

7th – Tribes, Nomads And Settled Communities



New arts, crafts and production activities flourished in towns and villages. Over the centuries important political, social and economic developments had taken place. But social change was not the same everywhere, because different kinds of societies evolved differently. In large parts of the subcontinent, society was already divided according to the rulers of large kingdoms. The difference between the high and low, and between the rich and poor, increased.

CHANGES IN CASTE STRUCTURE

During the ancient period, the hindu society was divided on the basis of four castes (varnas) - Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and shudras.

- * The Brahmins were the highest caste. With rich land grants, they became rich and powerful.
- * The new groups that acquired wealth and political power came to be included in the kshatriyas caste.
- * The vaishyas were the merchants who grew prosperous and rose in social status.
- * The condition of the shudras however, did not improve and they remained the landless labourers.

Beyond Big cities: Tribal Societies:

Many societies in the subcontinent did not follow the social rules and rituals prescribed by the Brahmins. Nor were they were they divided into numerous unequal classes. Such societies are often called tribes. Member of each tribe were united by Kinship bonds. Many tribes obtained their livelihood from agriculture. Other was hunter-gatherers or herders. Most often they combined these activities to make full use of the natural resources of the area in which they lived. Some tribes were nomadic and moved from one place to another. A tribal group controlled land and pastures jointly, and divided these amongst households according to its own rules. Many large tribes thrived in different parts of the subcontinent. They usually lived in forests, hills deserts and places difficult to reach.

Some powerful and large tribal groups in India were:

- Gonds in central india.
- Khokhars and Ghakkars in the north.
- Bhils and koils in the west.
- Cheros, Mundas, Snathals, Khasis, Nagas and Ahoms in the east.
- Todas, koragas, Maravars, Badagas and Vetars in the south

The nature of tribal societies:

- Tribal society has deep respect for all life forms including plants
- They believe in sharing all resources equally among all members.....
- Tribal societies are usually eglarian, i.e., they believe in the equality of all members.
- Society evils like slavery and caste- based discrimination are generally absent, widow remarriage is encouraged.
- The position of the ruler is not hereditary, unlike in non- tribal society

Who were Tribal people?

Contemporary historians and travelers give very scanty information about tribes. A few exceptions apart, tribal people did not keep written records. But they preserved rich customs and oral traditions. These were passed down to each new generation. Present day historians have started using such oral traditions to write tribal histories. Tribal people were found in almost every region of the subcontinent. These area and influence of a tribe varied at different points of time. Some powerful tribes controlled large territories. In the western Himalaya lived the shepherd tribe of Gaddis.

How Nomads and mobile People Lived:

Nomadic pastoralists moved over one distances with their animals. They lived on milk and other pastoral products. They also exchanged wool, ghee, etc. with settled agriculturist for grain, cloth, utensils and other products. The Banjaras were the most important trader-nomads. Their caravan was called tanda. Sultan Alauddin khaliji used the Banjaras to transport grain to the city markets. Many pastoral tribes reared and sold animals, such as cattle and horses, to the prosperous people. Different castes of petty pedlars also



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travelled from village to village. There were castes of entertainers who performed in different towns and villages for their livelihood.

Changing Society: New castes and Hierarchies:

As the economy and the needs of society grew, people with new skills were required. Smaller castes, or jatis, emerged within varnas. For example, new castes appeared amongst the Brahmins. On the other hand, many tribes and social groups were taken into caste-based society and given the status of jatis. Specialized artisans- smiths, carpenters and masons were also recognized as separate jatis by the Brahmins. Jatis, rather than Varna, became the basis for organizing society. Among the Kshatriyas, new Rajput clans became powerful. They gradually replaced the older rulers, especially in agricultural area. Here a developed society was emerging, and rulers, used their wealth to create powerful states.

The rise of Rajput clans to the position of rulers set an example for the tribal people to follow. Gradually, with the support of the Brahmins', many tribes became part of the caste system. But only the leading tribal families could join the ruling class.

Region:

Different tribes have different gods, some believe in a formless creator who lives in the clouds. He appears sometimes in human form in dreams. The bhils believe in bhagavan or bholo iswor, who is their supreme god. Among the naga tribes, there is belief in a god who created the earth out of the waters through earthquakes.

The sons of this god now watch or mankind and punish those who do wrong . other deities without name or form live in the mountain forest, river, and lakes.

Social and economic organisation:

In the beginning most tribes led a nomadic existence. They were hunter- gatherers. Some tribes moved on to shifting cultivation, or jhoom cultivation, where a plot of forest was cleared by cutting and burning the trees and crops were grown in the clearing. After a few years, when the soil lost its fertility, the tribe moved on and cleared and cultivated another piece of land.

Several tribes, like the Todas and the Ahirs, were pastoralists. They maintained cattle and made a livelihood from the sale of milk and meat.

Many tribal people were also gifted artists. Their finely crafted handicrafts, colourful embroidery and sturdy pottery found a ready market in the non- tribal areas.

Nomadic cultures:

Tribes like the Banjaras and the Lambadis were nomadic. Nomadic tribes are wanderers; they travel and change settlements frequently.

The banjaras were cattle herders originally from Rajasthan. Banjaras transported grains from the villages for sale in the towns and cities. They also worked as transporters for the Mughal armies. They carried their provision and arms, setting up camp on the outskirts of army encampments.

The banjara tribe was one of the most colorful tribal groups in India. The woman wore skirts and tops with elaborate embroidery and mirror work.

Interaction and social change:

Tribal economies were mostly based on subsistence agriculture or hunting and gathering. Tribal members traded with outsiders for the few necessities they lacked, such as salt and iron. So contact with the outside world was limited.

By medieval times, interactions between tribal and non- tribal communities had increased markedly. Trade routes and highways linking places across the subcontinent often cut through the heart of tribal lands. Several tribes were absorbed into the larger Hindu society as Jatis (or casters). Tribes soon started looking beyond their village- based units and took the first steps towards the formation of states and kingdoms.

Adivasi contributions to non- tribal culture:

Adivasi traditions and practices have, in fact, influenced various aspects of Indian culture and civilization.

Ancestor worship, the worship of fertility gods and goddesses, and even the practice of vrats or fasting are believed to have had tribal origins. Ayurveda draws heavily on the



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extensive knowledge tribal people. Their agriculture practices of crop rotation, musical instruments like the bansuri (flute) and dhol (drum), art, language and seasonal celebrations- all found their way into non- tribal society.

The Gonds:

The Gonds lived in a vast forested region called Gondwana- or “country inhabited by Gonds”. They practiced shifting cultivation. The large Gond tribe was further divided into many smaller clans. Each clan had its own raja or Rai. About the time that the power of the Delhi sultans was declining, a few large gond kingdoms were beginning to dominate the smaller Gond chiefs. The Akbar nama, a history of Akbar’s reign, mentions the Gond kingdom of Garha Katanga that had 70,000 villages.

The administrative system of these kingdoms was becoming centralized. The kingdom was divided into garh. Each garh was controlled by a particular Gond clan. This was further divided into units of 84 villages called Chaurasi. The Chaurasi was subdivided into Barhots which were made up of 12 villages each.

The emergence of large states changed the nature of Gond society. Brahmanas received land grants from the Gond rajas and became more influential. The Gond chiefs now wished to be recognised as Rajputs. So, Aman das, the gond raja of garha Katanga, assumed the title of sangram shah. His son, Dalpat, married princess Durgawati, the daughter of salbahan, the chandel Rajput raja of Mahoba.

Dalpat, however, died early. Rani Durgawati was very capable, and started rulling on behalf of her five-year -old son, bir narain. Under her the kingdom becomes even more extensive. In 1565 the Mughal forces under Asaf Khan attacked garh Katanga. A strong resistance was put up by Rani Durgawati. She was defeated and preferred to die rather than surrender. Her son, too, died fighting soon after

Graham Katanga was a rich state. It earned much wealth by trapping and exporting wild elephants to other kingdoms. When the Mughal defeated the Gonds, they captured a huge booty of precious coins and elephants. They annexed part of the kingdom and granted the rest to Chandra Shan, uncle of Bir Narain.

The Ahoms:

The Ahoms migrated to the Brahmaputra valley from present- day Myanmar in the thirteenth valet from present-day Myanmar in the thirteenth century. They created a new state by suppressing the older political system of the bhuiyans (landlords).during the sixteenth century, they annexed the kingdoms of the chhutiya (1523) and of Koch-Haji (1581) and subjugated many other tribes. The Ahoms built a large state, and for this -they used fitters as earth as the 1530s.they could even high-quality gunpower and cannons.

However, the Ahoms faced many invasions from the south west. In 1662, the Mughals Mir jumble attacked the atom kingdom despite their brave defence the Ahoms were defence.

The ahom state depended upon force labour. Those forces to work for the state were called paiks.

Almost all adult mail serves in the army during war. At other times they were engaged in building dams, irrigation system and other public works. The Ahoms also introduced new method odds of rice cultivation.

Originally, the Ahoms worshipped their own tribal own tribal gods. During the first half of the seventeenth century, however, the influence of Brahmanas increased temple and Brahmanas were granted land by the king. In the reign of sib Singh (1714-1744) Hinduism become the predominate religion. But the Ahom kings did not completely give up their traditional beliefs after adopting Hinduism.