

HISTORY

Chapter 2: Tribals, Dikus and the Vision of a Golden Age



TRIBALS, DIKUS AND THE VISION OF A GOLDEN AGE

The Life of the Tribals

The tribals in the nineteenth century were involved in many activities. They were a part of the following economic activities:

- During the 19th century, tribal people in different parts of India were involved in various activities like Jhum cultivators, Hunters & Gatherers, Herded animals, & Settled cultivation.
- Itinerant cultivation took place in small plots of land, mainly in the forests.
- In Jhum cultivators, the farmers cut off the treetops to allow sunlight to reach the ground and burned the vegetation on the ground to clean it for cultivation.
- They scattered the ashes from the fire, which contained potash, to fertilize the ground.
- Once the harvest was prepared and harvested, they moved to another field. One field that was once grown was left fallow for several years.
- Itinerant farmers have been discovered in the mountainous and wooded regions of northeastern and central India.
- The lives of these tribal peoples depended on the freedom of movement in the forests and the possibility of using the land and forests to cultivate their crops.
- In many parts of the country, tribal groups lived by hunting animals and gathering forest products.
- They saw forests as critical to their survival. The Khonds were such a community that lived in the forests of Orissa. They routinely engaged in collective hunting and then shared the meat.
- They used a wide range of shrubs and forest herbs for medicinal purposes and sold forest products in local markets.

- Local weavers and leathers turned to the Khonds when they needed supplies of kusum and palash flowers to colour their garments and leather.
- Tribal groups often had to buy and sell in order to obtain commodities that were not produced in the community.
- Money lenders gave out loans with which tribals responded to their cash flow needs, adding to what they gained. But interest on the loans was generally quite high.
- A lot of tribal groups lived in animal farming. They were pastoralists travelling with their herds of cattle or sheep depending on the season
- When one spot ran out of grass, they moved to another area.
- The Van Gujjars of the Punjab Hills and the Labadis of Andhra Pradesh were livestock farmers, the Gaddis of Kulu were shepherds and the Bakarwals of Kashmir were goat breeders.
- Even before the 19th century, many members of the tribal groups had begun to set up, and cultivating their fields in one place year after year, rather than moving from one place to another.
- They started using the plow and progressively acquired rights to the land on which they lived. In many cases, such as the Mundas of Chottanagpur, the land was part of the whole clan.
- For the British authorities, established tribal groups like the Gonds and Santhals are more civilized than hunters or itinerant farmers.
- Very often, some people within the clan have become more powerful than others, some have become leaders and other disciples. Powerful men often rented their land instead of farming it on their own.

The Issue of the Traders and Moneylenders

- During the nineteenth century, tribal groups have found that merchants and money lenders come to forests more often, wanting to buy forest products, offering cash loans, and asking them to work for wages.

- Tribal groups were slow to understand the implications of what was happening.
- The silk merchants would send their agents to lend to the tribes and pick up the cocoons.
- Silk producers won very little money. Naturally, many tribal groups saw the market and merchants as their principal enemies.

Shifting Cultivation

Many tribals followed jhum or shifting cultivation. In shifting cultivation, a piece of forest was cleared by the tribals by burning trees. The ash containing potash was then spread on the cultivation field in order to fertilise it. The seeds were then scattered over the field. After the crop was ready, it was harvested. After cultivating the crop for two to three years, another patch of land was cleared for cultivation. Shifting agriculture was practiced in the hilly and forested regions of central and northeast India.

Hunting and Gathering

The tribal communities were involved in hunting and gathering activities. The Khonds of Orissa were a tribe which regularly went on collective hunts and divided the meat among themselves. Apart from hunting, the tribals collected forest produce such as sal and mahua. Many medicinal herbs and plants were sold by them in the local markets. They also exchanged forest produce for receiving their supplies of rice and other grains. For example, many local weavers turned to the tribals for their supplies of kusum and *palash* flowers to colour clothes. When there was not enough forest produce to sell, the tribals tried to search for work as labourers. The tribals depended on moneylenders and traders for procuring goods and money. While the traders sold goods to them at high rates, the moneylenders charged high rates of interest on the loans which were given by them to the tribals.

Herding of Animals

Many tribal groups were pastoralists who moved with their cattle or sheep according to seasons. The Van Gujjars of Punjab, the Labadis of Andhra Pradesh and the Bakarwals of Kashmir reared and herded cattle. They exchanged animal products for grains and clothes.

Settled Cultivation

Many tribal communities had begun to settle before the nineteenth century. They ploughed and cultivated land and gradually got the rights over the land. Some people who acquired power over fellow tribals became chiefs. Sometimes, the land belonged to an entire tribal clan such as the Mundas of the Chotanagpur Plateau.

The Arrival of the British

After the arrival of the British, tribal societies experienced several changes. These were

- The tribal chiefs had considerable amount of power before the advent of the British. They

had the power to administer and control their territories.

- Some tribal chiefs had their own police. They also managed forests.
- After the arrival of the British, the tribal chiefs lost many of their administrative powers and had to follow the rules which were formulated by the British. They also had to pay taxes to the British.
- Although the tribal chiefs were allowed to keep land titles, they were now unable to fulfil their traditional functions.
- The British Government wanted shifting cultivators to take up settled cultivation and become peasant cultivators. This was because the British wanted fixed revenues. It was also easy to manage, and control settled cultivators.
- The jhum cultivators who often took to settled cultivation suffered as the fields which were assigned to them were not productive. Because of protests, the British had to allow them to carry out shifting cultivation in some parts of the forests.

Impact of Forest Laws on Tribal Communities

- Forests were the abode and the provider of food for the tribals. Tribal communities suffered when the British declared forests as state property.
- Forests were declared as reserved and protected. Problems arose when the tribals were not allowed to practice shifting cultivation and to collect fruits, food and wood.
- The Government also faced a shortage of labour for cutting trees. Thus, some arrangements were reached between the Government and the tribals. The Government allowed the tribals to practice jhum cultivation, but at the same time, they also had to provide labour to the Forest Department.
- Thus, many forest villages were established to ensure minimum supply of cheap labour.
- However, most tribals opposed the colonial forest laws. They disobeyed the old laws and rebelled against the British. Some such revolts were Songram Sangma in Assam in 1906, and the Forest Satyagraha in the Central provinces in the 1930s.

Problems Related to Trade and Work

- Many traders and moneylenders were visiting the forests to purchase forest products from the tribal communities and to offer them cash loans.
- One such example where the tribals were exploited by traders and moneylenders was in the present state of Jharkhand.
- During the colonial times, traders involved in the silk trade sent their agents to Santhals who reared cocoons.
- The Santhals were paid Rs 3–4 for a thousand cocoons. These cocoons were sold at much higher prices in Burdwan and Gaya. The middlemen gained huge profits from the trade.

Thus, tribals began to see traders as their main enemies.

- The tribals who travelled to distant places away from their homes in search of work suffered many hardships. Most of them travelled to the tea plantations of Assam and the Jharkhand coal mines. They were recruited at extremely low wages and were also prevented from returning to their homes.
- Because of all the hardships and problems which were faced by tribal societies, revolts broke out among them. Some tribal rebellions were the Kols rebellion of 1831–32, the revolt of the Santhals in 1855, the Bastar Rebellion in 1910 and the Warli Revolt in Maharashtra in 1940.

Birsa Munda

- Birsa Munda was a charismatic leader of the Munda tribe residing in the regions of present Bihar and Jharkhand.
- As an adult, Birsa Munda was influenced by the stories of the tribal 'Golden Age' when the Mundas were free from the oppression of outsiders locally known as the dikus.
- He came into contact with Christian ideas and Vaishnavism during the early years of his life.
- His main aim was to reform tribal society. He urged his fellow tribals to give up drinking liquor, to clean up the village and to not believe in witchcraft and sorcery.



Birsa Munda

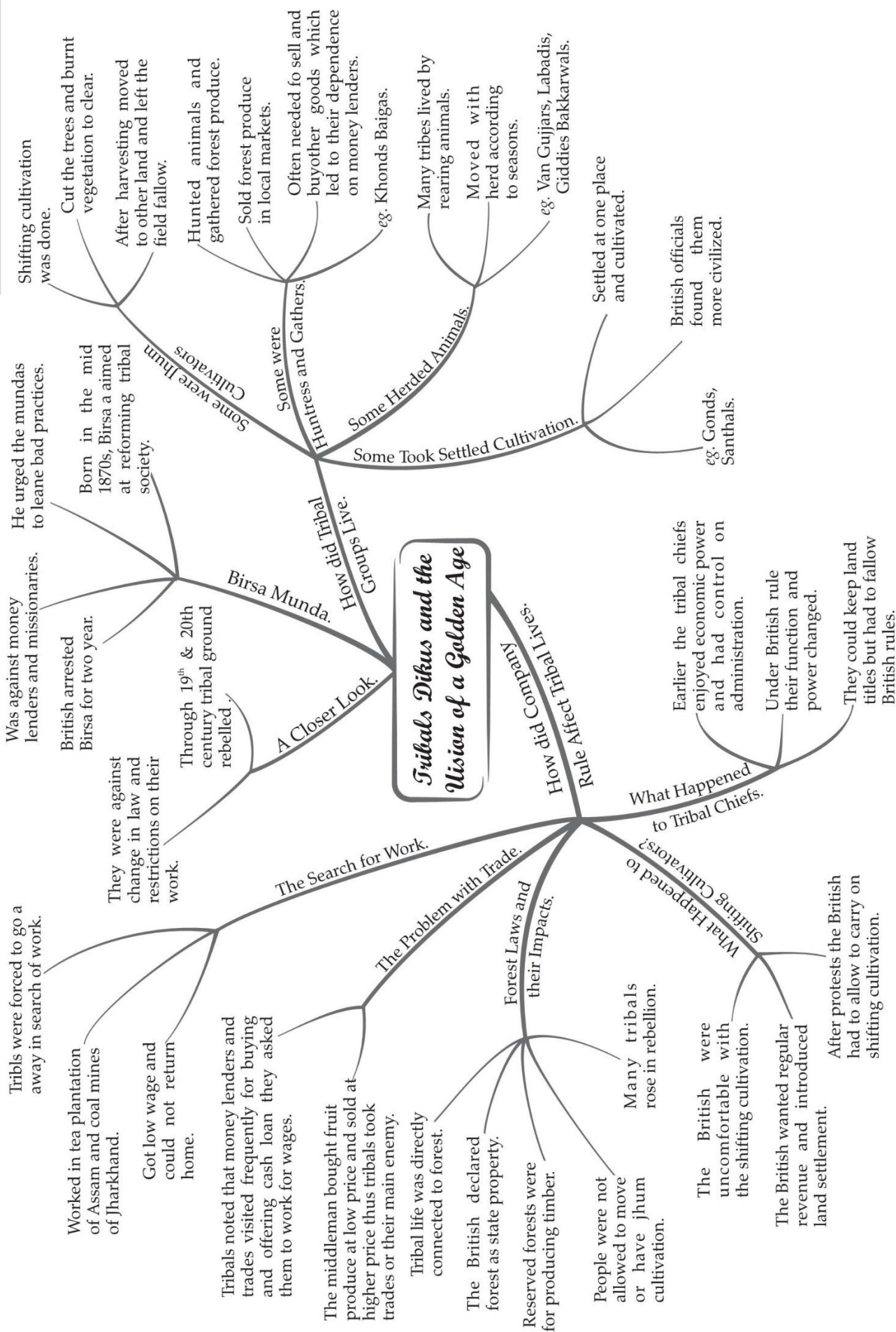
- He also tried to oppose the authority of the Hindu landlords and the Christian missionaries.
- Birsa Munda wanted the tribals to regain their lost glory. He wanted them to tap natural resources, plant trees and orchards and practise cultivation for earning their livelihood.
- Although Birsa Munda aimed at reforming the social and cultural lives of the tribals, the British officials were worried as he also talked about driving the missionaries,

moneylenders, landlords and the Government out of tribal lands.

- The Mundas blamed the Government for their land policies which destroyed their traditional rights over the land. The Mundas were also against the Hindu landlords and moneylenders as they aimed at snatching their land. Christian missionaries were attacked because they were criticising their traditional practices.
- As the movement began to gain momentum, the British arrested Birsa in 1895 and jailed him for two years. After his release, Birsa began touring various villages in order to gather support for the movement.
- He asked the people to fight against the Europeans and the dikus. Many tribals, following Birsa, attacked police stations, churches and raided the homes of moneylenders. They raised the white flag as a symbol of Birsa Raj.
- Unfortunately, the movement began to break down after the death of Birsa because of cholera. The movement was however important in two ways. First, it forced the colonial administrators to frame laws so that tribal lands could not be easily taken away by the dikus. Second, it demonstrated to the Government and the people that tribal people had the capacity to protest against the injustices of the colonial rule.

MIND MAP : LEARNING MADE SIMPLE

CHAPTER-4



Important Questions

Multiple Choice Questions-

1. Tribals who saw themselves as people of forest and could only live on the produce of forest:
 - a. Baigas
 - b. Van Gujjars
 - c. Khonds
 - d. Palash
2. The tribals who reared goats and from Kashmir:
 - a. Gaddis
 - b. Van Gujjars
 - c. Baigas
 - d. Bakarwals
3. The Khonds community used Sal and Mahua seeds for:
 - a. Prepare hair oil
 - b. Making garlands
 - c. Obtaining food
 - d. For preparing food
4. The man seen roaming the forests and villages of Chottanagpur in Jharkhand in 1895 was:
 - a. Birsa
 - b. Dikus
 - c. Santhal
 - d. Chiefs
5. Outsiders were being referred to as:
 - a. Gonds
 - b. Krishra
 - c. Palash
 - d. Dikus

6. The cultivators who practised shifting cultivation were:

- a. Khonds
- b. Khanda
- c. Jhum
- d. Mundas

7. For what purpose Kusum and Palash flowers are used?

- a. Extracting oil from the seeds
- b. Coloring clothes and leather
- c. Cooking and making food
- d. All of them

8. Who was Baigas from central India?

- a. Were reluctant to work for others
- b. Considered themselves as the people of the forest
- c. Was below their dignity to work as labor
- d. All of them

9. What were the Santhals of Hazaribagh?

- a. Cultivated small patches of land
- b. Reared silkworm
- c. Herders of village
- d. None of these

10. Most tribal like Khonds of Orissa?

- a. Practiced shifting cultivation
- b. Practiced subsistence farming
- c. Collected and sold forest products
- d. All of these

11. Bewar is used for which purpose in Madhya Pradesh?

- a. Shepherds
- b. Cattle herders
- c. Shifting cultivation

d. Traders and money lenders

12. What do you mean by the term Mahua?

a. Animal

b. Plant

c. Flower

d. None of these

13. Name the four geographic regions where Adivasis predominantly live?

a. North-eastern states

b. Central India

c. South India

d. All of these

14. Who was the leader of Ullgulan movement?

a. Mahatma Gandhi

b. Subhash Chandra Bose

c. Birsa Munda

d. All of these

15. What do you mean by the term fallow Land?

a. Cultivated land

b. Field left uncultivated

c. Land for sale

d. None of these

Very Short:

1. Mention different types of activities of the tribal people.

2. Why did the British want tribal groups to settle down and become peasant cultivators?

3. Why did the British introduce land settlements?

4. Why were some forests classified as Reserved Forests?

5. What problem did the British face after they stopped the tribal people from living inside forests?

6. Why did the Forest Department establish forest villages?

7. How did the tribal groups view the market and the traders?

8. Who was Birsa?
9. What did people say about him?
10. What problems did Birsa set out to resolve?
11. Who were the outsiders being referred to as dikus?

Short Questions:

1. What were the main activities of the Khonds living in the forests of Orissa?
2. How did traders and moneylenders exploit the tribal people?
3. How did the British officials view settled tribal groups and those who moved about from place to place?
4. Describe land settlements introduced by the British.
5. Why was the British effort to settle jhum cultivators not very successful?
6. How did Birsa resume his movement after his release in 1897?
7. In what ways was the Birsa movement significant?

Long Questions:

1. What problem did the British face after they brought changes in forest laws? How did they solve this problem?
2. Give a brief history of the revolts by different tribal groups in the country.
3. Write a short note on 'shifting cultivation'.
4. How did different tribal groups live? Describe in brief.
5. Give a brief life sketch of Birsa Munda.

Answer Key:

MCQ

1. (a) Baigas
2. (d) Bakarwals
3. (d) For preparing food
4. (a) Birsa
5. (d) Dikus
6. (c) Jhum
7. (b) Coloring clothes and leather
8. (d) All of them
9. (b) Reared silkworm

- 10.(c) Collected and sold forest products
- 11.(c) Shifting cultivation
- 12.(c) Flower
- 13.(d) All of these
- 14.(c) Birsa Munda
- 15.(b) Field left uncultivated

Very Short Answer:

1. (a) Some practised jhum cultivation
- (b) Some were hunter-gatherers.
- (c) Some herded animals.
- (d) Some took to settled cultivation.
2. It was because settled peasants were easier to control and administer than people who were always on the move.
3. They did so in order to get a regular revenue source for the state.
4. These forests produced timber which the British wanted.
5. They faced the problem of shortage of labour.
6. It did so in order to ensure a regular supply of cheap labour.
7. They viewed them as their main enemies.
8. Birsa belonged to a family of Mundas, a tribal group that lived in Chottanagpur.
9. People said that he had miraculous powers. He could cure all diseases and multiply grain.
10. (a) The familiar ways of tribals seemed to be disappearing.
- (b) Their livelihoods were under threat.
- (c) The religion appeared to be in danger. Birsa set out to resolve these problems.
11. Traders, moneylenders, missionaries, Hindu landlords and the British were the outsiders being referred to as dikus.

Short Answer:

Ans: 1. The Khonds were basically hunter- gatherers. They regularly went out on collective hunts and then divided the meat amongst themselves. They ate fruits and roots collected from the forest and cooked food with the oil they extracted from the seeds of the sal and mahua. They used many forest shrubs and herbs for medicinal purposes and sold forest produce in the local markets. All their activities were based on forest.

Ans: 2. Tribal groups often needed to buy and sell in order to be able to get the goods that were not produced within the locality. This led to their dependence on traders and

moneylenders. Traders came around with things for sale. They sold the goods at high prices. Moneylenders used to give loans with which the tribals met their cash needs, adding to what they earned. But the interest charged on the loans was very high. Thus, both traders and moneylenders always exploited the tribal people. It is therefore the tribals- saw them as evil outsiders and the cause of their misery.

Ans: 3. The British officials saw settled tribal groups such as the Gonds and Santhals as more civilized than hunter-gatherers or shifting cultivators. These tribal groups lived in the forests and kept on moving. They did not have a fixed home. The British considered them wild and savage and therefore they needed to be settled and civilized.

Ans: 4. The British introduced land settlements to ensure a regular revenue source for the state. Under these settlements:

- the British measured the land, defined the rights of each individual to that land, and fixed the revenue demand for the state.
- some peasants were declared landowners, other tenants. The tenants were to pay rent to the landowner who in turn paid revenue to the state.

Ans: 5. (a) It is usually difficult to carry on settled plough cultivation in areas where water is scarce, and the soil is dry.

(b) Jhum cultivators who took to plough cultivation often suffered since their fields did not produce good yields. Hence, the jhum cultivators in north-east India insisted on continuing with their traditional practice.

(c) The British faced widespread protests. Therefore, they allowed them to carry on shifting cultivation in some parts of the forest.

Ans: 6. Birsa was released in 1897. Now he began touring the villages to gather support. He used traditional symbols and language to rouse people, urging them to destroy dikus and the Europeans and establish a kingdom under his leadership. Birsa's followers began targeting the symbols of dikus and European power. They attacked police stations and churches and raided the property of moneylenders and zamindars. They raised the white flag as a symbol of Birsa Raj.

Ans: 7. The Birsa movement was significant in two ways:

- (a) It forced the colonial government to introduce laws so that the land of the tribals could not easily be taken over by dikus.
- (b) It showed once again that the tribal people had the capacity to protest against injustice and express their anger against colonial rule. They did this in their own specific way, inventing their own rituals and symbols of struggle.

Long Answer:

Ans: 1. The British stopped the tribal people from living inside forests by introducing some changes in forest laws. This created a problem. They lost labour force because most of the jhum cultivators moved to other areas in search of work. Who would cut trees for railway

sleepers and transport logs? Colonial officials solved this problem by giving jhum cultivators small patches of land in the forests and allowing them to cultivate these on the condition that these who lived in villages would have to provide labour to the Forest Department and look after the forests. The Forest Department established forest villages in many regions to ensure a regular supply of cheap labour.

Ans: 2. Several tribal groups in different parts of the country were unhappy with the changes they were experiencing and the problems they were facing under the British rule. Finally, they rebelled against the changes in laws, the restrictions on their practices, the new taxes they had to pay, and the exploitation by traders and moneylenders.

- The Kols rebelled in 1831-32.
- The Santhals rose in revolt in 1855.
- The Bastar Rebellion in central India broke out in 1910.
- The Warli Revolt in Maharashtra in 1940.
- Birsa Munda also led one such movement.

Ans: 3. In shifting cultivation a plot of land is cleared by felling the trees and burning them. Small patches of land in forests were used for this kind of cultivation. The cultivators cut the treetops to allow sunlight to reach the ground. The ashes of burnt trees were mixed with the soil to fertilize it. The tribals used the axe to cut trees and the hoe to scratch the soil in order to prepare it for cultivation. They scattered the seeds on the field instead of ploughing the land and sowing the seeds. Once the crop was ready it was harvested.

After the soil lost its fertility, the land was abandoned, and the cultivator moved to a new plot. Shifting cultivation is also known as 'slash and burn' agriculture.

Shifting cultivation usually starts with cutting trees and a fire which clears a spot for crop production. In the ideal case, shifting cultivation is a cycle where farmers come back to the original place after a couple of years

Ans: 4. Tribal people were involved in many different types of activities:

(a) Some tribal people practiced jhum cultivation also known as shifting cultivation. This was done on small patches of land, mostly in forests. The cultivators cleared off small patches of land. They then burnt the vegetation and spread the ash from the firing, which contained potash to fertilise the soil. They used equipments like axe and hoe for preparing the soil for cultivation. Then they scattered the seeds on the field. Once the crop was ready, and harvested, they moved to another field. Shifting cultivators were found in the hilly and forested tracts of north-east and central India.

(b) Some tribal groups were engaged in hunting animals and gathering forest produce, hence known as "hunter-gatherers". They saw forests as essential for survival. The Khonds were such a community living in the forests of Orissa. They regularly went out on collective hunts and then divided the meat amongst themselves. They ate fruits and roots and cooked food with the oil they extracted from the seeds of the sal and mahua. They got rice and other grains in return for their valuable forest produce. Sometimes they did odd jobs in the villages like

carrying loads, etc.

(c) Some tribal groups lived by herding and rearing animals. They were pastoralists who moved with their herds of cattle or sheep according to the seasons. For examples, the Vicm Gujjars of Punjab hills, and the Labadis of Andhra Pradesh were cattle herders, the Gaddis of Kulu were shepherds and the Bakarwals of Kashmir reared goats.

(d) Some tribal community took to settled cultivation. They cultivated their fields in one place year after year, instead of moving from place to place. They began to use the plough and gradually got rights over the land they lived on.

Ans: 5. Birsa was born in the mid-1870s in a family of Mundas, a tribal group that lived in Chottanagpur. He grew up around the forests of Bohanda, grazing sheep, playing flute and dancing in the local akharas. As an adolescent Birsa heard tales of the Munda uprisings of the past and saw sirdars (leaders) of the community urging the people to revolt.

Birsa took great interest in the sermons of missionaries because they inspired the Mundas to attain their lost rights. He also enjoyed the company of a prominent Vaishnav preacher. He wore the sacred thread and began to value the importance of purity and piety.

He decided to reform tribal society. He urged the Mundas to give up all their bad practices like drinking liquor, etc. Here, it is worth mentioning that Birsa also turned against missionaries and Hindu landlords.

He urged his followers to restore their glorious past. He talked of a golden age in the past—when Mundas lived a very good life. They did not kill their brethren and relatives. Birsa wanted to see these qualities again in the tribal society.

The British officials got terrified to visualise the political aims of Birsa Munda. As the movement spread, the government arrested him in 1895, convicted him on the charges of rioting. He was also jailed him for two years.

After Birsa was released in 1897, he began to tour the villages to gather support. He urged his supporters to destroy dikus and the Europeans. In 1900, he died of cholera and the movement faded out. But it proved significant in the long run.