

HISTORY

Chapter 7: Tribes, Nomads and Settled Communities



Tribes, Nomads and Settled Communities

The Indian society which lived in large villages, towns and cities in the medieval period comprised largely of the kings, members of the royal families, nobles, soldiers, traders, merchants, bankers, priests, artisans and peasants. The people in the society were governed by the *varna* or the caste system. While the Brahmins and the Kshatriyas enjoyed many privileges, the untouchables were discriminated against. During the medieval period, the social differences further grew and the divide between the rich and the poor deepened. Apart from this, in the society which was living in towns and cities, other social systems also existed. These societies did not follow any rituals and rules formulated by the Brahmins. They were also not divided into various castes. These societies were generally referred to as **tribes** and had their own distinct religious, social and cultural identities.

The Tribal Societies

Some main features of the tribal societies are:

- The members of the tribal societies were associated with the kinship bond.
- While some of the tribal societies were hunters and gatherers, some practised cultivation.
- Some societies were nomadic in nature as they kept moving from place to place.
- A tribal group jointly owned the land and the pastures which were divided among the different households according to their own customs and beliefs.
- The tribes mostly lived in the forested regions, hills and desert which were not usually habited by people.
- Tribal societies generally preferred to live independently and preserve their culture.



Forests and hilly regions were the main abode of the tribals

Some Major Tribes

Since the tribals do not keep and maintain written records, we do not have rich information about their history. However, the tribals preserved their rich culture and traditions, which are passed down from generation to generation. Historians have now begun to increasingly use the oral traditions to understand the culture of the tribal communities. Some important tribes in the medieval period were:

- The Khokhar tribe in Punjab during the thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries.
- Later, the Gakkhars became very important. The chief of this tribe, Kamal Khan Gakkhar was a mansabdar in the court of Akbar.
- In the Sind and Multan regions, the Langahs and the Arghuns were the dominant tribes till they were defeated by the Mughals.
- The Balochis was a powerful tribe in the north-west India and was divided into many small clans. Each clan was under a different chief.
- The Ahoms and the Nagas dominated the north eastern part of the subcontinent.
- The Chero tribe in Bihar and the Mundas and the Santhals were some other tribes which resided in Orissa and Bengal.
- The Kolis inhabited the highlands of Maharashtra, Karnataka and Gujarat.
- The Gonds lived in the present day Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh.

- In south India, Koragas, Vetars and Marvars were important tribes.



The women belonging to the Koli tribe

Source of Livelihood for the Nomadic Tribes

- People of the nomadic tribes kept moving from place to place with their families and cattle.
- They consumed milk and other pastoral products.
- They also exchanged milk products, ghee and wool for grains, clothes and other goods from the agriculturists.
- These products besides being used by the nomadic tribes were sold off in distant lands after earning profits.
- The Banjaras were the main nomadic trading tribe. They moved in a caravan called the tanda.
- They were used by Alauddin Khalji to transport grains to the markets in the city.
- Banjaras were also used by the Mughals to transport grains on their bullocks to the army men during military campaigns.
- Many nomadic tribes reared and sold animals such as cattle and horses to wealthy people. Apart from these many tribes also sold straw mats, ropes and sacks.
- Some people of the nomadic tribes were also entertainers who performed in different towns and villages for earning their livelihood.

Addition of New Castes

One interesting development at this time was that many smaller castes or the *jatis* emerged within the caste system as many people with different sets of skill were required. Many castes and tribes were taken into the varnas as jatis. Skilled artisans, smiths and masons came to be recognised as separate jatis by the Brahmins.

The clan of Rajputs became powerful among the Kshatriyas in the eleventh century. They belonged to different groups such as the Hunas, Chalukyas, Chandelas etc. Some of these groups were traditionally a part of the tribes.

The emergence of the Rajputs as rulers inspired the other tribals. Hence many tribes became a part of the caste system with the help and support of the Brahmins. However, only the chief tribal family was able to join the ruling class.

Many dominant tribes of Punjab, Sind and North West frontier Province had accepted Islam by this time. They rejected the caste based society.



The Rajputs emerged as Kshatriyas in the Indian varna system

The two main castes during this period were:

The Gonds

- The Gonds lived in a heavily forested region called Gondwana- a country inhabited by the Gonds.



A Gond woman

- They practised shifting cultivation in which a patch of forested area was cut and burnt. The crop was then sown in the ashes. When the soil lost its fertility after a few years, another patch of the forest was cleared and cultivated in a similar manner.
- The Gonds were divided into small clans and each clan had its own ruler. At the time of the decline of the Delhi Sultanate, many large Gond kingdoms began to grow. For example the Gond kingdom of Garha Katanga had about 70,000 villages.
- The Gond kingdom was divided into different garhs which were controlled by a Gond clan.
- The garh was divided into units of 84 villages called chaurasi. The chaurasi were further divided into bahrots which were made up of 12 villages.
- As the Gond kingdom grew larger, the Brahmins were given land grants by the rulers and the society began to be divided into different castes. Aman Das, the Gond king of Gargha Katanga married his son, Dalpat Rai, to princess Durgavati, the daughter of the Chandela Rajputs of Mahoba.
- After the death of Dalpat Rai, Rani Durgavati, a brave and an able ruler began to rule on behalf of his minor son.
- In 1565, Kargha Katanga was attacked by the Mughal forces under Asaf Jha. Rani Durgavati offered strong resistance but was defeated.



A painting depicting Rani Durgawati inspiring her soldiers for the battle with the Mughals

- Many reasons led to the annexation of the Gargha Katanga. It was a rich state which grew wealthy by selling wild elephants to the neighbouring kingdoms.
- The Mughals captured many precious coins and elephants after its defeat.
- They annexed a part of the kingdom and allowed Chandra Shah (relative of the previous king) to rule over rest of the kingdom.
- The Gond kingdom later became weaker as they were not able successfully stand against the Bundelas and the Marathas.

The Ahoms

- These tribal people migrated to the Brahmaputra valley from the present day Myanmar in the thirteenth century.



A person belonging to the Ahom tribe

- They created a new state after annexing the kingdoms of Chhutiyas and Koch-Hajo in the sixteenth century. They also defeated many tribes and built a large state.
- Ahoms were successful militarily as they could make firearms as early as in 1530. By the latter half of the seventeenth century, they were making gun powder and canons.
- In 1662, the Mughal forces under Mir Jumla defeated the Ahoms. However, the Mughal control could not last there for a long period.



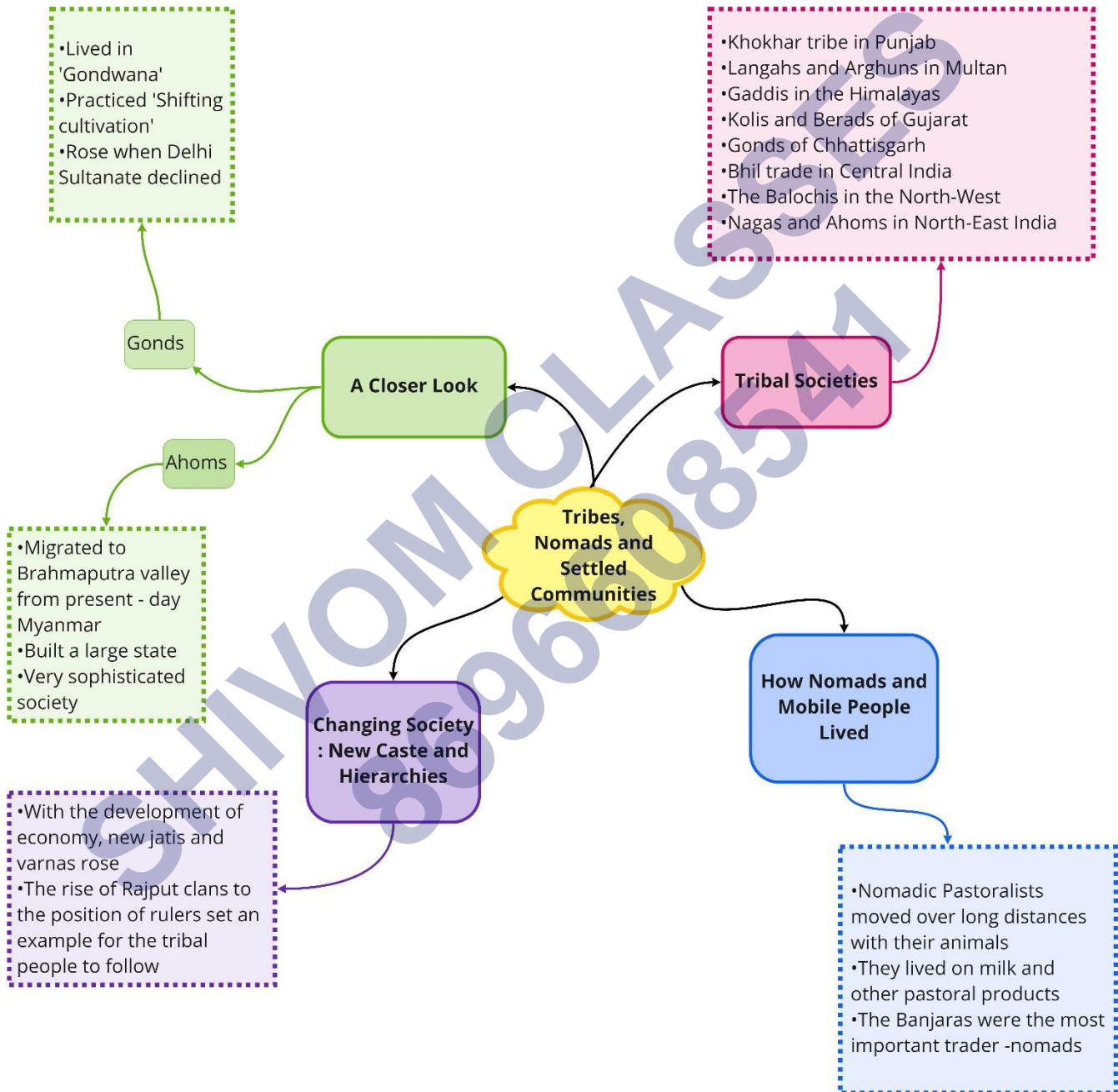
Statue of Ahom warriors near Sivasagar town, Assam

- The state of Ahoms depended on forced labour. The workers who were forced to work were known as 'paiks'.
- Each state had to send a set number of paiks by rotation.
- All the adult males were required to serve in the army during the period of war. When not fighting wars, they built dams, buildings and other public buildings. Ahoms introduced a new method of rice cultivation.

- The society of Ahoms was divided into various clans or khels. Khels controlled many villages.
- The land to the farmer was given to by the village communities. Artisans came to the state from the neighbouring kingdoms.
- Ahoms worshipped their own tribal gods. However, later the influence of the Brahmins increased and they were granted land and temples by the king.
- During the reign of Sib Singh, though Hinduism became a prominent religion the Ahoms still followed their religious practices.
- The Ahom society was sophisticated in the sense that the learned people were respected and literary activities were encouraged. Many important works of Sanskrit were translated into the local language. Historical works such as the buranjis were also written.

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Class : 7th Social Studies (History)
Chapter 7 Tribes, Nomads and Settled Communities



Important Questions

➤ Multiple Choice Questions:

Question 1. Mir Jumla attacked the Ahom in:

- (a) 1662
- (b) 1665
- (c) 1670
- (d) 1672

Question 2. Specialized artisans were:

- (a) Smiths, carpenters and peasants were specialized artisans.
- (b) Smiths, carpenters and masons were specialized artisans.
- (c) King, soldiers, carpenters and masons were specialized artisans.
- (d) None.

Question 3. Varna was prescribed by:

- (a) Brahmanas
- (b) King
- (c) Poets
- (d) Artisans

Question 4. Many societies in the subcontinent did not follow the social rules and rituals prescribed by the Brahmanas; they are called:

- (a) Poets
- (b) Peasants
- (c) King and its family
- (d) Tribes

Question 5. Khokhar tribes lived in:

- (a) Jammu and Kashmir
- (b) Assam
- (c) Punjab
- (d) Tamil Nadu

Question 6. Kamal Khan Gakkhar was mansabdar in region of:

- (a) Babin
- (b) Akbar

- (c) ShahJahan
- (d) None

Question 7. Langahs and Arghuns tribal dominated extensive regions which are:

- (a) Multan and Sind
- (b) North-East
- (c) Central India
- (d) Southern India

Question 8. Kolis lived particularly in many areas of:

- (a) Gujarat
- (b) Nagaland
- (c) Tamil Nadu
- (d) Andhra Pradesh

Question 9. Those who specifically made and sold ropes, reeds, straw matting and coarse sacks are called:

- (a) Banjaras
- (b) Gonds
- (c) Petty Pedlars
- (d) Bhils

Question 10. Mangols were hunter-gatherer tribes inhabited in:

- (a) Eastern Asia
- (b) South Asia
- (c) Western Asia
- (d) Central Asia

Question 11. Which tribes were influential in Punjab in 13th and 14th centuries?

- (a) Khokhar
- (b) Ahoms
- (c) Banjaras
- (d) Gonds

Question 12. Who assumed the title of Sangram Shah?

- (a) Bir Narain
- (b) Chaman Das

- (c) Dalpat
- (d) Aman Das

Question 13. Rani Durgawati ruled in which region?

- (a) Punjab
- (b) Ambar
- (c) Bikaner
- (d) Garha Katanga

Question 14. The 84 villages or Chaurasi was further subdivided into what?

- (a) Tanda
- (b) Barhots
- (c) Khel
- (d) Clan

Question 15. The Cheros were defeated in 1591 by whom?

- (a) Maharana Pratap
- (b) Raja Man Singh
- (c) Amax Singh
- (d) Prithviraj Chauhan

➤ **Fill in the blanks:**

1. The new castes emerging within varnas were called _____.
2. The Gonds practised _____ cultivation.
3. _____ were historical works written by the Ahoms.
4. The _____ mentions that Garha Katanga had 70,000 villages.
5. As tribal states became bigger and stronger, they gave land grants to _____ and _____.

➤ **Write true (T) or false (F):**

1. Tribal societies had rich oral traditions.
2. There were no tribal communities in the northwestern part of the subcontinent.
3. Barhots were made up of 12 villages each.
4. The chaurasi in Gond states contained several cities.
5. In the western Himalaya lived the shepherd tribe of Gaddis.

➤ **Very Short Questions:**

1. Who controlled garh?
2. Who were specialised artisans?
3. Who was Chandra Shah?
4. What is the meaning of 'bhuiyans'?
5. Where does the Kutiya Kond tribe live?
6. What do you understand by tanda?
7. Name the shepherd tribe of the Western Himalayas.
8. What was buranjis?
9. Who was the chief of Gakkhar tribe?
10. Which tribe was powerful in north-west?

➤ Short Questions:

1. How do the present day historians use to write tribal histories?
2. Who were Ahoms? How did they build a large state?
3. What changes took place in varna-based society?
4. What do you know about religion practised by Ahom society?
5. How did the tribes earn their livelihood?

➤ Long Questions:

1. Mention some special features of tribal societies.
2. Write about the Rani Durgawati.
3. Write about Ahom society.
4. How did tribal societies change after being organized into a state?
5. What do you know about Mongols?

ANSWER KEY –

➤ Multiple Choice Answer:

1. (a) 1662
2. (b) Smiths, carpenters and masons were specialized artisans.
3. (a) Brahmanas
4. (d) Tribes
5. (c) Punjab
6. (b) Akbar

7. (a) Multan and Sind
8. (a) Gujarat
9. (c) Petty Pedlars
10. (d) Central Asia
11. (a) Khokhar
12. (d) Aman Das
13. (d) Garha Katanga
14. (b) Barhots
15. (b) Raja Man Singh

➤ **Fill in the blanks:**

1. Jatis
2. shifting
3. Buranjis
4. Akbar Nama
5. Poets, scholars

➤ **Write true (T) or false (F):**

1. True
2. False
3. True
4. False
5. True

➤ **Very Short Answer:**

1. Each garh was controlled by a particular Gond clan.
2. Specialised artisans include smiths, carpenters and masons.
3. Chandra Shah was uncle of Bir Narain.
4. Landlords
5. Kutiya Kond tribe lives in Orissa.
6. Caravan of banjaras was called tanda.
7. Gaddis
8. Historical works was known as buranjis.

9. Kamal Khan Gakkhar was the chief of Gakkhar tribe.
10. The Balochis tribe was powerful in the north-west.

➤ Short Answer:

1. Contemporary historians and travellers 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.
2. The Ahoms migrated to the Brahmaputra valley 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 Chhutiyas (1523) and of Koch-Hajo (1581) and subjugated many other tribes.
3. Smaller castes, or jatis, emerged within varnas. For example, new castes appeared amongst the Brahmanas. On the other hand, many tribes and social groups were taken into caste-based society and given the status of jatis. Specialised artisans – smiths, carpenters and masons – were also recognised as separate jatis by the Brahmanas. Jatis, rather than varna, became the basis for organising society.
4. Originally, the Ahoms worshipped their own tribal gods. During the first half of the seventeenth century, however, the influence of Brahmanas increased. Temples and Brahmanas were granted land by the king. In the reign of Sib Singh (1714-1744), Hinduism became the predominant religion. But the Ahom kings did not completely give up their traditional beliefs after adopting Hinduism.
5. Many tribes obtained their livelihood from agriculture. Others were 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.

➤ Long Answer:

1. **Special features of tribal societies were:**
 - i. They did not follow the social rules and rituals prescribed by the Brahmanas. Nor were they divided into numerous unequal classes.
 - ii. Members of each tribe were united by kinship bonds.
 - iii. Many tribes obtained their livelihood from agriculture. Others were hunter-gatherers or herders.
 - iv. 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.

2. Rani Durgawati:

- i. Durgawati was the daughter of Salbahan, the Chandel Rajput raja of Mahoba. She got married to Dalpat, the son of Gond raja Aman Das.
- ii. Dalpat, however, died early. Rani Durgawati was very capable, and started ruling on behalf of her five-year-old son, Bir Narain.
- iii. Under her, the kingdom became even more extensive. In 1565, the Mughal forces under Asaf Khan attacked Garha Katanga.
- iv. 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.

3. Ahom society:

Ahom society was divided into clans or khels. There were very few castes of artisans, so artisans in the Ahom areas came from the adjoining kingdoms. A khel often controlled several villages. The peasant was given land by his village community. Even the king could not take it away without the community's consent. Originally, the Ahoms worshipped their own tribal gods. During the first half of the seventeenth century, however, the influence of Brahmanas increased. Temples and Brahmanas were granted land by the king. In the reign of Sib Singh (1714-1744), Hinduism became the predominant religion. But the Ahom kings did not completely give up their traditional beliefs after adopting Hinduism. Ahom society was very sophisticated. Poets and scholars were given land grants. Theatre was encouraged.

4. Changes in tribal societies:

- i. Considerable social change took place in the subcontinent. Varna-based society and tribal people constantly interacted with each other. This interaction caused both kinds of societies to adapt and change.
- ii. There were many different tribes and they took up diverse livelihoods.
- iii. Over a period of time, many of them merged with caste based society Others, however, rejected both the caste system and orthodox Hinduism.
- iv. Some tribes established extensive states with well-organised systems of administration. They thus became politically powerful. This brought them into conflict with larger and more complex kingdoms and empires.

5. Mongols:

- i. The best-known pastoral and hunter gatherer tribe in history were the Mongols. They inhabited the grasslands (steppes) of Central Asia and the forested areas further north.
- ii. By 1206 Genghis Khan had united the Mongol and Turkish tribes into a powerful military force. At the time of his death (1227) he was the ruler of extensive territories.
- iii. His successors created a vast empire. At different points of time, it included parts of Russia, Eastern Europe and also China and much of West Asia.

- iv. The Mongols had well-organised military and administrative systems. These were based on the support of different ethnic and religious groups.

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