

Pastoralists in the Modern World

Pastoralism has been important in societies like India and Africa for years. Pastoralism is a way of keeping animals such as cattle, sheep, that involves moving from one place to another to find water and food. Nomads are people who do not live in one place but move from one area to another to earn their living.

Movement Of Pastoral Nomads In Mountains

Mainly pastoral communities are found in mountainous regions.

Gujjar Bakarwals

Gujjar Bakarwals of Jammu and Kashmir are great herders of goat and sheep. Many of them migrated here in the 19th century in search of pastures for their cattle and settled here.

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. They crossed the Pir Panjal passes and entered Kashmir valley.

In summer, when the snow melted in the mountains and mountainsides were left lush green, they moved onto high levels. The variety of sprouted grass provided rich nutritious forage for their animals.

By the end of September, they used to start moving again for their downward journey back to their winter base. Several households came together for this journey forming a kafil.

Mandaps of Ringal:

The Gujjar cattle herders live in the mandaps, made of ringal—a hill bamboo—and grass from the Bugyal. A mandap was also a workplace. Here, the Gujjar used to make ghee which they ' took down for sale. In recent years, they have begun to transport the milk directly in buses and trucks. These mandaps are at about 10,000 to 11,000 feet, as buffaloes cannot climb any higher.

Gaddi Shepherds:

Gaddi shepherd is a pastoral community of Himachal Pradesh. They had a similar cycle of seasonal movements like Gujjar Bakarwals of Jammu and Kashmir.

Movement of Gaddi Shepherds:

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. Further to the East, in Garhwal and Kumaun, the Gujjar cattle herders came down to the dry forests of the bhabhar in the winter and went up to the high meadows-the bugyals in summer. Many of the Gujjar cattle herders were originally from Jammu and Kashmir and came to the uphill in the 19th century in search of good pastures. When the snow melted on the high mountains, they moved onto higher mountain meadows (dhars). By September, they began their return

movement. On the way, they stopped once again in the villages of Lahul and Spiti, reaping their summer harvest and sowing their winter crop.

On the way down, they stop for a while to have their sheep sheared. The sheep are bathed and cleaned before the wool is cut valley near Palampur in Himachal Pradesh is one of the areas where shearing of wool is being done. Then, they further descend to their winter base the Siwalik hills.

Bhotiyas, Sherpas and Kinnauris Many pastoralists of the Himalayas like the Bhotiyas, Sherpas and Kinnauris also followed 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. When the pasture was exhausted or 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

The pastoral communities are also 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. Dhangars stayed in the central plateau of Maharashtra during the monsoon. In the monsoon, this track became a vast grazing ground for their flocks.

By October, the Dhangars harvested the bajra and started to move towards West. After a month, reached Konkan which had high rainfall and rich soil. Here, they were welcomed by the Konkani peasants.

After the harvest of the Kharif crop, the fields had to be fertilised and made ready for the rabi harvest. Dhangar flocks manured the fields and fed on the stubble. The Konkani peasants also gave supplies of rice which the shepherds took back to the plateau where grain was scarce.

With the onset of monsoon, they returned to their settlements on the dry plateau as sheep could not tolerate the wet monsoon conditions.

The Gollas, Kurumas and Kurubas The Gollas, Kurumas and Kurubas are the 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.

They 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 tracts and left when the rains came. Only buffaloes liked the swampy, wet conditions of the coastal areas during the monsoon months. Other herds had to be shifted to the dry plateau at that time.

Movement Of Pastoral Nomads On The Plateaus, Plains And Deserts

Bhabhar A dry forested area below the foothills of Garhwal and Kumaun.

Bugyals Bugyals 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.

Banjara Tribes

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.

Ratios

They lived in the deserts of Rajasthan. Before 1947, they used to migrate to Sindh and grazed their animals on the banks of the Indus. But after partition, when Sindh became a part of Pakistan, this activity was restricted. Now, they started migrating to Haryana where sheep can graze on agricultural fields after the harvest. The rainfall in the region was less and uncertain. 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. By October, when those grazing grounds were exhausted, they moved out in search of new pastures. They returned in their home villages during the next monsoon.

Maru Raikas

One group of Raikas were known as Maru Raikas who reside in the Thar desert near Jaisalmer, Rajasthan. Their settlement is called a dhandi. They herded camels and another group reared sheep and goat. Maru Raikas know the history of their community from a genealogist. The genealogist is the one, who recounts the history of tribes. Such oral traditions give pastoral groups their own sense of identity. These oral traditions can tell us about how a group looks at its own past.

Camel Fairs

The camel fairs are held at different places of Rajasthan such as Pushkar, Balotra, etc. Camel herders come to the fair to sell and buy camels. The Maru Raikas also display their expertise in training their camels. Horses from Gujarat are also brought for sale at this fair.

Factors that Contributed to the Movement of Pastoralists

The life of pastoral groups is not easy. It was sustained by careful consideration of a host of factors. They 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.

Customary Rights Rights that are used by people by custom and tradition.

They had to set up a relationship with farmers on the way so that the herds could graze in harvested fields and manure the soil. They combined a range of different activities viz., cultivation, trade and herding to make their living.

Colonial Rule And Pastoral Life

The Colonial Government made different laws from time to time which severely affected the lives of the pastoralists. Their grazing grounds shrank, their movements were regulated, they had to pay high revenue, their agricultural stock declined and their trades and crafts were also affected adversely.

The colonial power believed that all grazing lands were wastelands because they were unproductive. These lands did not produce revenue or agricultural products. From the mid-19th century, Wasteland Rules were enacted in various parts of our country.

Wasteland Rules and Forest Acts

The government granted selected individuals various concessions and encouraged to settle them in these areas. Even some of them were made as headmen of villages. In most areas, the lands taken over were actually grazing tracts used regularly by pastoralists as their customary rights.

They believed that grazing destroyed the saplings and young shoots of trees that germinated on the forest floor. The herds crushed the saplings and munched away shoots. These prevented new trees to grow. 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 and in the protected forests their activity was strictly restricted. In the protected forests, they needed a permit for entry. The permit specified the timing of their entry and departure. If they overstayed there, they were liable to fines.

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. By this act, many communities of craftsmen, traders and pastoralists were classified as Criminal Tribes.

They were stated to be criminal by nature and birth. 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. The village police also kept a strict watch on them.

The imposition of Grazing Tax

In the mid—19th century, Grazing Tax was introduced by the British Government in most pastoral lands of India. In order to increase income, the government imposed tax even on animals.

The tax per head of cattle went up rapidly and the system of the collection was made increasingly efficient. In the decades between the 1850s and 1880s, the right to collect the tax was carried out by contractors. These contractors tried to extract high tax so that they could earn the profit. By the 1880s, the government began collecting taxes directly from the pastoralists.

Each of them was given a pass. The pastoralists had to pay tax on every animal they grazed in the pastures. To enter a grazing tract, the pastoralist had to show the pass and pay the tax.

Report by the Royal Commission on Agriculture

The Royal Commission on Agriculture in 1928 reported that the extent of the area available for grazing has gone down tremendously with the extension of the area under cultivation because of increasing population, an extension of irrigation facilities, acquiring the pastures for government purposes, e.g. defence, industries and agricultural experimental farms. Now breeders find it difficult to raise large herds. Thus, their earnings have gone down. The quality of their livestock has deteriorated, dietary standards have fallen and indebtedness has increased.

Effects of Colonial Changes on the Lives of Pastoralists:

Wasteland Rules, Forest Acts, Criminal Tribes Act and the 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.
- The animal stock declined as underfed cattle died in large numbers during scarcities and famines.

Ways by which Pastoralists Cope with the Changes Pastoralists coped up with the changes in a variety of ways

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

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.

They raise cattle, camels, goats, sheep and donkeys. They sell milk, meat, animal skin and wool. Some of them earn through trade and transport. Others combine pastoral activity with agriculture field and still, others do a variety of odd jobs.

The life of 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'. Maai-sai means 'My People'.

Before colonial rules, 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.

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 southern Kenya and northern Tanzania.

By changing conditions, the Maasai were forced to agriculture. They started growing crops such as maize, rice, potatoes, cabbage. Maasai believed that tilling the land for crop farming is a crime against nature. Once you cultivate the land, it is no longer suitable for grazing.

Effects of Colonial Rule on Maasai Community

Maasais Lost their Grazing Lands

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 pre-colonial times, the Maasai pastoralists had dominated their agricultural neighbours both economically and politically. By the end of colonial rule, the situation became the opposite. In 1885, Maasailand was cut into half with an international boundary between British Kenya and German Tanganyika.

They lost their grassing lands in the following ways

Large areas of grazing land were turned into game reserves like the Maasai Mara and Samburu National Park in Kenya and Serengeti Park in Tanzania. The Serengeti National Park has created over 14,760 km of Maasai grazing land.

Without grass, livestock (cattle, goats and sheep) were malnourished, which meant less food available for families and their children.

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 loss of the finest grazing lands and water resources created a serious problem for the pastoralists. Feeding the cattle became a persistent problem due to the unavailability of enough grazing lands.

Effect of Closed Borders on Pastoralists

Pastoral groups were forced to live within the confines of special reserves. The boundaries of these reserves became the limits within which they could now move.

They were not allowed to move out with their stock without special permits. They were not even allowed to enter the markets in white areas. They were prohibited from participating in any form of trade.

The new territorial boundaries and restrictions imposed on them suddenly changed the lives of pastoralists. This adversely affected both their pastoral and trading activities. Earlier, pastoralists not only looked after animal herds but traded in various products. The restrictions under colonial rule did not entirely stop their trading activities but they were now subject to various restrictions.

Effect of Dried Pastures on Maasais

The Maasais were forced to live in semi-arid tracts prone to frequent drought. Since they could not shift their cattle to places where pastures were available, large numbers of Maasai cattle died of starvation and disease in these years of drought.

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 Warrior class proved their manliness by raiding the cattle of other pastoral groups and participating in wars.

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 had regular income with which, they could buy animals, goods and lands. They lent money to poor neighbours who needed it to pay taxes. They started to live in towns and involved in trades. Their family stayed back in villages to look after lands and animals. These rich chiefs managed to survive devastations due to war and drought.

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

Rituals to become Maasai Warrior

Even today, Maasai young men go through an elaborate ritual before they become warriors,

although actually it is no longer common. They must travel throughout the section's region for about 4 months, ending with an event where they run to the homestead and enter with an attitude of a raider.

During the ceremony, boys dress in loose clothing 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.

Kaokoland Herders of Namibia

In Namibia, in South-West Africa, the Kaokoland herders traditionally moved between Kaokoland and nearby Ovamboland and they sold skin, meat and other trade products in neighbouring markets. All this was stopped with the new system of territorial boundaries that restricted movements between regions.

In most places in colonial Africa, the police were given instructions to keep a watch on the movements of pastoralists and prevent them from entering white areas.

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.

They change the path of their annual movement, reduce their cattle numbers, press for rights to enter new areas. They 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.

They are not people who have no place in the modern world. Environmentalists and economists have increasingly come to recognise that pastoral nomadism is a form of life that is perfectly suited to many hilly and dry regions of the world.

Pastoralism is a way of keeping animals and moving from one place to another to find water and food.

Gujjar Bakarwals migrated in the 19th century to Kashmir crossing Pir Panjal. They shifted their grazing lands from highlands in summer to lower hills of Siwalik range in winter. They used to move to form kafila.

Gaddi shepherds of Himachal Pradesh like Gujjar Bakarwals used to come down to the dry forest of bhabhar in winter and went up to the high meadows of bugyals in summer.

Shearing of wool is being done at Uhl valley near Palampur in Himachal Pradesh.

To adjust to seasonal changes and make proper use of available pastures Bhotiyas, Sherpas and Kinnauris also involved in cyclic movement between summer and winter.

Dhangars of Central Plateau, Maharashtra were mainly shepherds, blanket weavers and buffalo herders. After harvesting bajra, they move towards Konkan to reap benefits of high rainfall and rich soil.

Gollas, Kurumas and kurubas are cattle herders of dry Central Plateau of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.

Cyclic movement of Pastoralist communities in Plateaus, Plains and desert was defined by alteration of monsoon and dry season.

Banjara 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 had to combine cultivation with pastoralism when Sindh became part of Pakistan after 1947. Maru Raikas of Jaisalmer lived in a settlement called dhandi and know about their community from a genealogist.

Camel fairs were held in Pushkar, Balotra where Maru Raikas display their expertise in training camels.

Pastoralists had to set up a relationship with farmers and combined a range of different activities like cultivation, trade and herding.

Colonial Government considered that all grazing lands were unproductive. Hence, they categorised forest into the reserved forest (no pastoral activity allowed) and protected forest (permit system prevailed). These laws affected the customary rights of the traditional pastoralist.

Criminal Tribe 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 the available area for pastureland. Thus continuous grazing in the same piece of land degraded the quality of pasture.

To adapt to the changing circumstances, pastoralists reduced the number of cattle, discovered new pasture. Some even bought land and started settling down.

Pastoralism is still considered an ecologically most viable form of life.

Africa houses over half of the world's pastoral population. Pastoral communities like Bedouins, Berbers, Maasai, Somali, Boran and Tukana lived here.

The Maasai community lost about 60% of their land and were confined to arid zones due to colonial laws, even though they dominated in economic and political fields in the pre-colonial era.

Territorial boundaries and restrictions were imposed on Pastoralists and required the social permit to move out of it. For exp. Kaokoland herders of Namibia were severely affected by these territorial boundaries.

Maasai society was divided into Elders and Warriors.

Elders were ruling community who settled disputes and decided on affairs of the community.

The Warriors were young people who raided cattle and participated in wars. But restrictions imposed' by Britishers affected the traditional authority of both Elders and Warriors.

Though the traditional difference between Elders and Warriors was disturbed it did not breakdown. With social change new distinction between wealthy and poor pastoralist developed.

The relevance of Maasai tribe can be realised from the fact that even today young men go through an elaborate ritual before they become warriors. The boys in the ceremony wear loose clothing and dance throughout the day.

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.