

CBSE Class 9 Social Science History Notes

Chapter 5 - Pastoralists in the Modern World

Pastoralists in the Modern World chapter discusses nomadic pastoralists. Nomads are people who do not live in one place but move from one area to another to earn their living. In this chapter, you also read how pastoralism has been influential in societies like India and Africa, the way colonialism impacted their lives, and how they have coped with the pressures of modern society. The chapter will firstly focus on India and then Africa. CBSE Class 9 Social Science History notes of Chapter 5 help students to save their precious time while preparing for their exam. With the help of these notes, students can have a complete revision of the entire chapter quickly just before the exam. These notes are prepared according to the syllabus of CBSE Class 9 History.

Pastoral Nomads and their Movements

In the Mountains

In the nineteenth century, Gujjar Bakarwals of Jammu and Kashmir migrated to the mountains in search of pastures for their animals. During the winter, they moved to low hills of the Siwalik range. By the end of April, they began their northern march for their summer grazing grounds. This journey is known as a kafila. Again, they started their march by the end of September, this time back to their winter base. The Gaddi shepherds of Himachal Pradesh also had a similar cycle of seasonal movement.

The Gujjar cattle herds from the further east came down to the dry forests of the bhabar in the winter and went up to the high meadows – the bugyals – in summer. This pattern of cyclical movement between summer and winter pastures was typical of many pastoral communities of the Himalayas, including the Bhotiyas, Sherpas and Kinnauris.

On the Plateaus, Plains and Deserts

Pastoralists were also found in the plateaus, plains and deserts of India. In Maharashtra, Dhangars were an important pastoral community who were mostly, shepherds, blanket weavers, and buffalo herders. During the monsoon, they used to stay in the central plateau of Maharashtra. By October the Dhangars harvest their bajra and move to the west. After they reached Konkan, they were welcomed by Konkani peasants. After the kharif harvest was cut, the fields had to be fertilised and made ready for the rabi harvest.

In the state of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, the dry central plateau was covered with stone and grass, inhabited by cattle, goats and shepherders called Gollas herded cattle. The Kurumas and Kurubas reared sheep and goats and sold woven blankets. During the dry season, they moved to the coastal tracts and left when the rains came. Banjaras were yet another well-known group of graziers, found in the villages of Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra.

Raikas lived in the deserts of Rajasthan. During the monsoons, the Raikas of Barmer, Jaisalmer, Jodhpur and Bikaner stayed in their villages, where pasture was available. By October, they moved out in search of other pasture and water and returned again during the next monsoon.

Pastoral groups life was sustained by a host of factors. They had to judge how long the herds could stay in one area, and 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

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up a relationship with farmers on the way so that the herds could graze in harvested fields and manure the soil.

Colonial Rule and Pastoral Life

Pastoralists life changed completely, under colonial rule. Their movements were regulated, grazing grounds shrank, and the revenue they had to pay increased. Even their agricultural stock declined and their trades and crafts were adversely affected. It happened due to the following reasons:

1. Land revenue was one of the main sources for finance of the colonial state. So, the colonial government wanted to transform all grazing lands into cultivated farms through which they could expand cultivation and increase its revenue collection. All uncultivated land was seen as 'waste land'. From the mid-nineteenth century, Waste Land Rules were enacted in various parts of the country. Under these rules, uncultivated lands were taken over and given to select individuals.
2. By the mid-nineteenth century, various Forest Acts were being enacted in different provinces. According to these Acts, forests which produced commercially valuable timber like deodar or sal were declared 'Reserved' and other forests were classified as 'Protected'. These Forest Acts changed the lives of pastoralists as they were prevented from entering many forests.
3. British officials were suspicious of nomadic people. The colonial government wanted to rule over a settled population. In 1871, the colonial government in India passed the Criminal Tribes Act. By this Act many communities of craftsmen, traders and pastoralists were classified as Criminal Tribes. They were stated to be criminals by nature and birth.
4. Taxation was imposed on land, on canal water, on salt, on trade goods, and even on animals. In most pastoral tracts of India, grazing tax was introduced in the mid-nineteenth century. In the decades between the 1850s and 1880s, the right to collect the tax was auctioned out to contractors. By the 1880s the government began collecting taxes directly from the pastoralists.

How Did these Changes Affect the Lives of Pastoralists?

Due to these measures, there was a shortage of pastures. When grazing lands were taken over and turned into cultivated fields, the available area of pastureland declined. As pasturelands disappeared under the plough, the existing animal stock had to feed on whatever grazing land remained. When restrictions were imposed on pastoral movements, grazing lands came to be continuously used and the quality of pastures declined. This, in turn, created a further shortage of forage for animals and the deterioration of animal stock.

How Did the Pastoralists Cope with these Changes?

Pastoralists reacted to these changes in various ways. They reduced the number of cattle and some discovered new pastures. After 1947, the new political boundaries between India and Pakistan stopped the camel and sheep herding Raikas, to graze their camels on the banks of the Indus. Over the years, some richer pastoralists bought land and settled down, giving up their nomadic life. Some became peasants by cultivating land, others indulged in trading. On the other hand, poor pastoralists, borrowed money from moneylenders to survive. They still continued to survive and in many regions, their numbers have expanded. In many other parts of the world, new laws and settlement patterns forced pastoral communities to alter their lives.

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Pastoralism in Africa

In Africa, even today, over 22 million Africans depend on some form of pastoral activity for their livelihood. Like pastoralists in India, the lives of African pastoralists have changed dramatically over the colonial and post-colonial periods.

Where have the Grazing Lands Gone?

Before colonial times, Maasailand stretched over a vast area from north Kenya to the steppes of northern Tanzania. In 1885, it was cut into half with an international boundary between British Kenya and German Tanganyika. After the cut, the best grazing lands 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 nineteenth century, the British colonial government in east Africa encouraged local peasant communities to expand cultivation. In pre-colonial times, the Maasai pastoralists had dominated their agricultural neighbours both economically and politically. The loss of the finest grazing lands and water resources created pressure on the small area of land that the Maasai were confined within.

The Borders are Closed

In the nineteenth century, African pastoralists could move over vast areas in search of pastures. But, from the late nineteenth century, the colonial government began imposing various restrictions on their mobility. White settlers and European colonists saw pastoralists as dangerous and savage. The new territorial boundaries and restrictions imposed on them suddenly changed the lives of pastoralists, which adversely affected both their pastoral and trading activities.

When Pastures Dry

Pastoralists' lives were affected by drought everywhere. That is why, traditionally, pastoralists move from place to place to survive bad times and avoid crises. But from the colonial period, the Maasai were bound down to a fixed area, confined within a reserve, and prohibited from moving in search of pastures. As the area of grazing lands shrank, the adverse effect of the droughts increased in intensity.

Not All were Equally Affected

In Maasailand, not all pastoralists were equally affected by the changes in the colonial period. In pre-colonial times Maasai society was divided into two social categories – elders and warriors. 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 younger people, mainly responsible for the protection of the tribe and defended the community and organised cattle raids.

The British introduced a series of measures that had important implications, to administer the affairs of the Maasai. They appointed chiefs of different sub-groups of Maasai, who were made responsible for the affairs of the tribe. Restrictions were also imposed on raiding and warfare. These chiefs managed to survive the devastations of war and drought.

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But the life history of the poor pastoralists was different. In times of war and famine, they lost nearly everything. They had to go looking for work in the towns. Some used to work as charcoal burners, and some did odd jobs to earn their living.

The social changes in Maasai society occurred at two levels. First, the traditional difference based on age, between the elders and warriors, was disturbed, though it did not break down entirely. Second, a new distinction between the wealthy and poor pastoralists developed.

Conclusion

Pastoral communities in different parts of the world are affected in different ways by changes in the modern world. Their pattern of movement was affected by new laws and new borders. Pastoralists find it difficult to move in search of pastures and grazing becomes difficult. During the time of drought, cattle die in large numbers. Yet, pastoralists do adapt to new times. They change the paths of their annual movement, reduce their cattle numbers, press for rights to enter new areas, exert political pressure on the government for relief, subsidy and other forms of support and demand a right in the management of forests and water resources.