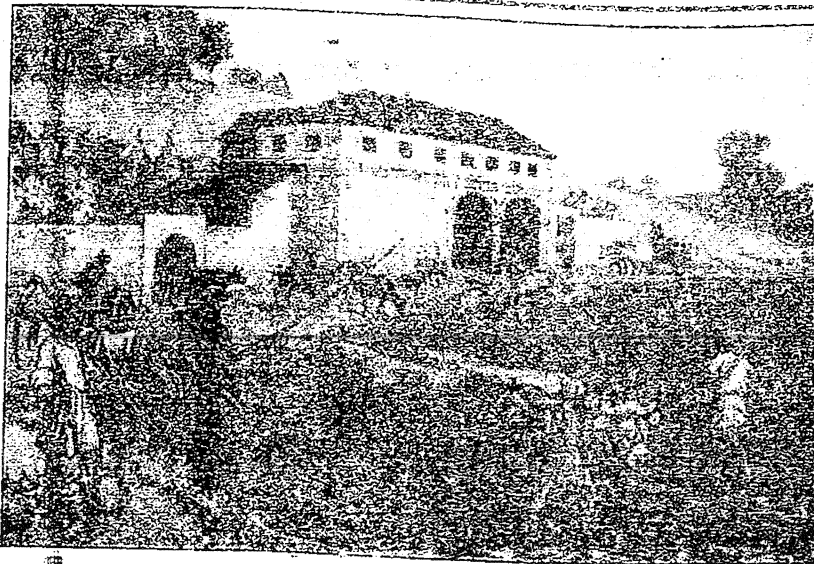


# Peasants & Farmers



"In this chapter you will read about peasants and farmers, with a special focus on three different countries, the small cottagers in England, the wheat farmers of the USA, and the opium producers of Bengal."

## 14.1 Introduction

You will see what happens to different rural groups with the coming of modern agriculture; what happens when different regions of the world are integrated with the capitalist world market.

## 14.2 The coming up of modern agriculture in England

On 1 June 1830, a farmer in the north-west of England found his barn and haystack reduced to ashes by a fire that started at night. In the months that followed, cases of such fire were reported from numerous districts. At times only the rick was burnt, at other times the entire farmhouse. Then on the night of 28 August 1830, a threshing machine of a farmer was destroyed by labourers in East Kent in England. In the subsequent two years, riots spread over southern England and about 387 threshing machines were broken. Through this period, farmers received threatening letters urging them to stop using machines that deprived workmen of their livelihood.

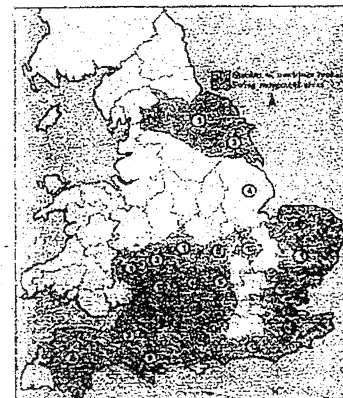
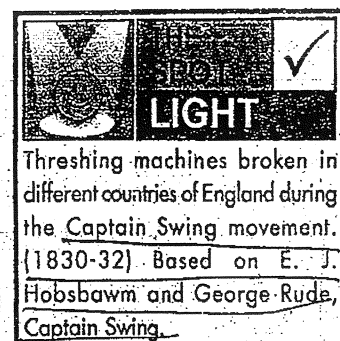


Fig. 1

## 14.3 The time of open fields and commons

- (i) Over the late, eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the English countryside changed dramatically.
- (ii) Peasants cultivated on strips of land around the village they lived in. At the beginning of each year, at a public meeting, each villager was allocated a number of strips to cultivate. These strips were often located in different places. The effort was to ensure that everyone had a mix of good and bad land.
- (iii) On the common land, all villagers pastured their cows and grazed the sheep, collected fuelwood for fire and berries and fruit for food. They fished in the rivers and ponds and hunted rabbit in common forests.
- (iv) For the poor the common land supplemented their meagre income, sustained their cattle and helped them in tide over bad times when crops failed.





The painting in fig. 2 is by the English painter John Constable (1776 - 1837). Son of a wealthy corn merchant, he grew up in the Suffolk countryside in east England, a region that had been enclosed much before the nineteenth century. At a time when the idyllic countryside was disappearing, the open fields were being enclosed, Constable painted sentimental images of open countryside.



Fig. 2  
Suffolk countryside in the early nineteenth century.



In this particular painting we do see some fences and the separation of fields, but we get no idea of what was happening in the landscape. Constable's paintings usually did not have working people. If you look at Fig. 1, you will see that Suffolk was surrounded by regions where threshing machines were broken in large numbers during the Swing riots.

#### 14.4 Enclosures and enclosure movements - causes

- (i) The price of wool went up in the world market in the sixteenth century, rich farmers wanted to expand wool production to earn profits. They were eager to improve their sheep breeds and ensure good feed for them. They were keen on controlling large areas of land in compact blocks to allow improved breeding. So they began dividing and enclosing common land. They drove out villagers who had small cottages on the commons and they prevented the poor from entering the enclosed fields.
- (ii) Till the middle of the eighteenth century the enclosure movement proceeded very slowly. The early enclosures were usually created by individual landlords. They were not supported by the state or the church. After the mid-eighteenth century, however, the enclosure movement swept through the countryside, changing the English landscape for ever. Between 1750 and 1850, 6 million acres of land was enclosed. The British Parliament no longer watched this process from a distance. It passed 4,000 Acts legalising these enclosures.
- (iii) **New demands for Grain:** The new enclosures were different from the old. The land that was enclosed in the late eighteenth century was for grain production.
- (iv) From the mid-eighteenth century, the English population expanded rapidly. This meant an increased demand for foodgrains to feed the population. Britain at this time was industrialising. More and more people began to live and work in urban areas. To survive they had to buy foodgrains in the market. The market for foodgrains expanded, demand increased rapidly and foodgrain prices rose.
- (v) By the end of the eighteenth century, France was at war with England. This disrupted trade and the import of foodgrains from Europe. Prices of foodgrains in England sky rocketed, encouraging landowners to enclose lands and enlarge the area under grain cultivation. Profits flowed in and landowners pressurised the Parliament to pass the Enclosure Acts.

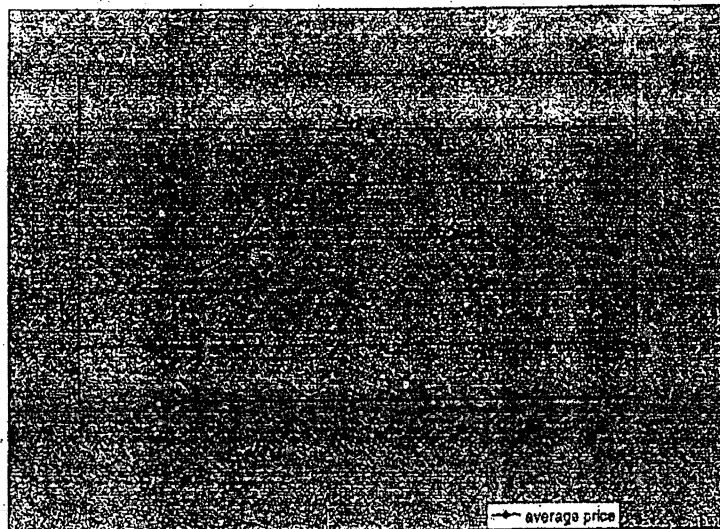


Fig. 3 Annual average wheat prices in England and Wales: 1771-1850.

## 14.5 The age of enclosures

- (i) There is one dramatic fact that makes the period after the 1780s different from any earlier period in English history. Foodgrain production in the past had not expanded as rapidly as the population. Grain production now grew as quickly as population.
- (ii) This increase in foodgrain production was made possible not by any radical innovations in agricultural technology, but by bringing new lands under cultivation. Landlords sliced up pasturelands, carved up fields, cut up forest commons, took over marshes, and turned larger and larger areas into agricultural fields.
- (iii) In the 1660s farmers began growing turnip and clover. They soon discovered that planting these crops improved the soil and made it more fertile. Turnip was, a good fodder crop. These crops had the capacity to increase the nitrogen content of the soil. Nitrogen was important for crop growth. Cultivation on the same soil over a few years depleted the nitrogen in the soil and reduced its fertility. By restoring nitrogen; turnip and clover made the soil fertile once again.
- (iv) Enclosures were now seen as necessary to make long term investments on land and plan crop rotations to improve the soil. Enclosures also allowed the richer landowners to expand the land under their control and produce more for the market.

## 14.6 What happened to the poor?

- (i) Enclosures filled the pockets of landlords, the enclosed land became the exclusive property of one landowner.
- (ii) The poor could no longer collect their firewood from the forest or graze their cattle on the commons. They could no longer collect apples and berries, or hunt small animals for meat.
- (iii) They could not gather the stalks that lay on the fields after the crops were cut. Everything belonged to the landlords ; everything had price which the poor could not afford to pay.
- (iv) In places where enclosures happened on an extensive scale-the poor were displaced from the land.
- (v) From the midlands, they moved to the southern countries of England. There was a great demand for agricultural labourers. But now-here could the poor find secured jobs.
- (vi) Labourers were being paid wages and employed only during harvest time. Work became insecure, employment, uncertain, income unstable.

## 14.7 The Introduction of Threshing Machines

During the Napoleonic Wars, prices of foodgrains were high and farmers expanded production vigorously. Fearing a shortage of labour, they began buying the new threshing machines that had come into the market. They complained of the insolence of labourers, their drinking habits, and the difficulty of making them work. The machines, they thought, would help them reduce their dependence on labourers.

After the Napoleonic Wars had ended, thousands of soldiers returned to the villages. They needed alternative jobs to survive. An Agricultural

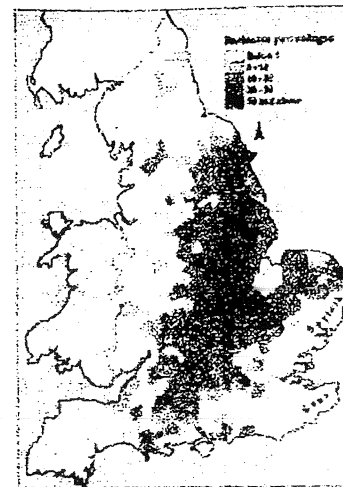
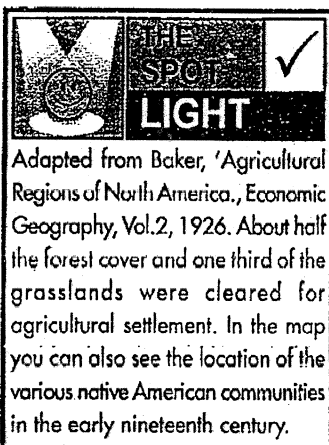


Fig.4  
Enclosures of common field by  
Parliamentary Acts: eighteenth-  
nineteenth centuries.

**THE  
SPOT  
LIGHT**

✓

In contrast many writers emphasised the advantages of enclosures. There can be no question of the superior profit to the farmer of enclosures rather than open fields. In one case he is in chains; he can make no changes in soil or prices, he is like a horse in team, he must jog along with the rest..



Depression set in, landowners began reducing the area they cultivated. They tried to cut wages and the number of workmen they employed. The unemployed poor tramped from village to village, and those with uncertain jobs lived in fear of a loss of their livelihood.

The Captain Swing riots spread in the countryside of this time. For the poor the threshing machines had become a sign of bad times.

#### 14.8 Impact of modern agriculture on England.

The coming of modern agriculture in England brought many different changes :

- (i) The open fields disappeared.
- (ii) The customary rights of peasants were undermined.
- (iii) The richer farmers expanded grain production, sold this grain in the world market, made profits, and became powerful.
- (iv) The poor left their villages in large numbers. Some went from the Midlands to the Southern countries where jobs were available, other to the cities.
- (v) The income of labourers became unstable, their jobs insecure, their livelihood precarious.

##### (a) Bread Basket and Dust Bowl (USA)

The USA became the bread basket of the world. At the time that common fields were being enclosed in England at the end of the eighteenth century, settled agriculture had not developed on any extensive scale in the USA. Forests covered over 800 million acres and grasslands 600 million acres. Most of the landscape was not under the control of white Americans. Till the 1780s, white American settlements were confined to a small narrow strip of coastal lands in the east. Native Americans were nomadic, many of them lived only by hunting, gathering and fishing; others cultivated corn, beans, tobacco and pumpkin. Still others were expert trappers through whom European traders had secured their supplies of beaver fur since the sixteenth century.

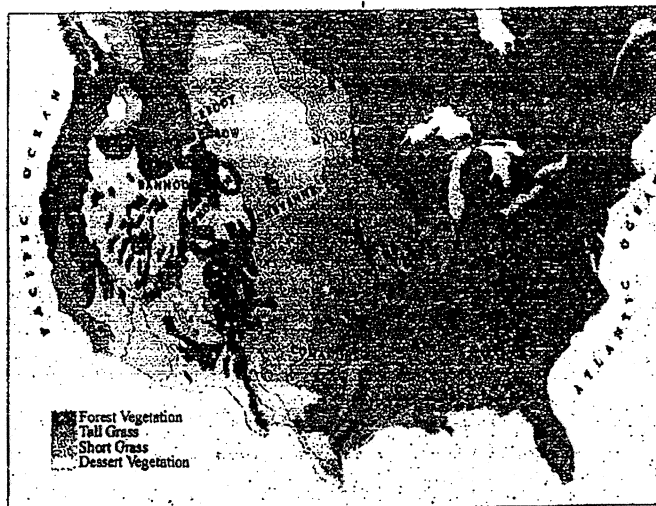


Fig.5 Forests And grasslands in the USA before the westward expansion of white settlers.

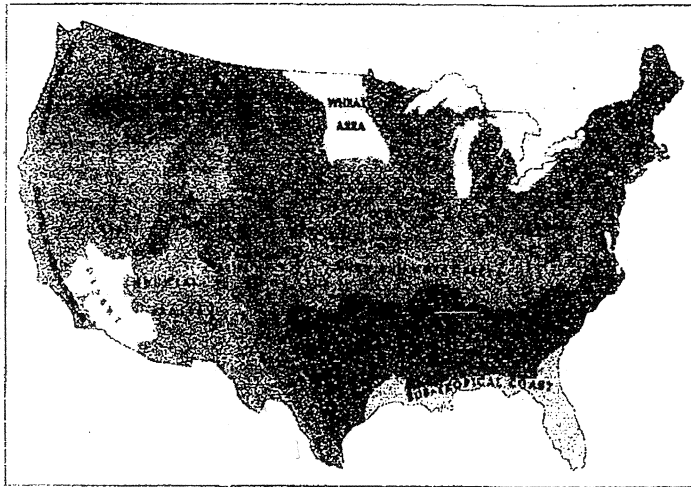


Fig.6 The agricultural belts in the USA in 1920.

By the early twentieth century, this landscape had transformed radically. White Americans had moved westward and established control up to the west coast, displacing local tribes and carving out the entire landscape into different agricultural belts. The USA had come to dominate the world market in agricultural produce.

#### ) The Westward Move and Wheat Cultivation

The story of agrarian expansion is closely connected to the westward movement of the white settlers who took over the land. After the American War of Independence from 1775 to 1783 and the formation of the United States of America, the white Americans began to move westward. Thomas Jefferson became President of the USA in 1800, over 700,000 white settlers had moved on to the Appalachian plateau through the passes. Forest timber could be cut for export, animals hunted for skin, mountains mined for gold and minerals. So the American Indians were cleared from the land. Wars were waged in which Indians were massacred and many of their villages burnt. The Indians resisted, won many victories in wars, but were ultimately forced to sign treaties, give up their land and move westward.

As the Indians retreated, the settlers poured in. They came in successive waves. They settled on the Appalachian plateau by the first decade of the eighteenth century, and then moved into the Mississippi valley between 1820 and 1850. They slashed and burnt forests; pulled out the stumps, cleared the land for cultivation, and built log cabins in the forest clearings. Then they cleared larger areas, and erected fences around the fields. They ploughed the land and sowed corn and wheat.

When the soil became impoverished the migrants would move further west, to explore new lands and raise a new crop. The Great Plains across the river Mississippi became a major wheat producing area of America.



Fig.7  
Sod houses in the Frontier.

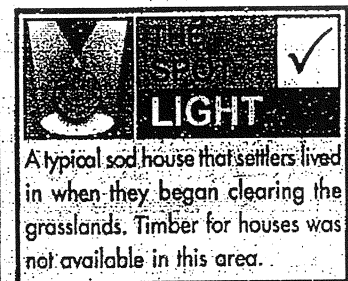




Fig. 8

A typical farming family on a Sunday afternoon. Picture taken in the Great Plains of Dakota in the first decade of the twentieth Century.



Note that in fig. 9 the front resting on a small wheel. At the rear is the handle with which the ploughman guided the plough. The plough was hitched to a team of oxen or horses.

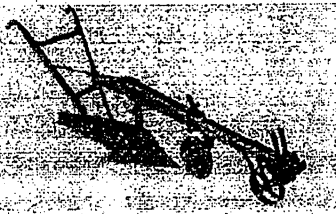


Fig. 9

A walking plough.

## CHECK YOUR LEARNING 14.1

1. Why in the 1930's America's dream of land of plenty turned into a nightmare?
2. The first Opium War took place during which period and between whom?

### The Wheat Farmers

Merits of expansion of wheat production

- (i) From the late nineteenth century, there was a dramatic expansion of wheat production in the USA. The urban population in the USA was growing and the export market was becoming even bigger.
- (ii) As the demand increased, wheat prices rose, encouraging farmers to produce wheat.
- (iii) The spread of the railways made it easy to transport the grain from the wheat-growing regions to the eastern coast for export.
- (iv) During the First World War the world market boomed. Russian supplies of wheat were cut off and the USA had to feed Europe. US President Wilson said **"Plant more wheat, wheat will. win the war"**.

In 1910, about 45 million acres of land in the USA was under wheat. Nine years later, the area had expanded to 74 million acres, an increase of about 65 per cent. Most of the increase was in the Great Plains where new areas were being ploughed to extend cultivation. In many cases, big farmers - the wheat barons - controlled as much as 2,000 to 3,000 acres of land individually.

## 14.9 The coming of new technology

- (i) This dramatic expansion was made possible by new technology. Through the nineteenth century, as the settlers moved into new habitats and new lands, they modified their implements to meet their requirements.
- (ii) The prairie was covered with a thick mat of grass with tough roots. To break the sod and turn the soil over, a variety of new ploughs were devised locally. By the early twentieth century, farmers in the Great Plains were breaking the ground with tractors and disk ploughs, clearing vast stretches for wheat cultivation.

## 14.10 In 1831, Cyrus McCormick invented the first Mechanical Reaper.

By the early twentieth century, most farmers were using combined harvesters to cut grain. With one of these machines, 500 acres of wheat could be harvested in two weeks.

- (iii) For the big farmers of the Great Plains these machines had many attractions. The price of wheat was high and the demand seemed limitless.
- (iv) The new machines allowed these big farmers to rapidly clear large tracts, break up the soil, remove the grass and prepare the ground for cultivation. The work could be done quickly and with a minimal number of hands.
- (v) With power driven machinery, four men could plough, seed and harvest 2,000 to 4,000 acres of wheat in a season.

#### 14.11 What happened to the poor ?

For the poorer farmers, machines brought misery. They borrowed money on loan to buy machines but found it difficult to pay back their debts. Many of them deserted their farms and looked for jobs elsewhere. Mechanisation reduced the need for labour. After 1920's most farmers faced trouble. Production had expanded so rapidly during the war and post-war years that there was a large surplus. Unsold stocks piled up, storehouses overflowed with grain, and vast amounts of corn and wheat were turned into animal feed. Wheat prices fell and export markets collapsed. This created the grounds for the Great Agrarian Depression of the 1930s that ruined wheat farmers everywhere.

#### 14.12 Dust bowl

In the 1930s, terrifying dust storms began to blow over the southern plains. Black blizzards rolled in, very often 7,000 to 8,000 feet high, rising like monstrous waves of muddy water. As the skies darkened, and the dust swept in, people were blinded and choked. Cattle were suffocated to death, their lungs caked with dust and mud. Sand buried fences, covered fields, and coated the surfaces of rivers till the fish died. Dead bodies of birds and animals were strewn all over the landscape. Tractors and machines that had ploughed the earth and harvested the wheat in the 1920s were now clogged with dust, damaged beyond repair. They came because the early 1930s were years of persistent drought. Ordinary duststorms became black blizzards only because the entire landscape had been ploughed over, stripped of all grass that held it together. When wheat cultivation had expanded dramatically in the early twentieth century, zealous farmers had recklessly uprooted all vegetation, and tractors had turned the soil over, and broken the sod into dust. The whole region had become a dust bowl. The American dream of a land of plenty had turned into a nightmare. The settlers had thought that they could conquer the entire landscape, turn all land over to growing crops that could yield profits. After the 1930s, they realized that they had to respect the ecological conditions of each region.

#### 14.13 The Indian farmer and opium production

Over the period of colonial rule, the rural landscape was radically transformed. As cultivation expanded, the area under forests and pastures declined. In the colonial period, rural India also came to produce a range of crops for the world market. In the early nineteenth century, indigo and opium were two of the major commercial crops. By the end of the century, peasants were producing sugarcane, cotton, jute, wheat and several other crops for export.

#### 14.14 A taste for tea : the trade with China

- (i) In the late eighteenth century, the English East India Company was buying tea and silk from China for sale in England. As tea became a popular English drink, the tea trade became more and more important. In fact, the profits of the East India Company came to depend on the tea trade.

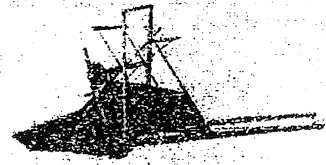
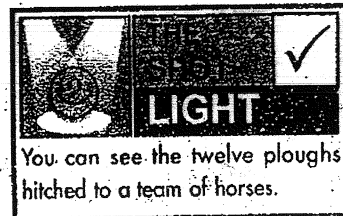


Fig.10  
Cyrus McCormick invented the reaper in 1831.



You can see the twelve ploughs hitched to a team of horses.



Fig.11  
The scythe was used for mowing grass before the mid-nineteenth century.



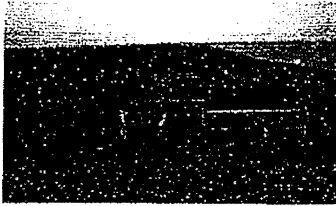


Fig.12 Seeding with drills and tractors. A highland farm in North Dakota, 1910.



Here you can see three drills and packers unhitched from the tractor. The drills were about 10 to 12 feet long, each with about 20 disks drilling the soil for seeding. Packers followed behind the disks covering the seeds with soil. You can see the vast seeded field extending into the horizon.

- (ii) England at this time produced nothing that could be easily sold in China. In such a situation, how could Western merchants finance the tea trade? They could buy tea only by paying in silver coins or bullion. This meant an outflow of treasure from England, a prospect that created widespread anxiety. Merchants therefore looked for ways to stop this loss of silver. They searched for a commodity they could sell in China, something the Chinese could persuade the Chinese to buy. Opium was such a commodity.
- (iii) The Chinese were aware of the dangers of opium addiction, and the Emperor had forbidden its production and sale except for medicinal purposes. But Western merchants in the mid-eighteenth century began an illegal trade in opium. It was unloaded in a number of sea ports of south-eastern China and carried by local agents to the interiors. By the early 1820s about 10,000 crates were being annually smuggled into China. Fifteen years later, over 35,000 crates were being unloaded every year.
- (iv) While the English cultivated a taste for Chinese tea, the Chinese became addicted to Opium. People of all classes took to the drug-shopkeepers and peddlers, officials and army men, aristocrats and paupers. Lin Zexu, Special Commissioner at Canton in 1839, estimated that there were over 4 million opium smokers in China. As China became a country of opium addicts, British trade in tea flourished. The returns from opium sale financed the tea purchases in China.

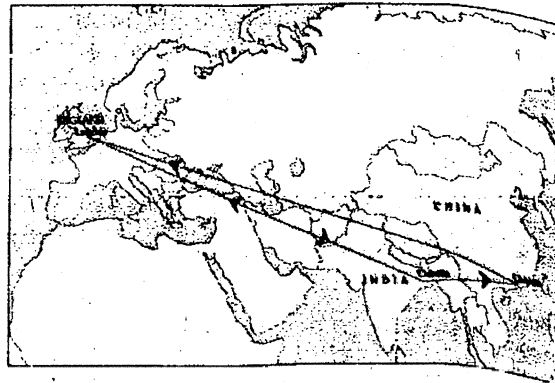


Fig.13 The triangular trade.

The British traders took opium from India to China and tea from China to England. Between India and England trade flowed both ways. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, exports of handlooms from India declined while the export of raw materials (silk and cotton) and foodgrains increased. From England, manufactured goods flowed into India leading to a decline of India artisanal production.

#### 14.15 Where did the opium come from

When the British conquered Bengal, they made a determined effort to produce opium in the lands under their control. Before 1767, no more than 500 chests were being exported from India. A hundred years later, in 1870, the government was exporting about 50,000 chests annually. Note : 1 maund = 40 seers. 1 seer is a little under a kg.



## CHECK YOUR ANSWERS 14.1

1. Because of Terrifying dust storms
2. Britain and China (1837-1842)

### Farmers were unwilling to turn their fields over to poppy

- (i) The crop had to be grown on the best land, on fields that lay near villages and were well manured. On this land peasants usually produced pulses. If they planted opium on this land, then pulses could not be grown there, or they would have to be grown on inferior land where harvests were poorer and uncertain.
- (ii) Many cultivators owned no land. To cultivate, they had to pay rent and lease land from landlords. And the rent charged on good lands near villages was very high.
- (iii) The cultivation of opium was a difficult process. The plant was delicate, and cultivators had to spend long hours nurturing it. This meant that they did not have enough time to care for other crops.

Finally, the price the government paid to the cultivators for the opium they produced was very low. It was unprofitable for cultivators to grow opium at that price.

### 14.16 Unwilling cultivators were made to produce opium

- (i) In the rural areas of Bengal and Bihar, there were large numbers of poor peasants. From the 1780s such peasants found their village headmen (manato) giving them money advances to produce opium.
- (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) The problem could have been partly solved by increasing the price of opium. The prices given to the peasants were so low that by the early eighteenth century angry peasants began agitating for higher prices and refused to take advances.

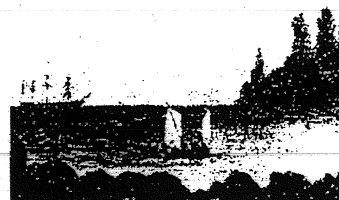


Fig.14 A ship arrives from China.

## EXERCISE # 1

## FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

### Multiple choice questions

1. Over the late eighteenth and nineteenth century in the English countryside at the beginning of each year at a public meeting each villager was allocated a number of-  
(1) animals to rear  
(2) strips to cultivate  
(3) machines to start his own industries  
(4) slaves
2. Till the middle of the eighteenth century the enclosure movement proceeded-  
(1) very fast (2) at the same rate  
(3) very slowly (4) not at all
3. \_\_\_\_\_ was the year of great agrarian depression.  
(1) 1930 (2) 1935  
(3) 1925 (4) 1920
4. Findings showed the planting of turnip and clover increased the \_\_\_\_\_ content of the soil  
(1) nitrogen (2) oxygen  
(3) carbon dioxide (4) lime
5. After the end of the Napoleonic war grain from Europe began flowing into England, prices declined and an  
(1) industrial revolution set in  
(2) industrial depression set in  
(3) agricultural depression set in  
(4) agricultural revolution set in
6. Till the 1780s, white America settlement was confined to a small narrow strip of coastal land in the -  
(1) east (2) west (3) north (4) south
7. Who was the special commissioner at canton, instructed to stop the opium trade?  
(1) mao-tse -tung (2) lin zeux  
(3) san-yu-ki (4) ho-chi-min
8. In 1870, the government was exporting about \_\_\_\_\_ chests of opium annually.  
(1) 5000 (2) 250000  
(3) 50000 (4) 100000
9. In 1910, about \_\_\_\_\_ of land in USA was under wheat cultivation.  
(1) 40 million acres (2) 45 million acres  
(3) 50 million acres (4) 55 million acres
10. In 1831 \_\_\_\_\_ invented the first mechanical reaper.  
(1) Cyrus Macormick  
(2) Sir George Yuil  
(3) John Deer  
(4) Fred Hulstrand
11. The continuous movement of the pastoral communities helps in  
(1) recovery of pastures  
(2) prevention of their over use  
(3) reduction in the demand of houses  
(4) both a and b
12. Who was Captain Swing?  
(1) a farmer (2) a labourer  
(3) a mythic name (4) a landlord
13. Which of these reasons led to a radical transformation of the landscape by the early 20th century?  
(1) white American have moved westward  
(2) local tribes were displaced  
(3) entire landscape was carved into different agricultural belts in US  
(4) all the above
14. When did westward white movement of white Americans take place?  
(1) during the 1610  
(2) the 1650s  
(3) after American war of independence  
(4) the 1800s
15. What were the reasons for these dust storms ?  
(1) early 1930s were years of persistent drought  
(2) the wind blew with ferocious drought  
(3) the entire landscape had been ploughed over, stripped all the grass that held it together  
(4) all the above

16. In the 19th century, the two major commercial crops in India came to produce for the world market were-  
 (1) Indigo (2) Opium  
 (3) Maize (4) Both (1) and (2)
17. When did the white American move into mississippi valley?  
 (1) 1800-1820 (2) 1820-1850  
 (3) 1850-1860 (4) 1860-1870
18. Name the US president who said " plant more wheat, wheat will win the war"  
 (1) Roosevelt (2) Clinton  
 (3) Bush (4) Wilson
19. To balance their trade, which commodity did the Company decide to sell in China?  
 (1) opium (2) silk  
 (3) spices (4) gems
20. From 1910 to 1919 the land area under wheat cultivation in USA had increased about  
 (1) 50% (2) 65%  
 (3) 75% (4) 80%

#### Fill in the blanks

- Agricultural revolution first took place in \_\_\_\_\_
- The agrarian expansion is closely connected to the \_\_\_\_\_ movement of the white settlers.
- In 1910, about \_\_\_\_\_ million acres of land in USA was under wheat.
- \_\_\_\_\_ is an English currency.

5. In \_\_\_\_\_ terrifying duststorm occurred in southern plains.

6. Opium was known primarily for its \_\_\_\_\_ properties.

#### True or false

- In 1773 the british government in Bengal had established a monopoly to trade in opium.
- Silk and tea was imported from China to Britain.
- China became the bread basket of the world.
- By 1773, the british government in Bengal had established a monopoly to trade in indigo.
- In 1831 the first mechanical reaper was invented.
- Under President Lincoln of America maximum expansion of wheat took place.

#### Match the column

1.	Column-I	Column-II
(1)	Thomas Jefferson	(a) bread basket of the world
(2)	Cyrus mc cormick	(b) smuggling of opium into china on large scale
(3)	opium trade	(c) he invented the first mechanical reaper
(4)	bushel	(d) American President
(5)	USA	(e) A measure of capacity

### EXERCISE # 1

### ANSWER KEY

### FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

#### Multiple choice questions

Ques	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Ans.	2	3	1	1	3	1	2	3	2	1	4	3	4	3	4	4	2	4	1	2

#### Fill in the blanks

1. England 2. Westward 3. 45 4. Shilling 5. 1930 6. Medicinal

#### True or false

1. True 2. True 3. False 4. False 5. True 6. True

#### Match the column

1. (1) → d; (2) → c; (3) → b; (4) → e; (5) → a

## EXERCISE # 2

## SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT

### Short answer type questions

1. What is strip cultivation?
2. How did food production increase in the 19th century?
3. Why did rich farmers use the threshing machines?
4. Why did the white people move westwards?
5. Who was Captain Swing?
6. What were the main causes of dust bowl in great plains of USA?
7. In the decade 1660, why did the farmers in England cultivate turnip and clovers?
8. State two effects of enclosures on English agriculture?
9. Who was Cyrus McCormick?
10. Who was Lin Ze Xu?

### Long answer type questions

1. How did the railways help in the expansion of Americas wheat production?
2. Why did the british start smuggling opium into China?
3. What problems did expansion of wheat agriculture in the great plains cause?
4. What were the advantages and disadvantages of the use of mechanical and harvesting machines in the USA?
5. Why were Indian farmers reluctant to grow opium?
6. What simple innovations helped to increase agricultural production in England?
7. Explain any four advantages of new techniques in agriculture?
8. Why were threshing machines opposed by the poor farmers in England?
9. What factors led to a dramatic expansion in American wheat production?

## NCERT QUESTIONS WITH ANSWERS

1. Explain briefly what the open field meant to rural people in eighteenth-century England. Look at the system from the point of view of :

(i) A rich farmer                      (ii) A labourer                      (iii) A peasant woman

**Ans.** The open field system left large parts of the English countryside open. The fields were not partitioned into enclosed lands privately owned by landlords. At the beginning of the year each villager was allocated a number of strips to cultivate. These strips were usually near the villages. The usual practice was to ensure that each peasant got strips of varying quality and often located in different places, not next to each other. This was done so that everyone got a mix of good and bad land. Beyond these strips lay common land. Everyone had access to these lands and used it as ground for grazing, collecting timber for fuel, berries and fruit. The ponds had fish and rabbit for small game could be found here in abundance. This land was very important for the poor. The use of this land augmented their income, sustained their cattle and helped them tide over bad times when crops failed.

**(i) The rich farmer :** The rich farmer was not unhappy with the system as it had been prevalent since long and hence they accepted it. He could, however, not claim land by enclosing it. Everyone made use of it. As the price of wool went up in the world markets in the 16th century, rich farmers wanted to expand wool production to earn profits. They realised that the need was to control large areas of land in compact blocks.

**(ii) A labourer :** A labourer worked on the land. He was satisfied with the open field system which allowed him not only land for cultivation but also common land. Activities such as fishing and hunting on the common land supplemented his meagre income. In addition, he also had another advantage, the land allocated to him for cultivation every year, was a mixture of good and bad land.

**(iii) A peasant woman :** A peasant woman was much at ease with the open field system. The common land was boon for her. She could gather fruits and berries and even fish in the ponds. She realised that these activities improved her financial position and helped her in times of crisis.

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

**Ans.** From the 16th century onwards the economy of open fields and common lands started changing. With the rise in the price of wool, rich farmers wanted to expand wool production to earn profits. They wanted to improve their sheep breeds and ensure good feed for them. They wanted to do this by controlling large areas of land in compact blocks to allow improved breeding. Division and enclosing of common land started. Hedges were built around holdings to separate one's property from others. Another factor was the new demand for grain. This happened in the 18th century. Land was being enclosed for grain production. English population expanded rapidly during the time. In addition, England during this time was industrialising. More and more people began to move to urban areas. They had to buy foodgrains from the markets. Enclosures were required to make long-term investments on land and plan crop rotations to improve the soil. These enclosures also allowed the richer landlords to expand land under their control and produce more for the market.

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

**Ans.** The poor felt that if threshing machines were used in farms there would be no need for manual labour. These peasants would be without jobs and become unemployed.

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

**Ans.** Captain swing was no name of a person. It was a mythical name used in letters. The name actually symbolised a group of people who resorted to violence to stop mechanisation in the field of agriculture as they were concerned with poor peasants losing their livelihood to machines.

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

**Ans.** The westward expansion of settlers in the USA had a great impact-the grasslands were transformed into the bread basket of America. The story of agrarian expansion is closely connected to the westward movement of the white settlers who took over the land and drove the American Indians westward. As the Indians retreated the settlers moved in. They slashed and burnt the forests, pulled out the stumps, cleared the land for cultivation and built log cabins in the forest clearings. They made fences around the fields and ploughed the land to grow corn and wheat. In the early years the soil was fertile and produced good crop. But as time passed, it began to lose its fertility. The settlers swept into the Great Plains across the River Mississippi. In a few years this region became a major wheat-producing area of America.

6. What were the advantages and disadvantages of the use of mechanical harvesting machines in the USA?

**Ans.** With the advent of the 19th century, as the settlers moved into new habitats and new lands, they modified their implements to meet their requirements. These implements and machines had many attractions. The price of wheat was high and demand limitless. These new machines allowed farmers to quickly clear tracts, break up the soil, remove the grass and prepare the ground for cultivation. The work could be done within a shorter time period and with a lesser number of labourers. The mechanical reaper could cut in one day as much as five men could cut with cradles and 16 men with sickles. With one combine harvesters 500 acres of wheat could be harvested in two weeks. With power-driven machinery, four men could plough, seed and harvest 2,000 to 4,000 acres of wheat in a season. These were the advantages of the new technological implements. There were, however, a few disadvantages too. For the poor, the machines were bad news. They were thrown out of their jobs and they lost their means of livelihood. Even the farmers who bought these machines were affected adversely. The machines were expensive and once the demand crossed its limits there was enough surplus grain in the market. Such farmers needed to pay back the loan they had taken from banks to buy these machines, and the farmers had no money.

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

**Ans.** The expansion of wheat agriculture in the Great Plains created the Dust Bowl. The American dream of a land of plenty had turned into a nightmare. We need to learn a lesson from this. Use of land is good but overuse of land is bad. We need to realise that land is a precious natural resource which needs to be preserved and conserved. Reckless, improper and unsustainable use of any resource leads to degradation and depletion. This gives rise to serious consequences. We must realise that we need to respect the ecological conditions of each region and work towards sustainable development and look after our earth.

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

**Ans.** The history of opium production in India has its links with the story of British trade with China. Since the 18th century England was buying tea and silk from China. Tea became a very popular drink and the quantity being bought increased. The East India Company realised that to make profits from this tea trade they must sell something to China which they required. England at this time produced no such thing. The Confucian rulers of China, the Manchus, at this time were suspicious of all foreign merchants. They were unwilling to allow the entry of foreign goods. The English realised that opium was one such commodity which the Chinese would easily buy as it had already been introduced by the Portuguese. An illegal trade in opium started. But where would the opium come from ? The British had conquered Bengal and here they made a determined effort to produce opium. This was the reason why opium became an important item of trade and the British forced the Indians to grow it.

9. Why were Indian farmers reluctant to grow opium ?

**Ans.** The Indian farmers were reluctant to grow opium because of the following reasons :

- (i) The crop had to be grown on the best land, on fields that lay near the villages and were well manured.
- (ii) This land was usually used for growing pulses. If opium was grown on fertile and well manured land then pulses would have to be grown on less fertile land and yield would not be good in quality as well as quantity.
- (iii) The cultivation of opium was difficult and time-consuming as the plants required looking after. As a consequence, the cultivators would not have time to look after their other produce.
- (iv) The farmers had to pay the rent for their land to the landlords. This rent was very high. The cultivators owned no land.
- (v) Finally, the price the government paid for the opium produce was very low and would provide the farmers with no profits.