Q. DISCUSS ABOUT THE DICHOTOMY OF *GRAMA* AND *ARANYA* AND *PRAKRITI* AND *SANSKRITI*.

Or

Q. WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HUMAN AND NATURE?

ANSWER:

The relationship between human and forest is reflected in the texts written in Sanskrit, Prakrit, Tamil and other languages as well as in the oral tradition. Early Sanskrit texts such as the Vedas make a distinction between what they call *grama* and *aranya*. These categories are generally seen as confrontational, but it is a confrontation which is sometimes used to highlight social perceptions. The *grama* is the settlement and is therefore orderly, disciplined, known, predictable, and the location of what came to be called civilization. It is the place where Vedic rituals can be performed. It is basic to agriculture, urban living, exchange, government, the arts, and the culture of elite groups (often referred to as high culture these days). The *aranya* is the forest, disorderly, unknown, unpredictable, and inhabited by predators and strange creatures, different from those living in the *grama*. This fantasy of associating the unknown with the dark depths of the forest is common to all societies which begin to view the forest from the settlement, as is evident from folk tales and children's stories. As the lifestyle of those who live in the settlement evolves into urban centres, the distancing from the people of the forest becomes greater. They are regarded as less civilized and because their social mores are different, they come to be treated as the backward peoples of society relegated to the lowest rungs of the social hierarchy.

This dichotomy between *grama* and *aranya* is generic to the narratives of the two epics, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*. The forest is the habitat of those who are sent into exile.

Among the more graphic descriptions of the deliberate destruction of the forest and forest life are incidents narrated in the *Mahabharata*. Dusyanta goes on a hunt, deep into the forest which brings him to the *ashrama* where he meets Shakuntala. The hunt is a campaign against nature. He is accompanied by a large band of warriors and they indiscriminately kill the animals. Herds of deer, families of tigers and elephants are mowed down and trees are devastated in this process. The people of the settlement are demonstrating their power over nature. Elsewhere in the epic we are told that when the Pandavas were given half the kingdom, they had to build their capital, Indraprastha. This required the clearing of the forest and in order to do this effectively the god Agni came into action and the forest was burnt. Descriptions of the burning of trees and of animals attempting to flee the flames provide a glimpse of the destruction of the forest prior to establishing a settlement. The *grama* is again projected as triumphant, irrespective of what may have been involved in the building of the new city.

Forest people are said to live on gathering roots and fruit and on hunting wild animals and this is a different culture from the cultivators and traders who constitute the settled society. The life of the forest people is seen as antithetical to the evolution of civilization if civilization is defined as the activities of the settled society. But the concession to the forest was made in various ways. The most obvious is the continuing worship of trees. This was in the form of either the veneration of particular trees, such as *Ficus religiosa* or bodhi tree, which has perhaps the longest continuity of a sacred tree in India. It occurs on the seals from the Indus Civilization, it is associated with Buddhism and is depicted in sculpture from Buddhist places of worship and it continues to be venerated in association with religious shrines of Hindus and Muslims.

Texts associated with Buddhism and Jainism refer to sacred groves, some maintained by the people of a city, others by a monastery, and still others by the wider community who lived on the edge of the forest. Thus the cities of Vaisali, Kushinara, and Champa, all maintained sacred groves.

Some categories of literature are very aware of ecological differences and their links to culture. Thus the *tinnai* concept of Tamil Sangam texts, composed around the start of the Christian era, is a fascinating example of a detailed and early perception of the significance of eco-zones.

Another dichotomy lies in the terms *Prakriti*, that which is natural, and *Sanskriti*, that which is created by man, sell-consciously cultured and to that degree, artificial. This becomes apparent in all activities where things naturally existing are differentiated from those which are artificially created. Here the forest would be the natural unit and the settlement, the created one. Gradually over time, it is the latter, *Sanskriti*, which comes to be equaled with civilization. This dichotomy continues into later literatures in other languages of India, such as the regional languages, Turkish and Persian. The forest is the retreat of recluses and holy men and even the princes of the royal court have to go there to meet them—as many Mughal miniatures depict. This is again a form of turning away from the settlement.

The old ambiguity of using the forest for royal hunts also continues. The dichotomy of Nature and Culture is interestingly reflected in the activity of hunting. Those who live by hunting are treated as uncouth, looked down upon, and subordinated to outcaste status. Yet princes and kings frequently go on hunts, which are meant to be a sport but which can sometimes be described as a ferocious destruction of nature and animals. These activities do not affect the high status of royalty, even when they behave in a manner far more gruesome than the actions of professional hunters.

The earlier suspicion of the forest and contempt for the people of the forest was reinforced by colonial rule, when forests became an area to be exploited for their wealth—particularly timber—and the people were dismissed as backward and primitive in the worst nineteenth century sense of the word.

A quantitative change came about with the colonial decision to build railway lines. This has been seen as one of the most destructive acts in the clearing of forests. The routes were originally located to serve the economic demands of carrying resources to the markets and the ports, to enhance the growth of industrialization. Inevitably the introduction of the railway had other results. Access to new lands through rail communication led to migrations and new settlements.

In looking critically at these changes, the intention is not to suggest that all technical innovation has to be brushed aside. But now that there is a greater awareness of the crucial role of environmental conditions, innovations have to be examined more carefully to assess the alterations that they will introduce in the interaction of man, nature, and culture. The change is no even restricted to the environment, for, altitudes of mind change, as do attitudes to other human beings. If a technological innovation in an area is imperative, then the first concern should be that the least damage be done to those who live there and their environment. The point of having the capacity to plan and to project the effect of a plan is to ensure the minimum devastation.