



Some groups have done a re-commandable work of conservation of India's distinctive identity and culture. These groups really did praiseworthy deed of preservation from sage culture, agriculture culture till forest culture. Not only this, these groups have played an important role in the development of India. Let us know more about these groups in this chapter.

Adivasis

The constitution of India includes specific Adivasi groups in the Schedule who protect traditional culture. These groups are known as Schedule Tribes.

If you look at the lifestyle of the Adivasi of India, their various festivals, customs, food, dress, dialect, painting, music and dance, etc create their distinctive identity. Before independence, this society was different from other societies in some ways. Still their contribution in the Indian system is quite significant. Literally, in Adivasi - Adi means from olden times and vasi means inhabitant. The relation of our old culture is associated with this name only.

The members of each tribe were connected with one other, by tribal (Kabilas) (Family and kinship) practice. They earned their livelihood as hunters and pastoralist along with farming to some extent. Forests and nature had greatest impact on their lives. Their houses were made up of natural resources only. These tribes had joint rights over land and land produce and distributed them among the families on the basis of their own rules. The principle of community living is also found in their economy as they lived in community. Social equality was seen in different communities.

Different tribes developed in different parts of the subcontinent. They usually lived in forests, mountains, deserts and inaccessible places. Sometimes they even clashed with the rulers. Yet the tribes maintained their independence and preserved their culture.

Generally the different communities of India were interdependent for their needs. Due to this interdependence, these tribes changed gradually.

Contemporary historians and travellers have given very little information about the tribes. With few exceptions, these tribes do not have written documents. These tribes protected their own rich customs and oral traditions. These traditions were inherited by the new generation. Present day historians also use such oral traditions to write the history of the tribes.

Way of Life and Culture

Adivasi community is different from other communities in some regards, which creates its distinctive identity. In some matters, their beliefs are similar to other communities.

In the past, the tribal community was dependent on forest products as well as agriculture for their livelihood. The things produced by their art and skills also became very important source of their income. The forest products collected by them also provided them with income. Animal husbandry played an important role in their livelihood.



These tribes people living in different parts of Gujarat have created a special identity through their attire and ornaments. In North Gujarat, men used to wear dhoti, shirt and faliyu. In the Eastern belt, men wore black baniyaan and short dhoti while in the South Gujarat some people wore dhoti/pyjama, paheeran. Women wear zuladi in North Gujarat. In the present times, most of the tribal communities have adopted the same dress as the mainstream. They are seen in their traditional attire only during their special festivals. Their performances and dances on special occasions are centre of attraction even today.

The major identity of the Adivasi community is found in their distinctive traditions, dialects as well as festivals. The Adivasi community has been a lover and preserver of nature. They have faith in elements of nature and various forms of gods and goddesses. They perform various rituals to please them. There are specific customs for marriage also in this society. In every tribe, Panch is an important part of their society and they work to maintain their tradition.



Scene of Dangs Fair

At present, tribal society has also changed like other societies due to various schemes of the government, spread of education and technological development. Permanent houses in place of huts, facilities of education, modern attire and social consciousness is also seen.

Know This

Vibrant life in the fairs

The fairs have a unique identity in Indian society. Due to the traditional lifestyle, the tribals express their folk life beautifully in fairs. Types of folk songs like 'Shyamlajina mele ranjhniyu pinjaniyu vage' doubles people's enthusiasm towards fair. Shyamlaji's fair (Shyamlaji Arvalli) Kawant no Gher no melo (Kawant Fair) (Chhota Udaipur) Chitra-Vichitra fair (Gunbhanekhari, Sabarkantha), Gai-Gohri melo (Nadhelav, Dahod), Gorh-Gadheda fair (Jessawada, Dahod), Dang Darbar (Ahwa), Chulno melo organised at various places are the main fairs in Gujarat. The local tribes mostly dress in their traditional attire in fairs. Along with enjoying some sweets and snacks, articles of household necessities are also purchased. Their enthusiasm is seen flowing through folk songs and dances in the fair.

Cultural Changes among Tribes

As the needs of economy and society increased, there arose a need of people with new arts and skills. Society was divided into various tribes. On the other hand, many tribes and social groups were given status of 'caste'. Among these tribes, groups having special skill are main ones. Now caste has become the basis of organisation of society instead of Varana.

Do this

Collect information about tribal groups. Prepare a pictorial report with information about their specific customs, fairs, dances, musical instruments, dress, food and occupations.

Know This

Dang Darbar :

Dang Darbar is organised every year in Dang, in which kings are honoured with annuity (Varshasan). Long ago, Dang Darbar started during Holi festival. At that time the kings and chieftains of the tribes, carried out the administration in the areas of present Dang district. In the year 1842 AD forest belts of Dangs were given to the Britishers. In exchange of the above rights, the government of that time decided to give traditional annuity (saliyana) to the Dangi kings and chieftains which was given at fair held at Dang Darbar. The tradition of giving this annuity is practised only in Dang, in entire India. The tradition of organising fair named as Dang Darbar continues even today. After independence, the government has increased the amount of annuity given to Dangi kings from time to time.

Major Tribal areas of India

Tribal population is found in most of the parts of India. The area and influence of the tribes have changed over a period of time. Some tribes were powerful and controlled large territories. The Khokhar and Gakhhar were major tribes in Punjab during the 13th and 14th century. Kamal Khan Gakhhar of this tribe was made the mansabdar by Akbar. Before Mughals, Multan and Sindh were dominated by the Langha and Arghun tribes. The Baloch tribe was the most powerful in the northwestern part of India. It was divided into small clans having various leaders. The Gaddi Gadariya tribe was the main tribe residing in the Western Himalayas. While the Northeastern part of India was dominated by Naga, Kuki, Mizo, Ahom and other tribes.

Some areas of present Bihar and Jharkhand were dominated by the Cher chiefs till the twelfth century. In 1591 AD, Raja Mansingh, the general of Akbar, attacked Cher tribe and defeated them, but he could not bring them under control completely. During the reign of Aurangzeb, the Mughal army captured many forts of the Cher tribe and established dominance over them. The two important tribes of this area were Munda and Santhal. Apart from this area, these tribes also lived in Odisha and Bengal.

Koli, Berad and some other tribes lived in the hilly areas of Karnataka and Maharashtra. South India was inhabited in large number by the Koraga, Veitar, Marwar and other tribes.

Bhils were in large number among these tribes, which were spread in Western and Central India. The states of Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh were the provinces of the Bhil chiefs. Many of the Kabilas had settled till the end of the sixteenth century as peasants (farmers) and landowners. However, some Bhil clans remained involved in activities like hunting and food gathering.

Gond and Ahom

Gond : The people living in India's vast forest region called Gondwana are known as Gond, one of the oldest tribes of India. They practised shifting agriculture. Gond tribe was divided into many small clans and each clan had a king. Akbarnama records that the Gond state of Gadhkatanga consisted of about 70,000 villages. At present Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh have the highest population of Gonds.

Their administrative system was centralized. The kingdom were divided into 'Gadhs'. Each Gadh being dominated by a specific Gond clan. Each Gadh was divided into a unit of 84 villages, known as 'Chauraasi'. Each Chauraasi was subdivided into Barhot. Each Barhot was made up of 12 villages each.

Gond society also changed with the rise of big states. Amandas, the Gond king of Gadhkatanga, assumed the title of Sangramshah in order to gain recognition as a Rajput. Dalpat, his son married princess Durgavati, the daughter of the Chandel Rajput king of Mahoba.



When Dalpat died at a young age, Durgavati took over the rule in the name of her five years old son Veer Narayan. In 1565 A.D, the Mughal army led by Asif Khan defeated Durgavati. The queen and her son fought bravely and achieved martyrdom in the battle field.

The state of Gadhakatanga made plenty of money by the elephant trade. By conquering Gadhakatanga, the Mughals got plenty of wealth and elephants. They controlled most parts of the state, while the rest were given to Veer Narayan's uncle Chandarshah. The Gond kingdom, weakened after the decline of Gadhakatanga and could not withstand the onslaught of the powerful Bundels and the Marathas.

Ahom : Ahom people came from present day Myanmar in the thirteenth century and settled in the valley area of Brahmaputra river in Assam. They changed the old political system of landlord (Bhuiyan) and established a new state. A vast Ahom kingdom was established in sixteenth century by merging Chutia (1523 A.D) and Koch-Hajo (1581 A.D) into their own kingdom and conquering the surrounding tribes. In the seventeenth century, they could manufacture ammunition and cannons also.

However, there were many attacks on the Ahom people from the South-West. In 1662 A.D, they fought valiantly against the Mughal army led by Mir Jumla but lost. But the direct Mughal domination on the area did not last long.

The Ahom state was based on forced labour. The people who were forced to work for the state were called 'Paiks'. A fixed number of Paiks were to be sent from each village. On the basis of census, people from more populated areas were moved to less populated area which led to the division of the Ahom clan. The administrative system became centralized in the first decade of the seventeenth century. As per the existing laws and regulations, it is a crime to force someone to work.

Men of this tribe were active in the army during war time and at other times in public activities like farming and irrigation. Ahom people implemented innovative methods of paddy cultivation.

Ahoms were divided into clans. Their clan was called 'Khel'. Many villages were controlled by the khels. The land given to the farmers by village community could not be taken back even by the king without consent of village community.

Initially, the Ahoms worshipped tribal deities (gods of nature). King donated land for temples and Brahmins. Hinduism became the main religion during the reign of Sibsingh (1714 A.D-1744 A.D). Despite adopting Hinduism, the Ahom kings did not entirely leave their own traditional beliefs.

The Ahom society was a civilized society. Land was donated to poets and scholars. Dramatics were promoted. Important literary works of Sanskrit were translated into the local language. The historical work 'Buranji' was written first in Ahom language and then in Assamese language.

Changing times : The structure of new tribes

We tried to understand the history of the tribes up to the 16th and 17th centuries. Over the time, many tribes underwent extensive changes. Both societies changed due to the interaction between the people of the caste based society and the tribal society. Different tribes adopted different livelihoods. As the time passed many of these tribes became part of a caste-based society. However, many tribes remained mostly away from Hinduism and caste system. A few tribes established large powerful states with well organized administrative systems. So vast empires clashed with them.

Exercise

1. Match the appropriate pairs :

A

- (1) Gadhkatanga
- (2) Annuity (Varshasana)
- (3) Labour
- (4) Amandas
- (5) Khokhar tribe
- (6) Baloch

B

- (a) Paik
- (b) Sangram Shah
- (c) Punjab
- (d) 70,000 villages
- (e) Divided into small clans
- (f) Dang - Darbar

2. Fill in the blanks :

- (1) and tribes had dominance in Multan and Sindh.
- (2) was a historical work composed in the Ahom language.
- (3) Members of the tribe were connected with each other by practice.

3. State whether the following statements are 'True' or 'False' :

- (1) Akbar's general Mansingh attacked and conquered the Cher tribe.
- (2) Gujarat is inhabited by tribes like Mizo, Ahom and Khokhar.
- (3) Gond people could manufacture cannons.
- (4) South India was inhabited by people of Vetar, Koraga and Marwar tribes.

4. Answer the following questions :

- (1) On which factors does the life of tribes depend ?
- (2) Explain the principle of community living seen in tribes.
- (3) On what basis it can be said that Ahom society was a civilized society ?
- (4) How did history of the Gond people differ from the Ahoms people ?

Activity

- Show the location of tribes mentioned in this chapter on the map of India. Discuss the livelihood of any two tribes on the basis of their geographical features and environmental suitability.
- Learn about the policies formulated by the present government for the tribes and organize a discussion in this regard.

