

Tribes, Nomads and Settled Communities

Exercises

Long answer questions:

- 1.** What is the difference between caste based and tribal society?
- 2.** Discuss the administration of the Gonds.
- 3.** What do you understand by shifting agriculture?
- 4.** Discuss how the tribals earn their livelihood.
- 5.** How did the Ahom kingdom come to an end?
- 6.** Discuss the socio-cultural changes in the Tribal communities during the medieval period.

Solutions

Long-answer questions:

1. Caste based society was divided according to the rules of the varna. The Brahmins occupied the dominant position and the Shudras were at the bottom rung of the social hierarchy. Tribal societies were egalitarian. They did not follow the varna system and there was equality. No caste or caste division existed. They did not follow the rules and customs of the Brahmins.
2. The Gond kingdom was divided into garhs. These were further divided into chaurasi which had 84 villages. A chaurasi consisted of barhots, each constituted of 12 villages. Each garh was the responsibility of one gond clan. Each Gond village had a headman known as mukhia or Patel and a village council chosen by the villagers.
3. Some tribes practice shifting agriculture. They clear a patch of the forest and cultivate the land. After a few years when the land loses its fertility, they move on and clear another area of the forest and use that for agriculture. This is also called slash and burn agriculture. This is because they often burn the vegetation to clear the land. Also, the ash was a natural fertilizer for the crops they grew.
4. Historically, the economy of most tribes was subsistence agriculture or hunting-gathering. They traded with outsiders for the necessities they lacked such as salt and iron. Different tribes have their own means of livelihood. Even in each tribe, people engage themselves in different professions.

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Some tribes are hunters- gatherers. But today, this is not very common. They depend on other means of livelihood such as gathering forest products such as honey, and selling them. Some tribes have settled down and farm their own piece of land. They also rear animals to supplement their income. Also, some tribes were skilled dancers and acrobats, and they use this skill to earn their livelihood. For example, the Nayaks are itinerant drama troupes in Gujarat. They move from village to village to perform.

Artisan tribes earned their livelihood by crafts like basket making, tool making, spinning and weaving. The Birhor of Bihar made ropes and in the past were nomadic the members of the group learnt the skill. There

were pastoralist tribe like the Toda in the Nilgiris and the Gujjar, the Bakarwal and Gaddi in Himachal Pradesh. They earned their livelihood by rearing and selling sheep, horses and goats. They make seasonal movements to the mountain pastures. They exchanged or sold the dairy products for other items of their use particularly agricultural products.

5. The Mughal emperor Aurangzeb wanted to conquer the Ahom kingdom. He sent Mir Jumla to attack the Ahom kingdom. The Ahoms put up a brave front but were finally defeated by the Mughal forces. However, this victory of the Mughals was short lived as they re-established their kingdom. The Ahom kingdom was again attacked by the Mughal forces in 1671. The Ahoms were successful in defeating the huge Mughal army. They extended the Ahom kingdom up to the Manas River. This river was the dividing line between the Mughal and Ahom Empire- However, the Ahom kingdom began to decline in the late 18th century.
6. The caste system continued to exist during the early medieval period. But it was not very rigid. There were cordial relations between the castes. However, many subcastes called jaatis began to appear during this period. This was because as the economy developed, special occupations originated like carpenters, masons and artisans etc. which were classified into different jaatis. The jaatis were different in food, customs, professions and religious practices. There was a special caste called the Kayasthas. This was a mixture of all the castes. With time, many tribals were taken into the caste based society in various jaatis.