

Revision Notes

Class- 8 Social Science(History)

Chapter 4 - Tribals, Dikus and the Vision of a Golden Age

The Lifestyles of Different Tribal Groups in India

- During the 19th century, tribal people in different parts of India were involved in various activities like Jhum cultivators, Hunters & Gatherers, Herded animals, & Settled cultivation.
- Itinerant cultivation took place in small plots of land, mainly in the forests.
- In Jhum cultivators, the farmers cut off the tree tops to allow sunlight to reach the ground and burned the vegetation on the ground to clean it for cultivation.
- They scattered the ashes from the fire, which contained potash, to fertilize the ground.
- Once the harvest was prepared and harvested, they moved to another field. One field that was once grown was left fallow for several years.
- Itinerant farmers have been discovered in the mountainous and wooded regions of northeastern and central India.
- The lives of these tribal peoples depended on the freedom of movement in the forests and the possibility of using the land and forests to cultivate their crops.
- In many parts of the country, tribal groups lived by hunting animals and gathering forest products.
- They saw forests as critical to their survival. The Khonds were such a community that lived in the forests of Orissa. They routinely engaged in collective hunting and then shared the meat.
- They used a wide range of shrubs and forest herbs for medicinal purposes and sold forest products in local markets.
- Local weavers and leathers turned to the Khonds when they needed supplies of kusum and palash flowers to colour their garments and leather.

- Tribal groups often had to buy and sell in order to obtain commodities that were not produced in the community.
- Money lenders gave out loans with which tribals responded to their cash flow needs, adding to what they gained. But interest on the loans was generally quite high.
- A lot of tribal groups lived in animal farming. They were pastoralists travelling with their herds of cattle or sheep depending on the season
- When one spot ran out of grass, they moved to another area.
- The Van Gujjars of the Punjab Hills and the Labadis of Andhra Pradesh were livestock farmers, the Gaddis of Kulu were shepherds and the Bakarwals of Kashmir were goat breeders.
- Even before the 19th century, many members of the tribal groups had begun to set up, and cultivating their fields in one place year after year, rather than moving from one place to another.
- They started using the plow and progressively acquired rights to the land on which they lived. In many cases, such as the Mundas of Chottanagpur, the land was part of the whole clan.
- For the British authorities, established tribal groups like the Gonds and Santhals are more civilized than hunters or itinerant farmers.
- Very often, some people within the clan have become more powerful than others, some have become leaders and others disciples. Powerful men often rented their land instead of farming it on their own.

Effects on the Tribal Lives due to British Colonial

- Tribal group life has changed during British domination.
- Prior to the arrival of the British, in many areas, tribal leaders were important individuals. They were economically powerful and had the right to administer and control their territories. In some locations, they had their own police and determined local land and forest management rules.
- They were also charged with honouring the British and disciplining tribal groups on behalf of the British. They lost the authority they previously enjoyed among their people, and were unable to fulfill their traditional duties.

- The British were uncomfortable with groups moving around without a fixed house. They wanted the tribals to settle and become peasant farmers.
- The British extended their control over the entire forest and declared it the property of the state. Some forests were classified as reserved forests because they made wood that the British wanted. In those forests, people did not have the right to move freely, to grow crops, to gather fruit or to hunt animals.

The Issue of the Traders and Moneylenders

- During the nineteenth century, tribal groups have found that merchants and money lenders come to forests more often, wanting to buy forest products, offering cash loans, and asking them to work for wages.
- Tribal groups were slow to understand the implications of what was happening.
- The silk merchants would send their agents to lend to the tribes and pick up the cocoons.
- Silk producers won very little money. Naturally, many tribal groups saw the market and merchants as their principal enemies.

The search for work

- The fate of the tribals who were forced to move away from their homes in search of employment was even worse.
- From the end of the nineteenth century, tea plantings began to appear and mining became an important industry.
- Large numbers of tribes were recruited to work on the tea plantations of Assam and the coal mines of Jharkhand. They were hired by entrepreneurs who paid them miserably low wages and prevented them from returning home.