

Impact of Colonialism in India



In Class VIII, we studied how the colonial policies affected 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

For ages, Adivasis and villagers living in and near forests used to fulfill their basic needs and necessities from the forests. In a way, they were the owners of the forests. Before the British started ruling, they used the forests for hunting, gathering wood, 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 tools. These people took whatever they needed for their personal use from the forest. They sold some of the things produced in the forest only to buy other things they needed from the market, such as salt and iron. They did not sell the other things that they got from the forests such as wood etc to earn a profit.

Even though the adivasis and villagers sometimes cleared large areas of forests by cutting down trees for cultivation, large areas of land were still left under forest cover. Sometime there were tensions between farmers and tribal people over this. But these farmers and adivasis who used these forests also protected them. When they needed wood, they 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. 16.1: Forest in Telangana .

- 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. The farmers who cultivated land in the forests sometimes also paid taxes. Many adivasis farmed using the technique of shifting cultivation also known as Jhum Cultivation. The kings and emperors did not make laws or rules to control how they used the forests because the people living in forests did not threaten the security of the kingdoms. So, for many centuries, the adivasis lived in harmony with their forests, fulfilling many of their daily needs from the forest and looking after them carefully.

How Forests Were Used During British Rule?



Fig. 16.2: Bamboo rafts being floated down the Kassalong river, Chittagong Hill Tracts.

The situation changed during British rule. At that time, bigger cities like Kolkata and Mumbai were growing. The government was laying thousands of kilometres of railway lines 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.

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

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.

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

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

The British government started getting worried as the timber trade increased. Where would it get wood for its future railways, ships and houses if the forests were cut down



Fig. 16.3: 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.

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 only wanted to plant trees that provided timber which was in great demand in the market. So, it began to plant trees like teak and pine 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 became worse in British times. The Baiga, Muria, Gond and Bhil tribes of Madhya Pradesh and Chattisgarh, the Koya, Reddy, and Kolam tribes of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh and the Saora adivasis of Orissa were no longer able to practice their old forms of cultivation. They were forced to become labourers for either the Forest Department or for contractors. Or they were forced to work as bonded labourers for moneylenders or farmers who had come from outside.

Now that the roads and railway lines had reached most places, it became easy for people from outside to settle down in Adivasis' areas and seize their land. The power of the Forest Department also increased. They started beating up people for the smallest reason. They forced them to pay fines. They also forcibly entered into people's homes to take away their belongings. They ill-treated women, took bribes, got *begar* (free labour) done by people. All this slowly became common.

The Adivasis started protesting against such atrocities 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 huge revolt in which the Santhals started looting and killing the zamindars and moneylenders. The Santhals declared that British rule had come to an end. They wanted to make a free state for the Santhals. But they were armed only with bows and arrows, and were not strong enough to stand 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. They wanted to get rid of the British 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. Birsa was thought of as *bhagwaan*-god and people followed every word he said. 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 was forced to make laws to protect the rights of the Adivasis of Chhotanagpur.

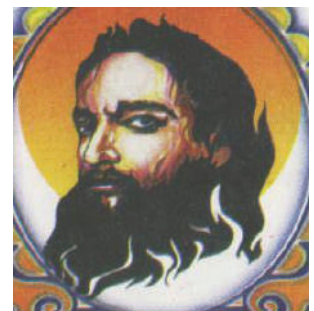
Forest revolt in Kumaon (1921-22)

In the Kumaon region of Uttarakhand, the peasants started protesting because their rights over the forest were being taken away by the government. So they refused to cooperate with the Forest Department. They openly broke the rules of the Forest Department. They also tried to burn the jungles used by contractors. They 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 according to which 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. His father was an official photographer in the central jail at Rajahmundry. Raju's father died when he was in school and he grew up in the care of his uncle, Rama Chandra Raju.



After the Madras Forest Act was passed in 1882, it restricted the free movement of tribal peoples in the forest. They were now stopped 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.

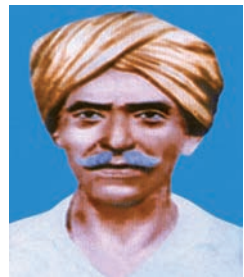
In December 1922, the British deployed a company of Assam Rifles, near Pegadapalle under the leadership of Saunders. Raju had now gone underground. He resurfaced after about four months and continued the fight. Many tribal volunteers joined him using bows and arrows under the leadership of Mallu Dora 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. He was shot dead with a rifle at Koyyur Village near Mampa Village in 7th May, 1924.

Komaram Bheem

Komaram Bheem was born at Sankepally village in Komarambheem District. 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.

He was leading a normal life by *Jhum* farming. A jagirdar named Siddhiki, who was an informer of the Nizam, occupied Bheem's land. Bheem killed Siddhiki out of anger and escaped from police to hide in Assam. After that, he worked as a labourer in coffee and tea plantations for five years. 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' and Dupapetti for grazing cattle and collecting firewood for cooking. Adivasis were impressed and inspired by the message ***Jal, Jangal, Jameen (water, forest land)*** of Komaram Bheem. This slogan was given by Bheem to fight for tribal freedom and rights and oppose the taxes. Nearly 12 villages in earlier Adilabad were ready to fight for their land. Bheem formed a guerrilla army with the young men of Gondu and Koya. He gathered and trained tribal people to fight with weapons.

Jodeghat became the central place from where he started the guerrilla battle. Surprised by this battle, Nizam tried to attack on Adivasis. At last, on one full moon day, Komaram Bheem died in the battle against the Nizam's 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



Fig. 16.4: Drawings of Some Marwari traders from Calcutta.

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

You know that in Britain, the government had done the same. They 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 the Indian industry. The pressure of the British factory owners and traders on the government was so much that it could not go against their interests.

In 1896, the income of British government of India reduced a lot. The government started thinking of ways to increase its income. So, in its time of difficulty, the government levied a three and a half percent tax on cloth coming from Britain to India. But it did not want to harm the sale of British cloth. So, it also 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 conflict between the Indian people and the British government. Indians had understood that the government would protect only the interests of the British factories. Indian people opposed this tax in India and demanded 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

During the First World War (from 1914 to 1918), the import of foreign goods into India reduced. One reason was that cargo ships were on war related duties, and hence there was a shortage of ships. Secondly, in the factories of Europe, things needed for the war were being made. So very few goods meant for the Indian markets were available.

Under these circumstances, the factories that had been established in India started selling their goods in large quantities. Because of heavy sales, there was a rapid development of industries. After the war ended, Indian factory owners purchased a large numbers of European machines and set up new industries. Indian industrialists began demanding that the government should levy a tax on foreign goods so that the sales of Indian goods might continue in future as well.

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



Fig. 16.5: An early sketch of Bankers in Delhi.

- 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 control of Europeans. Europeans had many advantages for these companies. They could easily contact officers and authorities of the British government, whereas Indians were never able to do so. All the foreign trade was in the hands of European companies, hence, they had no shortage of funds either.

Even though the Europeans had more influence on industries, Indian industrialists developed a great deal. For example, Indian industrialists were able to control the textile industry. The greatest example of the achievements of Indian



Fig. 16.6: Some of the pioneers among Indian industrialists J.N.Tata, R.D.Tata, Sir R.J.Tata and Sir D.J. Tata.

industrialists was the steel factory at Jamshedpur that was set up by an industrialist named Jamshedji Tata.

The tax on foreign goods was a great help for the Indian industrialists from the government, but this was not sufficient. Many resources and facilities were needed such as railways, roads, electricity, coal and iron. However, the British government did not pay attention to development in these areas.

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

For the development of industry, help was needed from scientists, engineers, and technicians. Educated workers were needed at all levels. But education was not given importance in India. Industrial development depended on foreigners because very few Indian scientists and engineers were there.

In order to promote 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 brought up the problems of the industrialists before the government.

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

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

Labourers in Indian Industries

Industrial Towns and Labour Settlements

From 1850 onwards, machine-based industries had started setting 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 started coming from villages to the cities in the hope of employment. Along with them or after them, their relatives, neighbours, and friends also came. The number of labourers in cities increased. Huts and tenements of labourers started setting up around factories. Many cities

of India, such as Kanpur, Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Kolkata, Chennai, became large industrial cities.

Work Conditions

In the early phase, work would begin every day at dawn in the mills, and would stop only at sundown. The labourers would wake up early and go to the mills - men as well as women and even children.

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

The labourers spent the whole day 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 allowed. They were given a holiday only for the major festivals of the year.

However, it is not possible to work every day of the year. Sometimes they fell ill or had to attend to family duties. People also got exhausted and tired of monotonous work. But if they did not go to work, they lost the day's wages.

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.

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 for the smallest reason - 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, and 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 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.



Fig. 16.7: A poster showing men, women and children walking towards the mills.

There were so many hardships at work and, on top of it; there was no security

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?

of employment either. If a mill suffered losses, 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, 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 reducing the wages of labourers. When the labourers got to know about it, they prepared themselves 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, around 20 mills of Mumbai reduced the labourers' wages by 12½%. In response to this, 20,000 mill workers stopped work and went on strike. All the 20 mills remained closed for 10 days.

Similarly in 1919, the cost of living was rising but the labourer's wages were not being increased. So, the labourers of all the mills of Mumbai went 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 sent the famous Indian freedom fighter, Lokmanya Tilak, to 6 years of exile from India. In short time, the labourers of all the mills of Mumbai went on strike against this for six days.

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



Fig. 16.8: A poster depicting labour meeting.

Addressing Labourers Problems

The strange thing was that in the beginning most of the educated people of India did not pay attention to the problems of the labourers. For them, it was more important to find ways to develop industries in India. In the earlier phase, they did not think much about the kind of working conditions that should be there for labourers.

But surprisingly, in Britain, the factory owners, traders and social workers were worried by the condition of Indian labourers. They began talking to the government about these problems.

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

The industrialists and educated people of India were unhappy about this change. They felt that once labourers were given fixed incomes and other facilities such as leaves, the 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:

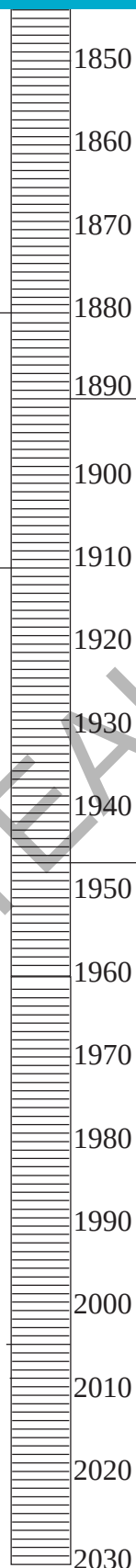
- Children below the age of 7 cannot be employed in factories.
- Children between 7 and 12 years of age cannot be made to work more than 9 hours a day and they must be given a one-hour break each day. They must also be given 4 days leave each month.

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?

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 in India had also come to believe that if laws were made in the interest of the labourers, industries would not be able to develop in India. A few lines published in a major newspaper of Bengal in 1875 show 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 needed, the conditions of the risks, an improvement in working conditions became relevant because industrial development lay in the hands of the labourers.



Fig. 16.9: In 1931 these millworkers in Lancashire, England were happy to meet Gandhiji and express solidarity with the Indian freedom movement.

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 Girni 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 solved 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.

Keywords

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|------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|
| 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. Whom did the adivasis revolt against? 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.
5. What problems did the Indian industrialists have with the British government?
6. During the 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 in an outline map of India during the 20th century.
10. Find out the names of the places where each of these adivasi struggles took place, and mark their locations on a map of India.
11. Read the paragraph under the title 'Adivasi Revolts' on page 206, 207 and comment on it.

Project

1. Visit an 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 nearby 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.