**Q. DESCRIBE ABOUT HUNTING IN INDIA.**

The history of hunting in India stretches far back to a time when the concept of time itself remained unmeasured and unknown. Historians have recorded the existence of societies that existed before the Dravidians that subsisted on hunting and gathering food.

The Kodas in South India as well as the Baigas and Gonds of the Central Indian plains are said to be the descendants of these early inhabitants of the subcontinent. Cave paintings found in the forests of Mudumalai (in Southern India) as well as in Bhimbhetka (in Central India) depict scenes from a hunt where men put down their quarry with primitive tools such as spears, bows and arrows. Agriculture as a way of life had still not surfaced and hence, it was by hunting and foraging that these people survived.

Societies such as the Indus Valley Civilization, which flourished in the North Western regions of India between 3500-1800 BC were pastoral in nature but animals continued to be hunted for their meat. Archaeological digs have unearthed bones, clay tablets and seals, which confirm the presence wild animals such as the barasingha, one-horned rhino and tiger -many of which satiated man’s appetite.

Hunting for sport became popular with the arrival of the Aryans around 1500 BC. Their fondness for outdoor activities manifested in hunting game, which was a source of food and entertainment. In the early Vedic period, the practice of eating meat was not uncommon and so, animals such as deer were hunted regularly. Likewise, accounts of hunting abound in works of literature such as the Ramayana and Mahabharata. Religious texts such as the ‘Manu Smriti’ would hold the view that hunting for sport denigrated the character and personality of the individual but allowed the consumption of meat that had been purified with holy water. Conversely, other works such as Charaka Samhita and Sushruta Samhita- treatises on medicine, endorse the consumption of the flesh of various animals for the express purpose of remaining healthy.

It was during the rule of the Mauryans (321-185 BC) that conservation of forests and use of forest products came to be regulated officially. Kautilya’s ‘Arthashastra’, which was written during this period, waxes eloquent on the duties of the ‘Protector of Forests’ who was in charge of forest conservation. Conservation would be taken a couple of notches higher during the Mauryan period.

Hunting acquired the element of pageantry as well as the precision and planning of war during the Mughal era between the 1700-mid 1900 AD. Mughals brought these Persian pastimes to India. Royal hunts were either organized at the royal game preserve or in

open forests. The royal hunt was a way to exert dominion over nature. Therefore, cheetahs and lynx were tamed and sent after antelopes while smaller game such as partridge, fowl, hare and other creatures were pinned down as part of the ‘art’ of falconry. Falconry was especially popular during this period, with Emperor Akbar being an ardent proponent.

The British too regarded hunting as a show of masculinity, which was supposed to reflect virtues such as patience, skill and ethics. This destruction was exacerbated during the 19th century when the British more or less controlled the domain of hunting. Following the various uprisings, the peasants and villagers were denied the possession or use of certain implements and weapons; consequently they couldn’t hunt. With the passing of the Indian Forest Act (1878), forests were classified as ‘Reserved’, ‘Protected’ and ‘Village.’ Hunting was banned in most parts except for certain designated shooting blocks, which were accessible with the acquisition of a license that was made available to very few people, most of whom were British.

During the first half of the 20th century, the causes of both conservation and hunting were trumpeted. Laws such as the Wild Birds and Animals Protection Act,1912, Bengal Rhino Preservation Act, 1932 etc began to be promulgated. In 1936, India’s first national park, Hailey National Park (now known as Jim Corbett National Park) was set up.

THUS, hunting has a legacy in India but this legacy has come at a very heavy price. The activity has caused large-scale destruction of wildlife resources, including extinction of many species. Therefore, after Independence, hunting was banned by the government under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, except for specified purposes such as for self-defence, to prevent crop damage, to counter vermin species and for scientific or educational reasons. Hunting for sport is prohibited in India. However, international trade in exotic species has been allowed as per the provisions of Foreign trade (Development and Regulation) Act, 1992, and the EXIM (export-import) policy of India.