

Class: IX

Subject: Social Science (087) - History

Chapter: 5 Pastoralists in the Modern World

Notes

Colonial Rule and Pastoral Life

Under colonial rule, the life of pastoralists changed dramatically.

- First, the colonial state wanted to transform all grazing lands into cultivated farms. To colonial officials all uncultivated land appeared to be unproductive or waste land. Waste Land Rules were enacted, headmen of the villages were appointed.
- Second, Forest Acts were introduced. Commercially valuable timber like deodar or sal were declared 'Reserved'. Other forests were classified as 'Protected'. The timing of their entry and departure was specified, and the number of days they could spend in the forest was limited. Forest Department permits that had been issued.
- Third, British officials were suspicious of nomadic people. The colonial government wanted to rule over a settled population. Such a population was easy to identify and control. In 1871, the colonial government in India passed the Criminal Tribes Act.
- Fourth, tax was imposed on land, on canal water, on salt, on trade goods, and even on animals. The right to collect the tax was auctioned out to contractors.

How Did these Changes Affect the Lives of Pastoralists?

- These measures led to a serious shortage of pastures.
- Shepherds and cattle herders could no longer freely pasture their cattle in the forests.
- The existing animal stock had to feed on whatever grazing land remained.
- Intensive grazing of these pastures declined the quality of pastures.
- Shortage of forage for animals resulted in large number of cattle deaths.

How Did the Pastoralists Cope with these Changes?

- Some reduced the number of cattle in their herds.
- Others 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, on the other hand, borrowed money from moneylenders to survive.

Pastoralism in Africa

- Famous pastoralists communities are Bedouins, Berbers, Maasai, Somali, Boran and Turkana.
- They raise cattle, camels, goats, sheep and donkeys; and they sell milk, meat, animal skin and wool.
- The Maasai cattle herders live primarily in east Africa: 300, 000 in southern Kenya and another 150,000 in Tanzania.
- Earn through trade and transport, others combine pastoral activity with agriculture and variety of odd jobs.

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.
- Large areas of grazing land were also turned into game reserves like the Maasai Mara and Samburu National Park in Kenya and Serengeti Park in Tanzania (14,760 km).

The Borders are Closed

- 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.
- An enquiry in 1930 showed that the Maasai in Kenya possessed 720,000 cattle, 820,000 sheep and 171,000 donkeys. In just two years of severe drought, 1933 and 1934, over half the cattle in the Maasai Reserve died.

Not All were Equally Affected

- 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 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.
- Chiefs had a regular income with which they could buy animals, goods and land. They also lent money to poor neighbours.
- A new distinction between the wealthy and poor pastoralists developed.

Conclusion

- 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.
- 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.