

1. Explain briefly what the open field system meant to rural people in 18th century England. Look at the system from the point of view of : A rich farmer, A Labourer and A peasant woman.

**Ans. A rich farmer.** He would not benefit from the open field system rather he would be in favour of enclosures. In the 16th century, they began to enclose common land and grew hedges around their holdings to separate their property from others. This was done to expand wool production and earn profits. In the 18th century, farmers enclosed lands for grain production.

**A labourer.** He used the open field system to graze his cows and sheep to hunt rabbits and for fishing in the rivers and ponds. For the poor, the common land was essential for his survival. It supplemented his meagre income, sustained his cattle and helped him tide over bad times when crops failed.

**A peasant woman.** Cow keeping, collection of firewood, gleaned and gathering of fruits and berries from the common lands was done by the peasant women.

2. Explain briefly the factors which led to the enclosures in England.

- Ans.**
- (i) In the 16th century, the price of wool increased leading rich farmers to expand wool production to earn profits. For this purpose enclosures were necessary.
  - (ii) The farmers were keen to improve sheep breeds and ensure good pasture for them. Therefore, they began to enclose common land and grew hedges around their holdings to separate their property from others.
  - (iii) The early enclosures were usually created by individual landlords and not supported by the church or state. But after the mid 18th century the enclosure movement swept throughout the countryside. By 1850, 6 million acres of land were enclosed and the British Parliament had passed 4,000 Acts legalising these enclosures.
  - (iv) The aim of this Enclosure Movement (18th century) was to increase grain production. During this century, the English population expanded rapidly which increased demand for foodgrains.
  - (v) As Britain industrialised, more people began to live in urban areas. As the urban population grew the demand for foodgrains increased as did the prices.
  - (vi) By the end of the 18th century, France was at war with England. This disrupted trade and the import of foodgrains from Europe. Prices of foodgrains skyrocketed leading landowners to enclose

land and increase area under grain cultivation. As profits flowed in, landowners pressurised Parliament to pass the Enclosure Acts.

3. Why were threshing machines opposed by the poor farmers in England?

- Ans.**
- (i) The threshing machines were opposed because they reduced the number of people needed for agricultural operations and created unemployment.
  - (ii) This problem became more acute when the soldiers returned to their villages after the Napoleonic wars and needed jobs to survive.

4. Who was Captain Swing? What did the name symbolise or represent?

- Ans.** Captain Swing was a mythic name used in 'threatening letters' to frighten farmers into destroying their threshing machines. The name symbolised an anti-machine movement or a swing back to earlier practices of using labour rather than machines.

5. What was the impact of the westward expansion of settlers in the USA?

- Ans.**
- (i) The white settlers moved westwards, first settled in the Appalachian plateau and then moved to the Mississippi valley. Here they burnt forests, cleared land for cultivation and sowed corn and wheat. After the 1860's the settlers swept in the Great Plains across the River Mississippi.
  - (ii) Their efforts in subsequent decades made this region the major wheat producing area of America. In the late 19th century, the American urban population rapidly expanded and the export market became bigger.
  - (iii) As demand increased, wheat prices also rose further encouraging farmers to produce wheat. The spread of the railways made it easy to transport grain from the wheat growing regions to the eastern coast for export. During the first world war, the world market boomed.
  - (iv) When Russian supplies of wheat were cut off due to the Russian Revolution it became America's responsibility to feed Europe. By 1919, 74 million acres of land was under wheat cultivation. Most of this increase was in the Great Plains where new areas were constantly being ploughed to extend cultivation. Thus the westward expansion of the white settlers helped to turn the Great Plains into the bread basket of America.
6. What were the advantages and disadvantages of the use of mechanical and harvesting machines in the USA?

**Ans. Advantages :**

- (i) The new machines allowed the farmers to rapidly clear large tracts, break up the soil, remove the grass and prepare the ground for cultivation.
- (ii) The work could be done quickly and with a minimal number of hands. With power driven machinery, four men could plough, seed and harvest 2000 to 4000 acres of wheat in a season.

**Disadvantages :**

- (i) But mechanisation reduced the need for labour and caused unemployment. Machines brought misery to the poor farmers. Many had taken loans and bought machines but when demand plummeted after the 1st world war, they found themselves in debt which they could not repay. Many deserted their farms and looked for jobs which were difficult to find due to mechanisation of agriculture.
- (ii) By the mid 1920's there was a large surplus of grain. After the war, demand fell as export markets collapsed. Unsold stocks piled up, storehouses overflowed and vast amounts of corn and wheat were turned into animal feed. This led to Great Agrarian Depression of the 1930's which ruined wheat farmers everywhere.

7. What lessons can we draw from the conversion of the countryside in the USA from a bread basket to a dust bowl?

- Ans.**
- (i) The early 1930's were years of persistent drought. Rains failed year after year and temperatures soared. The wind blew with ferocious speed.
  - (ii) But ordinary dust storms became black blizzards because the entire land had been ploughed over and stripped of all its grass.
  - (iii) In the early 19th century, zealous farmers recklessly uprooted all vegetation and used tractors to break the sod into dust. Thus they turned the whole region into a dust bowl.
  - (iv) The settlers had thought they could conquer the entire landscape and turn the entire land into cultivated land that would give them profits. The lesson to be learnt here is that the ecological conditions of each region has to be respected.

8. Write a paragraph on why the British insisted on farmers growing opium in India.

- Ans.**
- (i) The peasant were made to produce opium through a system of

advances. The government opium agents advanced money to the village headman who in turn gave it to the cultivators.

- (ii) By taking the loan, the cultivator was forced to grow opium on a specified area of land and hand over the produce to the agents once the crop had been harvested.
- (iii) By the early 1820's about 10,000 crates were annually smuggled into China. The Chinese soon became addicted to opium. As China became a country of opium addicts, British trade in tea flourished. The returns from the opium sale financed the tea purchase in China.
- (iv) For this purpose, the British required a ready supply of opium which they wanted to cultivate in India. Thus when the British conquered Bengal, they made a determined effort to produce opium in the lands under their control. By 1870, the government was exporting about 50,000 chests annually.

9. Why were Indian farmers reluctant to grow opium?

- Ans.**
- (i) The Indian farmers were reluctant to grow opium because the opium had to be grown on the best lands on which the peasants usually produced pulses. Pulses would then have to be grown on inferior land where harvests were poor and uncertain.
  - (ii) Moreover, many cultivators owned no land. To cultivate, they had to pay rent and lease land from landlords. And the rent of such lands was very high.
  - (iii) The cultivation of opium was a difficult process as the plant was delicate and needed nurturing. Thus, the peasants did not have enough time to care for other crops.
  - (iv) Moreover, the money, the government paid to the cultivators to produce opium was very low, thus, making opium cultivation unprofitable.