlier phase they did not think much about the kind of working conditions that should be there for labourers.

But even more amazing was that in Britain, factory owners, traders and social workers began to express concern over the conditions of Indian labourers. They began actively drawing the attention of the government to these problems.

The industrialists and social workers of Britain began putting pressure on the government that there should be laws to improve the condition of the labourers in India, similar to the laws in Britain. As a result of this pressure the government seriously began considering making a reduction in the working hours and making laws that would give labourers holidays.

This was deeply resented by the industrialists and educated people of India. They felt that once labourers were given fixed incomes and facilities such as leave, mill production would come down and the expenses of the owners would go up. This would in turn make the things produced in the factories more expensive. If this happened, goods coming from Britain would sell more easily and the development of Indian industries would come to a standstill.

Laws for the Welfare of Labourers : A Time line

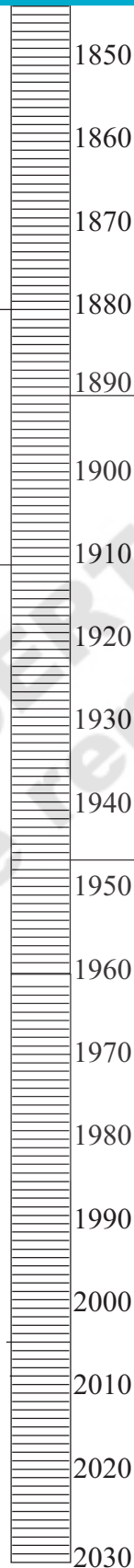
The government implemented the first Factory Act in 1881 and made the following rules especially for the welfare of working children:

- Children below the age of 7 cannot be employed in factories.
- Children between 7 and 12 years of age cannot be made to work more than 9 hours a day and they must be given a one-hour break each day. They must also be given 4 days leave each month.

The largest number of labourers in industries was that of men. It wasn't until 1911 that laws for their welfare were made. According to the Factory Act of 1911:

- Adult male labourers could not be made to work for more than 12 hours every day
- After every six hours of work there would be a break for half an hour.

- In which year were you born? Mark it on this timeline. Also mark the births of your parents and some grandparents or other old relatives you can find out about.
- Find out whether any of the people whose births you marked were affected by the labour laws.



In 1891, laws were made in the interest of women labourers to ensure that:

- Women labourers cannot be made to work more than 11 hours a day.
- Women labourers must be given an hour and half break each day.
- Children's working hours were reduced from 9 to 7 hours/day and factory employers were forbidden to employ children below 9 years of age.

India and Pakistan get independence from Britain

- Why did the educated people of India not pay much attention to the interests of factory labourers in the beginning?
- How would the labour laws have affected the industrialists?
- The British industrialists were against the development of factories in India, yet they took the side of Indian labourers. Why?
- Below what age could children not be employed as labourers in British times?
- What do the present laws set as the minimum age, below which children cannot be employed as labourers?
- According to the labour laws what was the maximum number of hours that children, women and men could be expected to work?



Fig. 18.9: In 1931 these millworkers in Lancashire, England were happy to meet Gandhiji and express solidarity with the Indian freedom movement.

Indian industrialists were suspicious that the British industrialists were just pretending to show concern for the welfare of the Indian labourers. Maybe they actually had their own interests in mind.

The educated people of India had also come to believe that if laws were made in the interests of the labourers, industries would not be able to develop in India. A few lines published in a major newspaper of Bengal in 1875 shows the thinking of those days: “Rather than this new industry be

destroyed it is better that labourers keep dying in high numbers once our industries are well-established, then we can protect the interests of our labourers”.

There was this fear in the minds of industrialists and the educated people, but it was not fully justified. Factories set up in India had begun to earn profits. New mills were being opened up all the time. Whatever labourers was needed, the conditions of the risks, an improvement in working conditions became relevant because industrial development lay in the hands of the labourers.

Labour Organisations

With time the problems of the labourers became well known. Some educated people began supporting the labourers and they began writing articles in newspapers to explain their problems to people. Small organisations for the welfare of labourers also started emerging.

During strikes labourers formed their own organisations with the help of some educated people. These were labour unions, formed to conduct the strikes and negotiate settlements with the mill owners. Slowly, the trade unions became active not just during the strikes but all around the year, promoting the workers’ welfare and rights. Such unions began to be established from the early 1920’s. People influenced by socialist thought were prominent among them. One such union formed was Girmi Kamgar Union with the help of which workers in Mumbai went on a very effective strike in 1928. In Ahmedabad, under the influence of Gandhiji, a powerful union known as the Mazdoor Mahajan was formed.

The formation of labour unions made the government and mill owners very anxious. Now laws began to be made to put restrictions on strikes. The government appointed labour officers to look after the welfare of the labourers. The government

- Which were the two main labourers' unions to be formed in India during British times?
- Why is a union or labourers' organisation important for labourers? Discuss.

began making efforts to ensure that the labourers solve their problems through the labour officers, rather than go to the unions.

But the labourers did not agree to this. They considered it better to form their own organisations to protect their interests. In this way, a struggle continued between the labourers on the one hand and the government and factory owners on the other, on the question of the right to form unions and the right to go on strike.

Key words

- | | | |
|------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Reserved forest | 2. Protected forest | 3. Auctioning |
| 4. Social Workers | 5. Industrialist | 6. Marwari traders |
| 7. Strike | 8. Labour Organisations | 9. Industrial Towns |
| 10. Labour Settlements | | |

Improve your learning

1. How did people use the forests before the rule of the British? Why was there less danger of the forests being fully destroyed in those days?
2. Against whom did the adivasis revolt? In what ways did they demonstrate their anger and protest? Give some examples.
3. How were the revolts of the adivasis suppressed by the British?
4. Make a timeline to show when adivasi protests occurred in different parts of India. Find out where each of these adivasi struggles took place, and mark their locations on a map of India.
5. What problems did the Indian industrialists have with the British government?
6. During British rule, why was it easier for the European companies rather than Indian companies to set up industries? Give a few reasons.
7. Labour laws were first made for child labourers, then for women and lastly for men. Why were these laws made in this order?
8. How could education affect industrial development? Discuss in the class.
9. Identify the large industrial cities on outline map of India during 20th century.

Project

1. Visit a office of the Forest Department and interview the official on how forest could be preserved and wisely used by both industries and local people.
2. Visit a near by factory in your area find out its history how has the technology changed, where do the workers come from, try and talk to the employers and some workers to get their views.