

# Peasants and Farmers

**Explain briefly what the open field system meant to rural people in eighteenth century England:**

Look at the system from the point view of:

- A rich farmer
- A labour
- A peasant women

**Open Field System:** - The 'Open Field System' had the following features:

- The land in a village was not partitioned into small parcels. It used to be an open land, with no marked boundaries.
- At the beginning of each year, each villager was allocated a number of strips for cultivation.
- Beyond these strips of cultivation lay the common land. All the villagers had access to it.

**A rich farmer:** - Rich landowners were probably the only section of the society that was not happy with the concept of common lands.

Because of the common lands, they could not engage in cultivation of large tracts of land. They had no incentives, although they realized that by cultivating larger pieces of land, their profits would multiply.

**A labour:** -For the village labourer and a poor man, village common land was the only source of substance.

- The poor and the village labourer could find fodder for their cattle.
- They could collect fuel wood for fire.
- They could collect berries and fruit for food.
- They fished in rivers and ponds.
- They hunted rabbits.

In short common land supplemented their income, sustained their cattle, and helped them tide over bad times.

**A peasant woman:** - In the open field system the peasant women helped their husbands and other male family members. They used to take with them their children also. Cow keeping, collection of firewood, gleaning, gathering of fruits and berries from the common lands was earlier mostly done by the peasant women. The enclosure movement adversely affected their family income and their living conditions became poorer and more miserable.

**Explain briefly the factors which led to the enclosures in England:**

1. Increasing population and due to it increasing demand of food grains and other things led to the enclosure in England.
2. The rising prices of agricultural products, wool, wheat, meat, milk, skin, fruits etc also played role as a factor in promoting enclosures in England.

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3. In the nineteenth century enclosure were seen necessary to make long-term investment on land and plan crop rotations to improve the soil.
4. Enclosures also allowed the richer landowners to expand the land under their control and produce more for the market.
5. The coming of modern agriculture in England also promoted enclosure movement. In big land farms the rich farmers and big landlords brought various changes in agricultural methods and technology. The open fields disappeared; and the customary rights of peasants were undermined. The richer farmers expanded grain production, sold this grain in the world market, made profits and became powerful. The poor farmers sold their small land tracks or field to richer farmers. They (the new richer farmers) enclosed the whole land.

## Why were threshing machines opposed by the poor in England?

Threshing machines were opposed by the poor in England because they thought that these machines would deprive workmen of their livelihood. They believe that with the help of machines the richer farmers and big landlords would encourage enclosure movement. The common land would be distributed among rich farmers, and poor farmers, labourers, peasants women would have to struggle for their jobs and they would be jobless.

## Who was captain Swing? What did the name symbolise or represent?

Captain Swing was a mythic name used in threatening letters, written by the workmen against the use of threshing machines by rich farmers.

The name symbolized or represents anger or unhappiness of the labourers against the use of threshing machine by rich farmers or big land owners.

## What was the impact of the westward expansion of settlers in the USA?

The westward expansion of the White settlers had been almost complete by 1920. The White settlers turned the grasslands into the bread basket of America.

The farmers were helped by the following factors:

- Growing urban population which demanded more wheat.
- Growing export market for wheat.
- Rising prices of food grains.
- Fast transportation of wheat due to the spread of railways.
- Introduction of the new technology which brought in new machines. New machines allowed big farmers:  
\_ to rapidly clear large tracts,

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- \_ to break up the soil.
- \_ to remove the grass, and
- \_ to prepare the ground for cultivation.

All the factors contributed to bring about a dramatic transformation in America agriculture.

## **What were the advantages and disadvantages of the use of mechanical harvesting machines in the USA?**

The machines allowed big farmers to rapidly clear large track of the soil, remove the grass and prepare the ground for cultivation. The work could be done quickly and with a minimal number of hands. With power-driven machinery, four men could plough, seed and harvest 2,000 to 4,000 acres of wheat in a season. For the poorer farmers, machines brought misery. Many of them bought these machines, imagining that wheat prices would remain high and profits would flow in. If they had no money, the banks offered loans. But those who borrowed, looked for jobs elsewhere.

But jobs were difficult to find. Mechanisation had reduced the need for labours.

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

Machanisation had turned America into a grain basket. Big farmers earned big profits. They, in turn, invested in agriculture.

In their lust for quick profits, they dug the land deeper and deeper. Machines helped them in the hard task of removing any hard surfaces on the earth. But this process brought in its wake another unexpected problem.

In the 1930s, terrifying dust storms began to blow over the southern plains. Ordinary dust storms became black blizzards, which caused unprecedented loss and damage to life and property. The whole reason had become a dust bowl. The basic reason was the reckless pursuit of profits by American farmers. They forgot the basic laws of nature.

## **Write a paragraph on why the British insisted on farmers growing opium in India:**

Trade in opium with China was flourishing like never before; the British merchants were making huge profits from this trade.

Supplies of opium had to be increased to feed this booming export trade of Indian opium.

For this, it was necessary that Indian farmers should be persuaded to grow opium.

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## Why were Indian farmers reluctant to grow opium?

Indian farmers were reluctant to grow opium due to the following reasons:

- Poppy, from which opium is obtained, could be cultivated only on the best available lands; the fields should be in close proximity to the village and should be well manured. Farmers were already making use of such lands in cultivation of pulses. They were happy with the returns. They never wanted to shift to inferior lands.
- Many cultivators owned no land. Land could be taken only on rent. Rent on good lands used to be exorbitant. Poor farmers could not afford this type of rent.
- Opium plant is a delicate plant. It needs to be nurtured properly throughout its growth. Farmers could not afford this.
- The government paid a low price for opium. It was not profitable to cultivate opium.

## What was the attitude of the British to the opium cultivation outside the British territories?

The British government had established a monopoly to trade in opium. No one else was legally permitted to trade in the product. By the 1820s, the production of outside Territories increased and armed bands of traders were found carrying on the trade. The British called this trade illegal. They called it smuggling. It instructed its agents posted in the princely states to confiscate opium and to destroy the crops.

## How was opium trade conducted in China?

The British traders made huge profits by the sale of Chinese tea in the European markets. But since they had nothing to offer in return of tea, all payments were made in bullion.

This was unacceptable to people in England. English traders successfully developed a huge market for opium in China. The Chinese were aware of the dangers of opium addiction. The emperor had forbidden its production and sale. But an illegal opium trade flourished in China. In 1839, China closed all foreign trade in a bid to crush the illegal supplies of opium.

In response, Britain declared a war on China. This war is known as the 'Opium War'.

The Chinese were defeated in this war. They were forced to accept the humiliating terms of the treaty at the end of the war. These included, among other things,

- Legalizing opium trade.

