

9th – Pastoralists in the Modern World II



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 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 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 Beekuiris, 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'. Maa-sai means 'My People'. Before colonial rules, Maasai land 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 South Kenya and North 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

Maais 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 was confined to an



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arid zone with uncertain rainfall and poor pastures. In pre-colonial times, the Maasai pastoralists had dominated their agricultural neighbors both economically and politically. By the end of colonial rule, the situation became opposite. In 1885, Maasai land was cut into half with an international boundary between British Kenya and German Tanganyika. They lost their grassing lands in the following way.

- 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 Serengeti National Park was 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 Ambosdi National Park. But the villagers are barred from using the water for irrigation or for livestock.
- The loss of 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.

Unequal Effects of Colonial Rules on Massais: 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 neighbors 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.

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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, and 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 recognize that pastoral nomadism is a form of life that is perfectly suited to many hilly and dry regions of the world.

