

Pastoralists in the Modern World

Pastoralism is a way of keeping animals such as goats, sheep, camels and cattle that involves moving from one place to another in search of water and food. Pastoralism has been important in societies like India and Africa for years.

Pastoral Nomads and their Movements

Nomads are people who do not live in one place, but move from one area to another to earn their living. Pastoral communities are mainly found in mountainous regions.

Pastoral Communities in the Mountains

Gujjar Bakarwals, Gaddi Shepherds, Bhotiyas, Sherpas and Kinnauris are pastoral communities found in the mountains.

Gujjar Bakarwals

- Gujjar Bakarwals migrated and settled in **Jammu and Kashmir** in the 19th century in search of pastures for their goat and sheep.
- They move annually between their summer and winter grazing grounds in groups known as *Kafila*.
- In winter, when the mountains were covered with snow, they lived with their herds in the low hills of **Siwalik range**. Here, the dry scrub forests provided pastures for their herds.
- In summer (by the end of April), they crossed the Pir Panjal passes and entered Kashmir valley. The variety of sprouted grass here provided rich nutritious food for their animals.

Chapter Syllabus

- Pastoral Nomads and their Movements
- Colonial Rule and Pastoral Life
- Pastoralism in Africa

- By the end of September, they used to start moving again for their downward journey.
- The Gujar cattle herders live in the **mandaps**, made of ringal (a hill bamboo) and grass from the **Bugyals**¹.
- The mandaps were also used as work places. Here they used to make ghee which they sell. These mandaps are situated at a height of about 10,000 to 11,000 feet, as buffaloes can not climb any higher.

Gaddi Shepherds

- This a pastoral community of Himachal Pradesh. It performs a similar cycle of seasonal movements like Gujar Bakarwals.
- During winter, Gaddi Shepherds grazed their flocks in scrub forests of the low hills of Siwalik range. By April, they moved North and spent the summer in Lahul and Spiti.
- When the snow melted on the high mountains, they moved onto higher mountain meadows (*dham*).
- By September, they began their return movement. On the way, they stopped once in the villages of Lahul and Spiti, reap their summer harvest and sow their winter crop.
- Further down, they stopped to shear their sheep. The sheep are bathed and cleaned before wool is cut. Uhl valley near Palampur in Himachal Pradesh is one of the areas where shearing of wool is being done. Then, they further moved to their winter base i.e. the Siwalik hills. Next April, once again they began their march with their cattle to the summer meadows.
- Further to the East in Garhwal and Kumaon, the Gujar cattle herders came down to the dry forests of the **Bhabar** in the winter and went up to the high meadows—the **Bugyals** in summer.

Bhotiyas, Sherpas and Kinnauris

Many pastoralists of Himalayas like the Bhotiyas, Sherpas and Kinnauris also follow cyclic movement between summers and winters in search of pastures.

They all had to adjust to seasonal changes and make proper use of available pastures.

Bugyals These are vast natural pastures on the high mountains, above 12,000 feet. They are under snow in the winter and come to life after April. At this time, the entire mountainside is covered with a variety of grasses, roots and herbs. By monsoon, these pastures are thick with vegetation and carpeted with wild flowers.

Kharif The autumn crop, usually harvested between September and October.

Rabi The spring crop, usually harvested after March.

stubble Lower ends of grain stalks left in the ground after harvesting.

When the pasture exhausted or becomes unusable in one place, they moved their herds and flock to new areas. This continuous movement of the pastoralists allowed the pastures to recover.

On the Plateaus, Plains and Deserts

Dhangars, Gollas, Kurumas, Kurubas, Banjaras, Raikas and Maldharis are the pastoral communities found in the plateaus, plains and deserts of India.

Dhangars

- Dhangars were an important pastoral community of Maharashtra. In the early 20th century, their population was more than 4 lakhs.
- They were mainly shepherds, blanket weavers and buffalo herders.
- The Dhangar shepherds stayed in the Central Plateau of Maharashtra during the monsoon. This was a semi-arid region with low rainfall and poor soil which was covered with thorny scrub. Dry crops like bajra were grown here.
- In the monsoon, Central plateau tract become a vast grazing ground for their cattle.
- By October, the Dhangars harvested the bajra and started to move towards Konkan in West. Here, they were welcomed by the Konkani peasants.
- After the harvest of **kharif**² crop, the fields had to be fertilised and made ready for the **rabi**³ harvest. Dhangar cattle manured the fields and fed on the **stubble**⁴.
- The Konkani peasants also gave supplies of rice to the shepherds when they returned back on the onset of monsoon.

The Gollas, Kurumas and Kurubas

- These are important Pastoral communities of the dry Central Plateau of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.
- The Gollas herded cattle. The Kurumas and Kurubas reared sheep and goats and sold woven blankets.
- These pastoralists lived near the forests, cultivated small patches of land, engaged in a variety of small trades and took care of their herds.

- The movement of these pastoralists depended on monsoon and dry season. In the dry season they moved to the coastal areas and left when the rains came.
- At this time, other herds, except the buffaloes who liked the wet conditions, shifted to the dry plateau.

Banjaras

- They were an important group of graziers, which were found in the villages of **Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra**.
- In search of good pasture land for their cattle, they moved over long distances.
- They sold their plough cattle and other goods to villagers in exchange of grain and fodder.

Raikas

- The Raikas lived in the deserts of Rajasthan. Due to the small and uncertain rainfall, harvest was irregular in this region. So, they combined cultivation with pastoralism.
- During the monsoon, the Raikas of Barmer, Jaisalmer, Jodhpur and Bikaner stayed in their home villages where pasture was available.
- One group of Raikas were known as **Maru Raikas** who reside in the Thar desert near Jaisalmer, Rajasthan. Their settlement is called a *dhandi*.
- Maru Raikas herded camels and another group reared sheep and goat.
- Maru Raikas display their expertise in training their camels.

Maldharis

- The Maldhari herders live in the Rann of Kutch. They also move in search of pastures.
- Their movement depend upon availability of rainfall and pastures.

Factors that Contributed to Movement of Pastoralists

- Pastoralists had to judge how long the herds could stay in one area and know where they could find water and pasture.
- They needed to calculate the timing of their movements and ensure that they could move through different territories.
- They had to set up a relationship with farmers on the way, so that the herds could graze in harvested fields and manured the soil.

- They combined a range of different activities viz, cultivation, trade and herding to make their living.

Check Point 01

- 1 Gaddi shepherds belong to which state?
- 2 Vast meadows in the high mountains is known as
- 3 Name a pastoral community of the dry Central plateau of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.
- 4 The pastoral communities who have combined cultivation with pastoralism are
- 5 Name the pastoral community from Maharashtra.

Colonial Rule and Pastoral Life

Under colonial rule the life of pastoralists changed dramatically. The Colonial Government made different laws for pastoralists.

Their grazing grounds shrank, movements were regulated, they had to pay high tax, their agricultural stock declined and their trades and crafts were affected adversely.

Wasteland Rules and Forest Acts

- The colonial power believed that all grazing lands were wastelands as these were unproductive.
- As land revenue was one of the main sources of their income, they wanted to expand cultivation which could increase the revenue collection.
- From the mid-nineteenth century, wasteland rules were enacted in various parts of our country.
- According to these rules, uncultivated lands were taken over and given to selected individuals whom were given different concessions for settlement. Some were even made as village headmen. In most areas, the lands which were taken over were the grazing lands used by the pastoralists.
- The Forest Acts made by the British Government changed the lives of pastoralists.
- Some forests which produced commercially valuable timber like *deodar* or *sal* were declared as 'reserved'. In the reserved forests, no pastoral activity was allowed.
- Other forests considered as 'protected' where some customary grazing rights of pastoralists were granted, but their movements were strictly restricted.
- The colonial officials thought that grazing destroyed the saplings and shoots which prevented new trees from growing.

Criminal Tribes Act

- British officials were very suspicious of nomadic people. They wanted to rule over a settled population which could be easily identified and controlled.
- In 1871, the British Government in India passed the Criminal Tribes Act. This act classified communities of craftsmen, traders and pastoralists as **Criminal Tribes**.
- As a result of this Act, these communities were expected to live only in notified village settlements and they were not allowed to move without a permit.

Imposition of Grazing Tax

- In the mid-19th century, Grazing Tax was introduced by British Government in most pastoral lands of India.
- In order to increase income, the government imposed tax even on animals. The tax on the cattle was increased and the system of collection was made increasingly efficient.
- In the decades between the 1850s and 1880s, the right to collect the tax was carried out by contractors. By the 1880s, the government began collecting taxes directly from the pastoralists. To enter a grazing tract, the pastoralist had to show his pass and pay the tax.

Effects of Colonial Changes on the Lives of Pastoralists

Wasteland Rules, Forest Acts, Criminal Tribes Act and imposition of grazing tax affected the lives of pastoralists badly. The effects were

- These measures led to the serious shortage of pastures as grazing lands were turned into cultivable land.
- The shepherds and cattle herds could no longer freely graze their cattle in the forests.
- Nomadic people had to move frequently from one place to another in search of pastures.
- Animal stock was declined as underfed cattle died in large numbers during scarcities and famines.

Ways by which Pastoralists Cope with these Changes

Pastoralists coped up with the changes in a variety of ways

- Some pastoralists reduced the number of cattle in their herds, since there was not enough pasture to feed large numbers.
- Some pastoralists discovered new pastures when movement to old grazing grounds became difficult.

- Some richer pastoralists began buying land and settling down, giving up their nomadic life.
- Many poor pastoralists borrowed money from moneylenders to survive. Some of them became labourers, working on fields or in small towns.

In spite of such difficulties, pastoralist communities still exist and are considered the most important form of life ecologically.

Check Point 02

- By which act many pastoral communities were classified as criminal tribes?
- From which century wasteland rules were enacted in our country?
- The Forest Act made by the British changed the life of?
- Which forests are producing deodar or sal?
- _____ act classified communities of craftsmen, traders and pastoralists as Criminal Tribes.

Pastoralism in Africa

Africa is a country where over half the world's pastoral population lives. Even now, over 22 million Africans depend on some forms of pastoral activities for their livelihood.

The different pastoral communities of Africa are Bedouins, Berbers, Maasai, Somali, Boran and Turkana. Most of them lived in semi arid grasslands where rainfed agriculture is difficult.

Pastoralists of Africa raise cattle, camels, goats, sheep and donkeys. They sell milk, meat, animal skin and wool. Some of them earn through trade and transport.

Maasai Community

The Maasai are nomadic and pastoral people who depend on milk and meat for subsistence. The title Maasai derives from the word 'Maa'. Maa-sai means 'My People'. Maasai believed that tilling the land for crop farming is a crime against nature.

Effect of Colonial Rule on Maasai Community

Maasai lost their grazing lands in the following ways

- Before colonial rule, Maasailand stretched over a vast area from North Kenya to the steppes of Northern Tanzania.
- In the late 19th century, European imperial powers divided the region into different colonies.

Pastoralists in the Modern World

- After colonial rule, best grazing lands of Maasai community were gradually taken over for white settlement and the Maasai were pushed into a small area in South Kenya and North Tanzania.
- From the late 19th century, the British Colonial Government in East Africa also encouraged local peasant communities to expand cultivation. As cultivation expanded, pasturelands were turned into cultivated fields.
- The Maasai community lost about 60% of their land and were confined to an arid zone with uncertain rainfall and poor pastures.
- In 1885, Maasailand was cut into half with an International boundary between British Kenya and German Tanganyika.
- Large areas of grazing land were turned into game reserve like the Maasai Mara and Samburu National Park in Kenya and Serengeti Park in Tanzania.

The effects of turning grazing lands into cultivated field and the Maasais losing their lands were as follows

- Without grass of pasture lands, livestock (cattle, goats and sheep) were malnourished, which meant less food available for Maasai people and their families.
- The loss of finest grazing lands and water resources created a serious problem for the pastoralists to feed their cattle.
- The Kilimanjaro Water Project cuts through the communities of the area near Amboseli National Park but the villagers are barred from using the water for irrigation or for livestock.

The Borders are closed

- Pastoral groups were forced to live within the boundaries of special reserves.
- They were not allowed to move out with their stock without special permits.
- They were not even allowed to trade and enter the markets in white areas.
- These restrictions adversely affected both their pastoral and trading activities.
- Earlier, pastoralists looked after animal herds as well as traded in various products. However, during colonial trade, pastoralists could do trading but they were subject to various restrictions.

When Pastures Dry

- When pastures dry the Maasais were forced to live in drought prone areas, as a result large numbers of Maasai cattle died of starvation and disease.

- There was a severe decline of the animal stock of Maasais. Over half of the cattle in the Maasai reserves died after two years of serious drought i.e. 1933 and 1934.

Not All Were Equally Affected

The colonial rules had unequal effects on elders and warrior groups of Maasai society.

The Elders formed the ruling group and met in periodic councils to decide on the affairs of the community and settle disputes.

The Warriors consisted of young people, mainly responsible for the protection of the tribe. The Warriors defended the community and organised cattle raids.

It is through raids that power of different pastoral groups are ascertained. The young man proved their manliness by capturing the cattle of other pastoral groups.

To administer the Maasai tribe, the Britishers took a series of measures. They appointed Chiefs of different sub-groups of Maasai, who were responsible for the affairs of the tribe.

The British imposed various restrictions on raiding and warfare. Thus, the traditional authority of both Elders and Warriors was negatively affected.

The chiefs appointed by the Colonial Government accumulated wealth over time. They started to live in towns and involved in trades. Their family stayed back in villages to look after lands and animals.

The chiefs managed to survive the destructions of war and drought, as they had both pastoral and non-pastoral income.

The poor pastoralists did not have the resources to survive in bad times and thus, they were compelled to do odd jobs, like charcoal burners, workers in road and building construction, etc.

The social change in Maasai society happened at two levels.

- First, the traditional difference based on age between the Elders and Warrior was disturbed.
- Second, a new distinction between the wealthy and poor pastoralists was developed.

Rituals to become Maasai Warrior

Maasai young men go through an elaborate ritual before they become warriors. They must travel throughout the section's region for about four months, ending with an event where they started to live in house surrounded with some land for cultivation and became a raider who captured cattle of other groups.

During the ceremony, boys dress in loincloth and dance non-stop throughout the day. This ceremony is the transition into a new age. Girls are not required to go through such a ritual.

Conclusion

Pastoral communities in different parts of the world are affected in a variety of different ways by changes in the modern world. New laws and new borders affect the patterns of their movement.

Pastoralists adapt to these new changes in the following ways:

- They change the path of their annual movement.
- They reduce their cattle numbers.
- They pressure for rights to enter new areas.
- They exert political pressure on the government for relief, subsidy and other forms of support.
- They demand a right in the management of forests and water resources.
- According to environmentalists and economists, pastoral nomadism is a form of life that is perfectly suited to many hilly and dry regions of the world.

Check Point 03

1. Name some pastoral communities of Africa.
2. Which area was regarded as Maasai land before colonial rule?
3. Where did the Maasai cattle herders live?
4. In pre-colonial period, the Maasai society was divided into two categories viz. _____ and _____.
5. _____ is a form of life that is perfectly suited to many hilly and dry regions of the world.

TimeLine

Year/Period	Event
to 19th century	Gujjar Bakarwals migrated to Jammu and Kashmir in search of pastures. Gaddi shepherds from Jammu and Kashmir came up to hills.
In mid-19th century	Grazing Tax was introduced.
1850s	Right to collect tax auctioned out to contractors.
1871	British Government in India passed Criminal Tribes Act.
1885	Maasailand was cut into half with an international boundary between British Kenya and German Tanganyika.
1919	Tanganyika came under British rule.
1928	Report of Royal Commission on agriculture.
1933-34	Severe drought in Maasailand.
1947	Raikas could not move to Sindh anymore after independence so migrated to Haryana.
1961	Tanganyika attained independence.
1964	Tanganyika united with Zanzibar to form Tanzania.

SUMMARY

- Pastoralism is a way of keeping animals and moving from one place to another in search of water and food.
- Gujjar Bakarwals migrated in 19th century to Kashmir crossing Pir Panjal. They shifted their grazing lands from highlands in summer to lower hills of Nowshir range in winter.
- Gaddi shepherds of Himachal Pradesh like Gujjar Bakarwals used to come down to the dry forest of Bhamburda in winter and went up to the high mountains of Buggala in summer.
- Dhungars of Central Plateau Maharashtra were mainly sheepherds, blanket weavers and bridle makers.
- Gollis, Karamas and Kurkhas are cattle herders of dry Central Plateau of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.
- Barmisra tribes were found in villages of Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra, who also moved over long distance in search of pastures.
- Raikas of Rajasthan combined cultivation with pastoralism as there was small and uncertain rainfall and the harvest was irregular in districts of Rajasthan.
- Criminal Tribes Act of 1871 classified many communities of craftsmen, traders and pastoralists as Criminal tribes.
- British Government introduced Grazing Tax, which was auctioned out to contractors.
- The changes brought by laws of British Government reduced available area for pastures. Thus, continuous grazing in a piece of land degraded the quality of pasture.
- To adapt to the changing circumstances, pastoralists reduced the number of cattle, discovered new pastures. Some even bought land and started settling down.
- The Maasai community lost about 60% of their land and was confined to arid zones due to Colonial laws, even though they dominated in economic and political fields in pre-colonial times.
- Maasai society was divided into Elders and Warriors.
- Pastoral communities are greatly affected by the new laws and new borders of the countries. But they are not redundant communities rather recognised as the perfectly suitable communities for many hilly and dry regions by environmentalists and economists.