
UNIT 3 STRATEGIES OF SURVIVAL

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3.0. OBJECTIVES

After having read this Unit you will be able to:

- describe the nature of seasonal migration;
- discuss some of the reasons of strategies of seasonal migration; and
- list out some of the tribes and their habits of seasonal migration.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Seasonal migration of a tribe from one place to another occurs mainly in search of food as it dominates most of their lives and occupies most of their time. They earn their livelihood by working as labourers in plantations, agricultural farms, factories and also by collection of forest products etc. Seasonal migration mostly happens due to the economic problems and most important are; unemployment, shifting cultivation, lack of educational facilities, poor living conditions, restriction in forest land, land-alienation (refers to land being taken away by force or through threats,) etc. Another important cause is the cultural contact with the urban societies and which is changing their social and cultural institutions. Although these activities provide them with better livelihood but in most cases they are being exploited by their employers for their ignorance.

3.2 TYPES OF MIGRATION

In the following paragraphs, we will discuss some of the important factors of seasonal migration.

3.2.1 Migrant labourer working in industries

In India after independence the growth of the industry in most of the tribal areas has been very rapid. As a result, the bulk of the labour forces in these areas are employed from these tribal people. The growth of different industries in several natural sites has led to a huge demand for land, which are mostly the natural dwelling places for the tribes. These types of problem of encroachment in the tribal areas have compelled the tribes to change their age old habits of living and some of them migrate from their natural habitats to industrial townships and urban areas. They work as migrant labour because of factors like erosion of the resource base, alienation of land, restrictions on rights over forest produce and lack of employment opportunities in the areas of their domicile. These factors force the tribal people to seek jobs outside the region especially in the enterprises employing unskilled labourers like brick kilns, agriculture, and housemaid, playing musical instruments for weddings or other occasions and excavation work. In the wake of development activities a large number of industrial mining, irrigation, power and other projects are coming up but they are not able to use these new opportunities mainly because of the lack of required skills, training and other wherewithal to participate in the new ventures. Their unwilling attitude to face the socio-economic and cultural impact of the process of the industrialization has also been partly responsible for their migration to other areas. Besides, large scale displacement of the tribal from their lands has forced them to migrate to other areas in search of employment.

3.2.2. Tribal labourer in small scale industries

Tribal labourers are employed more in the small scale industries than in heavy industries. This is because they are naturally trained in many skills, from making handloom products, sericulture, basket making, herbal medicine manufacturing, painting, handicraft etc., which are funded by the small scale industries of Government of India. For example, The Craft Museum in New Delhi, established in 1956, has been created with a motive to showcase the works of indigenous artisans in one place and also to encourage Indian handicrafts, to preserve the old crafts of India, thereby promoting the aspects of Indian culture. The main attraction of this museum is the tribal and rural crafts from various places of India with added advantage of demonstration of craft person's skills. There are over 20,000 objects being exhibited at the crafts museum which include collection of textiles, jewellery and ceramics, metal wares, basketry, carving in wood, ivory and stone, jewellery, leather objects, dolls, toys etc.. Apart from exhibiting the tribal artifacts, the open area of the museum is used to hold exhibitions of various artifacts as an encouragement to the artisans in supplying with designs, painting, embroidery artforms of various types. The museum not only showcases artifacts of tribal and rural crafts but it also works as an institution for learning the craft directly from the craftsmen. Most of these craftsmen are winners of National awards. Some of the well known exhibits are *Dhokra* (an oldest metal casting tradition of folk art) craft of Oraon, Malhar etc., tribes of Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal, traditional shawls of Naga tribes ,etc.

3.2.3 Tribals working as professional animal trainers

Some of the migrational tribes are settled into agriculture but when they are not engaged in agricultural activities they work as professional trainers of animals such as elephant-catching and taming, grazing animals, etc. In the following case study we are going to discuss about elephant taming and training in Goalpara, Assam.

Elephant catching and taming in Goalpara, Assam.

Some of the tribals of Assam are known for their skills in training and domesticating of wild animals, specially the elephant. As we all know that the elephant is one of the most intelligent and agile living land mammals of this earth. They are used for various purposes such as for hunting games or riding or to work in the forest for loading wood. Earlier there were several places in Assam where elephants were caught and among them is Goalpara, which lies within the foothills of Bhutan, these daring exploits of capturing the elephants take place in the dense forests of north and south regions of Goalpara, Assam. Goalpara lies on the lower banks of Brahmaputra River and shares many of its cultural traditions with the adjoining North Bengal. The *Mahut* (elephant rider and trainer), the *Phandi* (the men who lasso the wild elephants) and their companions undertake the elephant catching and taming operation. The *mahut*, the *phandi* and their companion do not belong to any special community or caste. They come from different ethnic tribes of people residing in the districts of Assam such as *Rajbansi*, *Bodo*, *Garos*, *Rabha* (they are different branch of Mongolian tribe) and also from other communities like Nepalese, Muslims, etc. In the forests the social laws are peculiar; here a man is not known by his caste or community. A man is given the title of a Guru (teacher or one who guides) and becomes a *Sardar* or the leader of a hunting band only by proving his courage and skill.

The tradition of catching elephants is an ancient profession of Assam; it was also a popular sport among the *Ahom* (1228-1826 AD) monarch. Specially the *Ahom* King Sukhapha and Pratap Singh (E. A. Gait: 1905: 105, 123), were much addicted to elephant hunting and frequently present at the *Khedas* (capturing by chasing), later in the modern time the practice was continued through the *Mahaldars* (the man who leases a portion of the forest and brings in the *Mahut* and *Phandi* to work for him), who require the *Phandi* and the *Mahut* to capture the elephant. The entire process of capturing elephant is undertaken by following the tender advertised from the Department of Forest, Assam. Normally, the operations of capturing elephant begin from Oct to March and sometime in the rainy season (from July to September). During October to March the grass lands are dry so it becomes easy to dig the hole to catch the elephant. There are a number of techniques of catching the elephant. To catch and train an elephant, trained elephants are used and in most cases even experienced female elephants are employed. The people involved in the elephant catching operation are constantly at risk and uncertainty. They often spend months together in dense forest away from parents, loved ones and even the newly married wife. But for the *Mahut* and *Phandi* the call of the forests is irresistible. In the forest the *Mahuts* sing-songs to relax themselves and keep up their spirits in the lonely camps.

The entire process of catching and training of elephant takes place inside the forest. Generally a baby elephant is preferred because it is easy to tame them and there is no time limit for training an elephant. For the first few days it is a painful

and testing time for both the *mahut* and the elephant. While taming the elephant, the *mahut*, *phandi* and their companion sing some special songs accompanied by the swaying of the burning torches in keeping with the rhythm of the song. The leader of the chorus sings the song lines first, and then the others join in; repeating the refrain together, begin with an invocation:

*Alla Alla bol re hai, hai Alla Rasul,/Kon mahaler Hati re bhai hai Alla Rasul,
Bhutan mohaler hati re bhai hai Alla Rasul,/Kon ba phandir dhora re bhai hai
Alla Rasul*

*...Phandir dhora re bhai hai Alla Rasul,/kon mahutar dohar re bhai hai Alla
Rasul*

...mahutor dohar re bhai hai Alla Rasul

(*Allah Allah* recite my friends, which *Mahal* (portion of the forest leased for capturing the elephant) this elephant from/it's from Bhutan *Mahal*/who is the *Phandi* that caught? /it was caught by .../which *Mahut* threw the second lasso/it was the *Mahut*.Who through the second lasso)

Note: Blank spaces are to fill the name of the *Phandi* and *Mahut*.

Apart from the forest camp of training elephant, there are other training camps functioning under the Department of Forest, Government of Assam. One such camp is under the Kohora Forest Range near the Kaziranga National Park, Assam. Elephants trained under this camp are mostly born in the forest premises or found abandoned during the monsoon floods. The trained elephant of the Kohora Forest Range are mostly used for “elephant riding” for the visitors inside the Kaziranga National Park.

Check your progress

Note: 1) Your answers should be about 30 words each:

2) You may check your answers with the possible answers given at the end of the Unit .

1) What is the reason for seasonal migration?

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2) Explain a type of seasonal migration.

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3.2.4 Agricultural labourer

In most cases migrant tribal labourers move out in search of employment to rich agricultural areas or city, while they are free from their usual work, this may be mentioned as off-season. Mostly, they are recruited by the contractors and their agents from the areas of their domicile with the promise of high wages, better working conditions and employment opportunities. In the urban areas they work as labourers in building roads, building houses, cleaning cars, as vegetable vendor, rickshaw puller, etc. Some of the tribal people work as agricultural labourer with rich landowning communities. For example; among the Gonds, the Raj Gond are mainly landowning community. A very large proportion of the working force is engaged in agricultural labour and most of them are landless. The basic economic activity of the Gond tribe is agriculture. They are mainly ploughmen, but they also practice animal husbandry. Though the traditional occupations of agriculture and animal husbandry have sustained their economy since time immemorial, nevertheless, these have, of late, started facing mounting pressure due to the large scale immigration of people into their land. Now-a-days the Gond of Central India are engaged in various economic operations simultaneously other than agriculture such as forest labourers, agricultural labourers, daily wage labourers, engaged in mining and quarrying, skilled labourers and musicians, etc.

3.2.5 Tribal women working as maid servants

The demand for maid servants in most of the urban areas is increasing mainly due to advancement of urbanization. The present day educated women of most of the middle class families take up some or other kind of job and this keeps them away from home for a considerable period of the day. That is why; most of the middle class and the higher status families of urban area are mostly dependent on the aid of the maid servants for managing their households. The tribal women have proved to be most reliable maid servants in most of the urban areas which are adjacent to the tribal area or some places where the tribals themselves have migrated in large number. This is very common in Assam, Calcutta, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Delhi and various other industrial and urban areas of India. In some places, due to poor living conditions, tribal people prefer to keep their daughters of tender age, in the middle class families as a maid servant. This is because; firstly they get a regular amount of money as a salary for the family and secondly she is secured by her basic need for food and clothing. In the urban areas, there are number of agencies which are operated by the contractors and their agents are recruited from the areas of their domicile for bringing the tribal women to work as maid servant. The agents get the girls and women of various age groups with the promise of high wage, better life style and connect them with the agency. Generally these agencies work as a mediator between the favourable families and the maid.

3.3 PASTORAL NOMADS/SEASONAL MIGRANT

Pastoral nomads/migrant lead wholly wandering lives and depends upon nature for their living. They move around from one place to other grazing their cattle and earn their livelihood mainly by trading milk products. The Pastoral nomads/migrants of India are concentrated in hilly and forest areas. They are found in large number in the Himalayan belt, North-Western states of India, namely

Kashmir, Punjab, Western Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and, to a certain extent in Rajasthan. Now, we will discuss about a migrant tribe and their migrational habits.

3.3.1 Case study: the Bhot tribe of Sikkim

The *Bhot* of the Lachaen valleys of Sikkim, live in the high mountains of the Himalayas. In the month of April, the young men and women migrate to the higher villages of Zemu, Talem, Samong, Yathang, Kalep etc., to sow potatoes. As this month is not warm enough and suitable for migration, they keep their children and old people with the Lachen, the winter residence of the valley. From May to September they cultivate in the higher regions and in early October, after the completion of harvesting in the upper region they come down to Lachen to stay for the remaining months.

Besides agriculture, the *Bhot* people also depend on pasturing and trade. Their basic economy depends on pasturing and trade, where about one third of their economic needs are met by agricultural products. The Bhot people move around grazing herds of sheep, goats and yaks in the summer months in Northern Sikkim. During monsoon they produce butter from the milk of sheep, goats and yaks. The Bhot people sell their dairy products in the plains.

The *Bhot* people carry out cultivation in two types of agricultural fields (a) permanent field for annual cultivation and (b) temporary field captured from the jungle for only one or two years and then vacated for regeneration of forest for another few years. The cycle of regeneration varies with the climate and altitude of the place.

3.3.2 Case study: the Todas

These are pastoral nomads' tribes of South India, who live in the Nilgiri groups of hills. Their main occupation is rearing buffaloes. They have contempt for cultivation, and despite a large extent of potato land secured for them from the Government, have not shown much interest in utilizing it. They, instead, lease it out to the more enterprising and agricultural minded *Badaga*, who makes a good cultivator. The Toda hut is half-barrel shaped, oblong and has a small entrance through which the inmate crawls inside. A Toda hamlet which is called a *Mand*, consists of similar houses, less than half a dozen in number, with milk houses separately attached to every family house. It is in this house that milk is boiled, to which access is denied scrupulously to all women.

H.C. Wilson writes in his report about the Toda; "during the annual migration of the buffaloes to the Kundahs and when they were approaching the bridle path leading from Avalanche to Sispara, I witnessed an interesting custom; both the ordinary and sacred herds were on the move together. As soon as the sacred herd crossed the bridle path, the Toda men having put down all their house-hold utensils, went to where the women and girls were sitting and carried them one by one over the place where the buffaloes had passed, depositing them on the path above. One of the men told me that the females are not allowed to walk over the track covered by the sacred herd and have to be carried whenever it is necessary to cross it. This herd has a recognized track when migrating, and is led by the old buffaloes which appear to know the exact way".

3.3.3 Case study: the Gujjar

The Gujjars are a pastoral tribe of Northern India. They lead a pastoral life moving with herds of buffaloes from high altitude to low hills during winter and from lowlands to highlands during the summer months. The Gujjars move around the mountains of Himalaya from Jammu, Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttaranchal and hilly regions of Utter Pradesh and also in the state of Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan. They speak in the Indo-Aryan language, Gujjari, and use the Arabic script.

The Gujjars of Himachal Pradesh rear buffaloes, cows, and even sheep and goats like their fellow nomads of the valleys. They sell milk and its products to the villagers to earn their living. They divide their work equally; such as rearing domestic animals, milking, weaving and selling the products etc. Every member of the family has to bear his/her joint responsibility, for example if one member is sick, another will perform the duty automatically. The Gujjars migrate to the *Dhars* (high mountains) during summer and wander down in winter. The men graze cattle, where as women cook food, milk the animal and prepare ghee. Unlike, the Gaddi tribe, they wander in search of grazing pastures for their cattle, throughout the year. The Gujjars build their *deras* (huts) with grass leaves and wood available in the forest. These huts are temporary and are destroyed or abandoned after they change their grazing tracts.

They enjoy the right of grazing with a formal permit in the forests. Since many of them have been rehabilitated in colonies, they have taken to other pursuits like agriculture, business and service. The Gujjar sell milk and its products to earn their living. They have links with the market mostly through middlemen, but many of them sell their dairy products in the market directly.

The Gujjar men look distinct in their attire which is made up of a *tamba* (a kind of head cap) and a colorfully embroidered waistcoat, while the women wear a *churidar* (a baggy pair of trousers) and a shirt.

The Gujjar are divided into two endogamous religious groups, the Muslim and the Hindus. The Muslims have two sections-Bhatariye and Bhanariye, who do not normally intermarry. It is believed that Gujjars were originally a Hindu population, who were converted to Islam during the last part of the Mughal rule. The Gujjars of Himachal Pradesh are spread from the states of Chamba, Sirmur and then gradually to other localities outside these regions. Some of them found their way to the Kangra District and up to Bilaspur.

Check your progress

Note: 1) Your answers should be about 30 words each.
2) You may check your answers with the possible answers given at the end of the Unit .
3) How do the Gujjars of Himachal Pradesh earn their living?
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3.4 TRIBAL LIVING INFORMAL PROFESSION

Some tribes in India earn their livelihood by informal profession such as singing around from one house to another or singing in public places or performing acrobatic feats or jugglers, exhibiting their feats as they wander around from place to place etc., but most of them are settled inhabitants. The Gulgulias, the Dommaras, the Singiwalas, the Karwals, the Jogis, the Munduputtas and the Kelas, the Pamulas, the Kakmaras, the Bynollu etc., are some such tribes who are professional singer and earn their living by singing. Given below are two case studies:

3.4.1 Case study: the Bynollu

The *Bynollus* are musicians by profession and earn their living by singing. They carry a stringed black cylindrical drum thoroughly exposed on one side and a sheet of thin leather covering at the other end with a wire mounted upon it and also consisting of a number of jingle bells fitted inside which can produce a jingling musical sound. With his right hand, the musician beats the hollow producing the effect of a thud, another keeps the chorus by playing upon the wire drum fitted with a single string. They entertain villagers by singing praises of Gods and Goddesses and their miracles. All able bodied *Bynollu*, are in great demand on occasions when village Gods are worshiped, as they sing the praises of Gods and can narrate “Ellamma katha” and other ballads. They are the priests for Madigas. They are found in Kurnool and Anantapur districts of Andhra Pradesh.

3.4.2 Case study: the Kakmaras

The Kakmaras are a migrant tribe of West Bengal. They correspond to the Bandas of Andhra Pradesh. Though the Telugu Bandas migrated to Bengal more than 200 years ago on account of their poverty, they still speak Telugu at home and are able to converse in Bengali. They mainly live by singing and got their name on account of their fondness for the crow flesh as is the case with the Bandas of Andhra Pradesh. The crow is a forbidden bird and unfit for the table for almost all Indian except very few tribes like Kakmaras. Kakmaras were classified in the Census report of 1951 as *Madrasis*. They camp in their wandering they sometimes camp under the trees, near market places, fairs or in open places.

P.K. Bhowmick, made a close study of this small tribe, the population of which is below 300. They settle down for 10 to 30 days at a stretch and after exhausting chances of collecting in the surrounding areas move to another place. When they go to any particular place, they keep their scanty belongings in the cavities of big trees or keep them hanging from the branches in the trees and move about within a radius of 3 to 4 miles for carrying on their only profession i.e. singing. They are mostly found in Contai, Tavailuk and in parts of Sadar sub-division of Midnapur; and a few of them can be found in the districts of Balasore and Puri in Orissa. Bhowmick observed that “the Kakmaras men dress themselves in a peculiar fashion with vermilion marks on the forehead and a coloured head gear or crown is worn by them. They wear an iron bangle around the right wrist and carry a sharp knife without handle for use as well as for defense. They have bags made of palm leaf mats and telescoping spears for killing of catching birds. Dogs are trained and employed to keep watch on their bedding or other domestic

kits hung on a tree. Women generally move about with the children carrying infants tied to their back with a piece of cloth. To get more alms, they recite loudly the name of God in melodious tone “Govinda” every time they approach a prospective giver. They have the dirty habit of spitting frequently and thus they soil the place they visit. Sometimes they make a gash on their bodies from which blood is allowed to flow. In this way they try to draw sympathy, more rice, vegetable, and torn clothes from people of charitable disposition in the village.

Check your progress:

Note: 1) Your answer should be about 30 words each.

2) You can check your answers with possible answers given at the end of the Unit.

4) Write a brief note on occupational habits of any tribes from informal profession.

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3.5 LET US SUM UP

Migrations of tribes have been happening all over the world from time immemorial. Our early men were presumed to be a migrant, who traveled across the globe for millions of years and who were obliged to earn their livelihood through food gathering and later by hunting, must have lived as nomads as no other way could have suited their environment, tradition and living conditions. In India before independence, there were many tribes who migrated from their place of origin to work as plantation labourers, for example in the tea plantation in Assam, there are many tribal people like Santal, Oraon, Munda etc. from the central Indian tribe, who were brought as seasonal labourers but now, they are habitants of Assam. Other than Indian states many of the tribes migrated to foreign lands such as the Caribbean Islands, West Indies, etc., to work as factory labourers. They adopted the foreign land as their new home but at the same time they also retained some of the flavour of their native culture.

3.6 ACTIVITY

We have discussed about seasonal migration in article (2.5). Do you think that now you know why they migrate and which are the places they work for their livelihood?

3.7 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE ANSWERS

- 1) Seasonal migration of tribe from one place to another occurs mainly in search of food as it dominates most of their lives and occupies most of their time earn their livelihood
- 2) **Migrant labourer working in industries:** In India after independence the growth of the industry in most of the tribal areas are coming up very fast. As a result bulk of the labour force in these areas is employed from these tribal people. The growing of different industries in several natural sites are constantly sought which are mostly the natural dwelling places for the tribes. These types of problem of encroachment in the tribal areas have compelled the tribes to change their age old habits of living and some of them migrate from their natural habitats to Industrial Township and urban areas. They work as migrant labour because of factors like erosion of the resource base, alienation of land, restrictions on rights over forest produce and lack of employment opportunities in the areas of their domicile. These forced the tribal to seek jobs outside the region especially in the enterprises employing unskilled labourers like brick kilns, agriculture, and housemaid, playing musical instrument in wedding or other band and excavation work.
- 3) The Gujjars of Himachal Pradesh rear buffaloes, cows, and even sheep and goats like their fellow nomads of the valleys. They sale milk and its products to the villagers to earn their living.
- 4) The Bynollus: are musician by profession and earn their living by singing. They carry a stringed black cylindrical drums thoroughly exposed on one side and a sheet of thin leather covering at the other end with a wire mounted upon it and also consisting of a number of jingle bells fitted inside which can produce a jingling musical sound. With his right hand, the musician beats the hollow producing the effect of a thud, another keeps the chorus by playing upon the wire drum fitted with a single string. They entertain villagers by singing praises of Gods and Goddesses and their miracles. All able bodies Bynollu, are in great demand on occasions when village Gods are worshiped, as they sing the praises of Gods and can narrate "Ellamma katha" and other ballads. They are the priests for Madigas. They are found in Kurnool and Anantapur districts of Andhra Pradesh.

3.8 SUGGESTED READING

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