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## UNIT 2 PASTORAL NOMADISM

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### Structure

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### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

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In the last Unit we referred to the use of spears, bows and arrows and microliths toward the upper Palaeolithic period. You must have noticed that these influenced the hunting patterns as well as ways of securing animal food. The microliths were used for fishing as well as arrow heads for hunting. These new tools helped in hunting the small game in the forests rather than hunting herds in steppes. Hunting was also becoming more selective. Groups were becoming smaller with small number of families as smaller amounts of game were available. The patterns of movements or habitations were also influenced. They were determined by the availability of plants, animals and environment. A migratory or seasonal way of life with some base camps emerged. By this time many hunting gathering groups had acquired knowledge about their immediate environment. The pattern of growth of vegetation of different types of plants and use of various plants for their survival, knowledge about animals, their life cycle, breeding patterns, habitat and food consumption was also available to the hunter gatherers. This knowledge helped them in domesticating plants and animals.

Following the upper Palaeolithic phase, in last 12000 years in different regions hunting gathering cultures underwent changes representing different patterns of subsistence and ways of life. Some groups continued with hunting gathering ways of life in isolated groups down to the modern times while others took to pastoralism or moved to settle ways of agriculture at varying points of time in different regions.

In majority of cases the domestication of plants and animals was the crucial element in transition to agriculture and transformation to settled life. This transition was gradual spread over hundreds of years and not a sudden phenomenon. In most of the early cultures both domestication of plants and animals appear almost simultaneously. While in the next Unit we will provide a detailed discussion on the transition to agriculture. In the present Unit we will confine ourselves to the process of the growth of pastoral nomadism.

Domestication of animals was the first step towards the adoption of pastoral nomadic way of life. We will first discuss the domestication of various species of animals. This would be followed by a discussion on the main features of pastoral nomadism and the circumstances under which it developed in the earliest

phase. We will also undertake survey of pastoral nomadic cultures in different regions. These pastoral nomadic cultures were spread in different regions and existed in different periods of time. Given the constraints of space in this Unit we will not go into the details of these cultures in each region instead we take into account the society, ways of life and economy of these cultures in general.

We must emphasize here that the placement of this Unit after hunting gathering and before transition to agriculture should not be seen as a stage in the development of cultures and societies. We have placed it at this point in our scheme of discussion because the earliest evidence of the existence of these cultures can be traced to the period following upper Palaeolithic. However, it must be borne in mind that these cultures flourished in various forms down to the middle ages and even to the present age in some isolated regions. In fact the nomadic cultures achieved their glory during the middle ages when their leader succeeded in establishing the nomadic empires in certain regions. During this period they were considered a force to reckon with and are seen as alternative mode of social formations which flourished side by side with powerful sedentary civilisations. We will discuss these aspects in a separate Unit as Nomadic Empires in Block 4 of this course. The discussion on pastoral nomadism in this Unit, therefore, is not confined to a particular period prior to the process of settled agriculture but cuts across the periodisation and should be seen as a distinct social and economic way of life.

Let us first discuss the process of domestication of animals before going into the details of pastoral nomadism.

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## 2.2 DOMESTICATION OF ANIMALS

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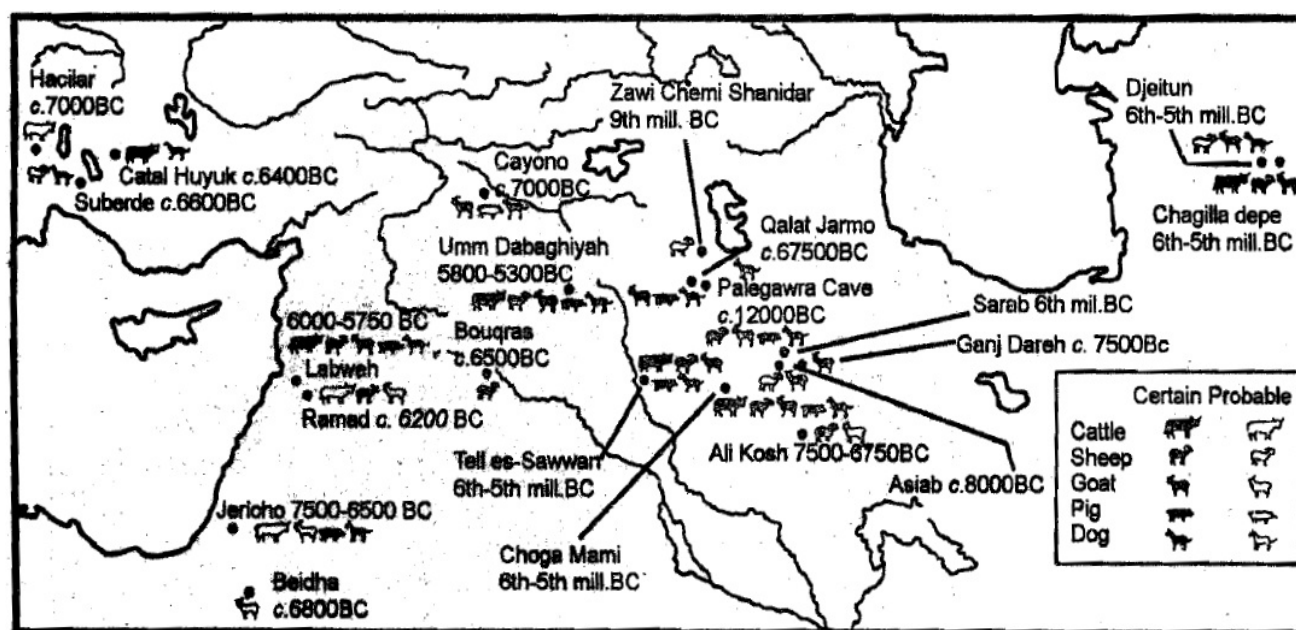
The domestication of animal amounted to capturing, taming and breeding wild animals. They were separated from their natural habitat and provided shelter and food. Domestication of various species was followed with breeding taking place under captivity. According to Sandor Bokonyi “ It is a long and complicated process. Animal domestication was the culmination of experience and knowledge gained through tens of thousands of generations of hunting, about the anatomy, biology, physiology, behaviour and so on of a number of wild animal species. The domestication itself was not a process that occurred from one animal generation to the other but took several and sometimes up to thirty generations” (History of Humanity, Vol., p. 389). Certain considerations must have guided the selection of animal species to be domesticated. The important ones of these were: i) the provision of food for these species was easily available through human efforts and guidance, ii) the domesticated species were of some use to humans either as animal meat or any other purpose, iii) they were not too aggressive to cause harm to the persons domesticating them, and iv) they could easily move from one place to the other with the groups keeping them under captivity. It has been suggested by some scholars that the animals were also domesticated for using them for sacrificial purposes and evidence for it has come through their presence in graves.

To begin with most of the domesticated animals were herd animals (the sole exception is cat which anyway was domesticated much later). The main purpose of domestication must have been to get food reserve when hunting failed to deliver the need.

In several regions the dog was probably the first animal which was tamed and domesticated. It seems that during the late upper Palaeolithic certain species of

wolf (the ancestor of dog) or wild dog were tamed and domesticated to help in tracking and hunting activity.

Pig was another early domesticated animal. Both Dog and Pig did not require any specific and elaborate food to be arranged. They could survive on the left over food of hunting gathering people. This includes the refuge of plant as well as animal food consumed by these people. The other three early domesticated species included sheep, goat and cattle. All three required vegetation available in the wild forests and grass lands. This included grasses and leaves of shrubs in the natural form. These species were of great advantage to the people domesticating them. The biggest gain was a reserve source of meat which was rich in protein. Besides their skin and hair were also of significant value. Sandor Bokonyi has analysed the available evidence about early domesticated animals. He considers them as five early Neolithic domesticated animals. viz. Dog, Pig, Sheep, Goat and Cattle. He feels that the earliest evidence of their domestication comes from West Asia due to: i) availability of all these species in this region, ii) specifically goat and sheep a) could survive on fodder rich in cellulose thus providing meat from a food that could not be used by humans or dog and pig, b) they were small sised and posed no danger to humans, and c) their undemanding feeding habits were valuable feature in the circumstances of primitive animal husbandry, iii) in South West Asia wild forms of cereals were also present and their cultivation started at about the same time as animal domestication and the two processes went hand in hand. (History of Humanity, Vol. 1 pp. 392-93). He also provides approximate dates of these domesticated species in this region. (As shown in the illustration below).

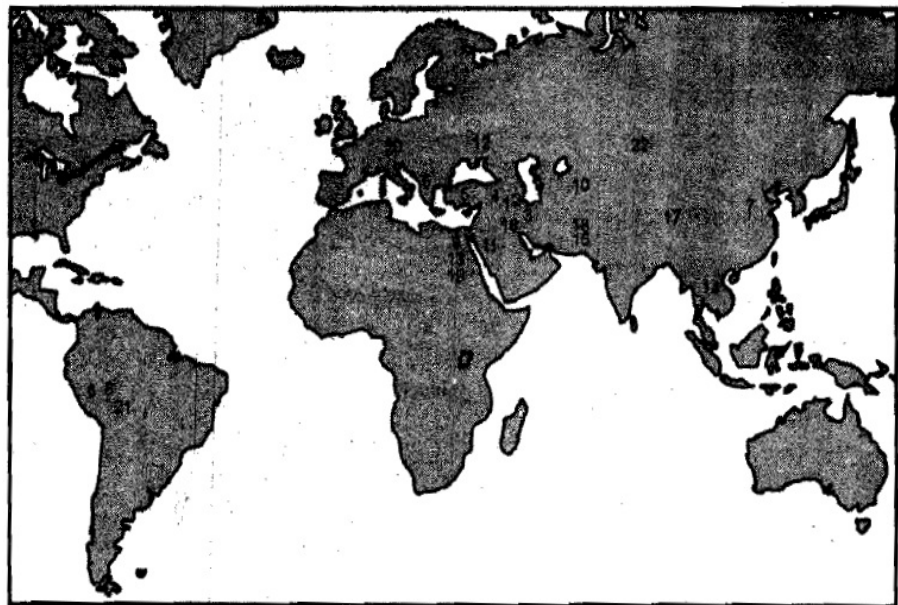


Map 1: Domestication of Animals in West Asia (Reproduced from *History of Humanity*, I, p. 393)

The earliest evidence for the domestication of dog comes from north-east Iraq around 14000 years ago. Possibly the earliest evidence for domesticated sheep is found in Zawi Chemi Shanidar (North-west Iraq) from early 11<sup>th</sup> century BP. Ali Kosh (Western Iran) has yielded definite proof of the domestication by about 9500 to 8750 years ago. Asiab and Ganj Dareh (Western Iran) provide evidence of domestic goats from the 10<sup>th</sup> millennium BP as also Jericho (Iraq) and Alikosh (Iran). The evidence for the earliest domestic pig is found in Qala' at Jaruso (north east Iraq) about 8750 years ago. The earliest domesticated cattle lived in Catal Huyuk, in Anatolia about 8400 years ago. This data suggests that by the middle of the 9<sup>th</sup> millennium BP all five domestic animal species had been acquired (*Ibid*). However, goat and sheep out number all other species because

of their capability to survive in all weather conditions and all types of wild vegetation found in plains and mountains. About the rapid spread of sheep and goat Wenke comments “By 6000 B.C. there is evidence of domestic sheep and goats at sites all over Southwest Asia and even into Greece and southern Europe, and it appears that once domestication was well advanced, the spread of sheep and goat raising was very rapid. In every agricultural community there are hedgerows, thorny plants, clippings, and stubble that are perfectly acceptable to the rather indiscriminating sheep and goats, and these animals, with their heavy fleece, are well protected against the sun and heat of the Middle East” (Wenke, *Patterns in Prehistory*, p. 168 ). While cattle required rich pastures and pig needed more water and select food.

Donkey seems to have been domesticated in Egypt and Eastern Sahara around 7<sup>th</sup> century BP. They were mainly used as beast of burden to carry loads and draw carts. Later Arabia also seems to have adopted them. Domestication of camel is first reported from Eastern Sahara. Its breeding probably started in the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC. In Arabia evidence of its breeding is confirmed in the second millennium BC. However it was only towards the end of 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC a new saddle was devised in North Arabia for its effective use. This saddle had a pommel and was placed on the animal’s hump leaving the arms of the rider free. As a result the efficiency of camel warriors was significantly increased and they became a formidable military force (Khazanov, p.101). This development gave nomadism a new impetus and camel in the region played the same effective role as horse did in the Eurasian steppes. In Arabia it proved of immense use with its capacity to carry loads, which was many times more than the ass, and could survive without water for days in high temperature regions of Arabia and Sahara desert travelling for miles.



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| 1 Sheep (8500 B.C.) Żawi Chemi Shanidar, Iraq          | 12 Horse (3000 B.C.) Ukraine,U.S.S.R                    |
| 2 Dog (12,000 B.C.) Paleogavra, Iran                   | 13 Honeybee (3000 B.C.) Nile Valley, Egypt              |
| 3 Goat (7500 B.C.) Ganj-Dareh, Iran                    | 14 Banteng (3000B.C.) Non Nok Tha, Thailand             |
| 4 Pig (7000 B.C.) Cayonu, Turkey                       | 15 Water buffalo (2500 B.C.) Indus Valley, Pakistan     |
| 5 Cattle (8500 B.C.) Thessaly, Greece; Anatolia Turkey | 16 Duck (2500B.C.) Near East                            |
| 6 Guinea Pig (8000 B.C.) Ayacucho Basin, Peru          | 17 Yak (2500 B.C.) Tibet                                |
| 7 Silk moth (3500 B.C.) Hsi-yin-fsun, China            | 18 Domestic fowl(2000 B.C.) Indus Valley, Pakistan      |
| 8 Llama (3500 B.C.) Andean Highlands, Peru             | 19 Cat (1800 B.C.) Nile Valley, Egypt                   |
| 9 Ass (3000 B.C.) Nile Valley, Egypt                   | 20 Goose (1500 B.C.) Germany                            |
| 10 Bactrian Camel (3000B.C.) Southern U.S.S.R          | 21 Alpaca (1500B.C.) Andean Highlands, Peru             |
| 11 Dromedary (3000 B.C.) Saudi Arabia                  | 22 Reindeer (1000B.C.) Pazyryk Valley, Siberia,U.S.S.R. |



Domestication of horse was the major break through which completely changed the socio-economic and political scenario of pastoral nomadic cultures. The evidence for domestication of horse and its breeding is available from the Eurasian steppes some time before fourth millennium BC. According to one view it was domesticated in the 5<sup>th</sup> millennium BC in Ukraine and Kazakhstan. There are conflicting views about the use to which the domesticated horse was put to. According to one view they were first used as a draught animal and as food. While the second view suggests that they were used for riding purpose and as draught animal only subsequently. But the evidence for the use of wheeled carts is not available prior to 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC. At the same time we do not have evidence for the use of harness and saddle, which was crucial for effective riding of the horse before the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC.

Notwithstanding the conflicting opinions about, its first usage for riding or as draught animal, once effective riding was mastered it proved to be the most effective in managing and leading large herds of cattle. It also enhanced the mobility of the riders to travel long distances and equipped its users with a lot of attacking power. The horse was the single most important factor which helped the nomadic groups in establishing nomadic empires spread across vast regions.

Reindeers were domesticated and herding was practiced in the region of Siberia i.e. Urianghai of the Altai Mountains. Yaks were similarly domesticated in the specific regions of high mountains in the region of Tibet. They were also herded in Mongolia, Manchuria, Sayan and Altai Mountains. In South East Asia dog, pig, fowl and duck were domesticated around 7000 years ago. Animal husbandry was brought to Europe by two succeeding waves of immigrants from Anatolia – the first reaching Greece through the Aegean and the second reaching Balkans through the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus. All the five domestic species of West Asia are found in Europe a little later. Sheep and goat were not natural fauna of Europe and did not have favourable conditions. In Greece they could adapt very well. Cattle and pig grew at a faster pace in all parts of Europe. Horse and ass also began to be domesticated and were used mainly as work animal. In Southern Italy animal husbandry started in 7<sup>th</sup> millennium BP and Southern France around 6000 years ago.

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## 2.3 PASTORAL NOMADISM

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The available evidence and data for the earliest period (following Palaeolithic) is very limited. The archaeological evidence for material culture is also fragmentary for the earlier period. Anthropological studies conducted among the pastoral nomadic groups in the modern times and the accounts of observers from sedentary civilisations for first millennium BC throw some light on them. However, more detailed records are available about nomads of Eurasian Steppes for the middle ages. According to Dani and Jean Pierre “Nomadic groups established relationships not only between themselves but also between humans and animals. In this biotic symbiosis they adjusted themselves fairly comfortably to a particular natural surrounding. ... This particular association of people and animals led to better management and to an understanding of the power that was potential in animals. By harnessing this power for their own purposes, herders took another step forward towards progressive civilization. The bull or horse was harnessed to the plough and the horse or camel was used for a quicker ride across the grassy steppe land or sandy deserts (*History of Humanity*, Vol. II, p.10).

In simple terms nomadic pastoralism is characterised by two dominant feature

common to almost all such societies: (i) dependence of their economy on breeding of herd animals who provide sustenance to their way of life and shape the society they live in, and (ii) the migratory character of life in contrast to settled way of agriculturists. If we take both these elements separately then we may have pastoral communities or groups who are pastoralists and their subsistence is based on animal breeding but they follow a settled life. At the same time there are nomadic groups who are engaged in vocations, like trade, or craft production and lead a migratory life and do not involve themselves with breeding of animals. One more thing to be borne in mind is that within nomadic pastoral groups there are some who also participate in agriculture and other professions side by side with pastoralism. It is, therefore, very important to have both the above listed elements together in the groups to classify them as pastoral nomads.

Khazanov lists five important characteristics defining economic essence of pastoral nomadism: 1) Pastoralism is the predominant form of economic activity, 2) Its extensive character connected with the maintenance of herds all year round on a system of free-range grazing without stables, 3) Periodic mobility in accordance with the demands of pastoral economy within the boundaries of specific grazing territories, or between these territories (as opposed to migration), 4) The participation in pastoral mobility of all or the majority of the population (as opposed, for example, to the management of herds on distant pastures by specialist herdsmen, into which only a minority is involved in pastoral migrations), 5) The orientation of production towards the requirements of subsistence (as opposed to the capitalist ranch or dairy farming of today).

Apart from the basic characteristic features there are a number of factors which provide a unique identity to different pastoral nomadic groups. The nomadic mode of production, way of life, the structure of society and economy was not uniform in all regions and historical periods. It was mainly shaped by the geography, environment, types of animal breeding, technology available, neighbouring sedentary society and resources available to the nomadic groups. We propose to discuss a wide range of these groups cutting across periods to provide you a general understanding about the pastoral nomadic cultures with different variations.

There are different views among scholars about the origin of pastoral nomadism. According to one view the origin of pastoral nomadism can be traced back to Palaeolithic times when hunters followed the big herd mammals and in due course managed to tame and domesticate them. Such groups did not at any stage engage themselves in agriculture. Reindeer herding is cited as the earliest form of pastoralism by them. This view is more inclined to assume that pastoralism as a mode of production predates agriculture and many of these pastoral groups later on took up agriculture while a few continued with nomadic pastoral way of life. A second view considers both agriculture and pastoralism starting almost simultaneously and feels that domestication of big herd animals was accomplished in sedentary agricultural communities. They feel that with the growth of animal herds it became difficult for these agriculturists to arrange food and pastures in the areas around habitations. Some from among them had to carry the herds to pastures and come back after migratory trips. In due course of time in some specific circumstances many of these groups adopted pastoralism as a full time vocation and nomadic way of life ensued. Many scholars do not accept this theory of expansion of cattle population to the point of

moving away from the agriculturists and becoming nomads. Yet two more variants of the second view or as its extension were also put forward. One of these explains the taking up of full time pastoralism due to climatic changes which made agriculture nonviable in some regions and such agriculturists moved out with their animals and started a nomadic way of life. Among these climatic changes one may include natural disasters also which might have forced abandoning agriculture in some regions. Another variant is what has come to be considered as displacement. According to this view certain agricultural cum pastoral communities were attacked by their stronger neighbours and were forced out of their cultivated lands. Such groups took up nomadic pastoralism as a mode of life.

Two more points need to be kept in view while analysing the origin of nomadic pastoralism. First, the ethnographic studies taken up on nomadic pastoralism and settled agriculturists do indicate some similarities in cultural traits of both the groups in specific regions. These establish strong linkages within the regions rather than among the nomads from distant regions. The second is that nomadic pastoralism emerged in different regions at different periods of time. In view of these, it is difficult to say with certainty the circumstances under which pastoral nomadism originated and whether these were similar in all regions in all periods. The trend of declining number of pastoral nomadic communities through the historical times does suggest that many of these groups gave up their pastoral nomadic way of life at various points of times and settled for sedentary mode of life.

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## **2.4 GENERAL SURVEY OF SPREAD OF PASTORAL NOMADISM**

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The domestication and breeding of animals clearly shows that while some species could be bred in a range of climatic and geographical regions a few were confined to specific regions only. Sheep, goat, cattle, pig and horses had more adaptability to the food available and climatic changes and could spread to wider regions while camel, yak, reindeer and llamas remained confined to specific regions where climatic and ecological conditions suited them. The pastoral nomads also bred specific species but in many cases had combination of species in their herds for example sheep and goat along with horses or cattle with horses, or sheep or goat with camels have been reported in different regions.

In most of the cases nomads shared the same zones with agriculturalists for their subsistence and that of their stock.

### **2.4.1 Different Regions**

Pastoralism was practiced in Eurasian steppes from around 7<sup>th</sup> millennium BC. It had also penetrated to east European steppes by the 6<sup>th</sup> millennium BC and spread quickly to adjoining areas. The mobility was limited in early phase. The use of horse on a large scale from 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC gave an impetus to nomadism proper and it occupied pride of place in nomadic pastoralism and covered large areas as a dominant and distinct culture for almost 3000 years. Around the end of 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium and beginning of first millennium BC this nomadism penetrated to Mongolia and China also. In fact Chinese sources refer to constant conflicts with northern barbarians of different names, and the continual opposition of nomadic and settled people. It is suggested that the building of the Great Wall of China was a

result of this opposition (Richard N. Frye, *History of Humanity*, Vol. III).

As already indicated the regions of Mesopotamia, Syria, Palestine and Arabia probably were the centres of origin of agriculture and domestication of animals. The existence of pastoral nomadism in this region has been attributed by scholars to the dates ranging from 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC and 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC. Here the nomads had close association with agriculturalists and for this reason many scholars consider the dominant trend as being semi nomadic and movement restricted within a limited territory. In the region of Arabia nomadism dominated and had a wide spread upto Sahara in Africa. Camel played a crucial role in nomadism in this region.

In the region of Afghanistan, Iran and Asia Minor pastoralism was practiced from 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC but nomadism emerged much later and was at its peak during the middle ages (10<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> century). Nomadism in this region is ascribed to the displacement of sedentary populations. The nomads of Eurasian steppes greatly influenced nomadism in this region.

In Africa the domestication of animals was adopted first in Egypt and North Africa probably around 7<sup>th</sup> millennium BC and from 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC we can trace the existence of pastoralism in this region. However, nomadism proper seems to have been adopted in the middle of 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC. Horse is to be found in Egypt and other regions of North Africa in 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC. But it was camel which played an important role in nomadism in the whole of north and east Africa from the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC and not the horse. The latter was used more in chariots and wheeled carts and not as a riding animal during this period. In the region known as Horn of Africa (Eritrea, Harsas and Somalia) nomadism proper appeared only in the first millennium AD.

As far as other regions are concerned reindeer herding was prevalent among nomads in Siberia and other parts of North Eurasia probably from 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC. Around the same time nomads of the region of Tibet were breeding yaks. Both these are considered as basically nomads who descended directly from hunting gathering people and continued till the middle ages as nomads only.

In the American continent only two main domesticated animal species were bred. These were llama and vicuna (belonging to camel family). They were a source of meat and wool and also served as pack animals. Horse was introduced here by Spaniards in the 16<sup>th</sup> century only. Soon horse was bred on large scale and nomadic pastoralist groups are noted in the subsequent period only.

In India pastoralism was prevalent at a large scale and even had separate social groups engaged in herding and breeding (known by different castes in different regions). However, most of these groups were semi nomadic agriculturalists. However a few were pure pastoralists but their migratory pattern was between summer and winter abodes and had habitats at one fixed location where they would return after the seasonal changes. Gujjars and Bakarwals of sub-Himalayan ranges and Rajasthan, Gaddis and Rabaris of Kashmir, Changpas of Laddakh, Gollas and Kurubas of South India and Lombards and Sugalis in other parts are some of these pastoral nomads.

A survey of growth and spread of nomadic pastoralism in different regions through historical periods shows that horse and camel played a significant role in shaping nomadism. Commenting on the contribution of horse Dani and Jean Pierre say, “Although other regions relied on other animals, the horse has retained its value right



up to very recent times. Its domestication, training and proper use and its companionship with its owner have left lasting memories in art, in certain rituals and in Shamanistic practices and ceremonies. As the food crop is the base of agricultural civilizations, so the horse is the mainstay of the nomadic way of life and all that implies in the process of nomadic cultural growth to steppe civilization. The horse was a means of controlling other animals and placing them too in the service of human beings, just as the growing of crops enabled them to produce a surplus and head for new ventures towards civilisation” (*History of Humanity*, Vol. II, p.10). Steppes and highland of South-east Europe, Mongolia, Transcancacia and some other parts in Asia witnessed the flourishing of nomadism and provided it military superiority to dominate the sedentary societies for long periods of time. They even succeeded in establishing nomadic empires who extended their reach upto Europe and influenced the course of history in Europe and Asia. Many of these sedentary societies in the region borrowed horse breeding and skills of riding from these nomadic groups. According to Richard N. Frye “Weapons which could be carried on horses, such as the compound bow, were a contribution of the nomads to the art of warfare. Also the techniques of bridles and saddles developed throughout this early time although the use of the stirrup is later. The nomads almost lived on horses which became essential to the nomadic way of life, and in warfare the nomads, of course, were always superior to the settled folk since the nomads were mobile and could easily retreat into the steppes or surprise their opponents by virtue of that mobility” (*History of Humanity*, Vol. III, p. 445).

Similarly the use of camels in Arabia and Sahara in Africa helped in subjugation of large desert areas and provided an edge in long distance trade. This helped in unifying small tribal communities in the region.

### 2.4.2 Extent of Mobility

The mobility of pastoral nomads is mainly as a response to unfavourable habitat for their stock. It depends on seasonal variations in temperature, rainfall, sowing or harvesting of crops by agriculturists in the regions. The movement is towards a more attractive destination as per the scheduled seasonal time table. Many a times they follow the pattern of rains so that more healthy fodder is available to live stock. Many a time their stock may be dangerous to the crops sown by neighbouring agriculturists and they move away to come back after harvesting when their flocks can graze in these fields and may even fertilise them for new crop sowing.

One most common pattern of movement noticed in many regions is referred as Transhumance. This is the regular seasonal movement of flocks between summer and winter pastures. Transhumance is considered by many scholars as different from true nomadism. In this case a fixed route is followed and fixed abodes are available in parts of year. Gujjars and Bakarwals in sub-himalayan ranges, Gaddis, Rabaris and Changpas in Kashmir Valley may be included in such categories. In such situations one of the abode is a settled habitat rather than complete nomadic existence.

The area covered by true nomadic groups is varied in different regions. Khazanov has given estimates for various nomadic groups. It is around 50 – 100 kilometres among reindeer herders in Chukotkas, 100 – 200 kms amongst the Lapps in Finmark, 150 – 200 kms amongst the Nentry of Kanin – Timan tundra, 400 – 500 kms amongst the Chukchi if Elvuney and Anyuy, 1200 kms amongst certain groups of the Nentsy. Navajos (Red Indians) move in an area of 2500 sq miles.

In the Steppes amongst the Mangols of Inner Mangolia it has been less than 150 kms while in Gobi zone of outer Mongolia it amounted to 600 kms and amongst the Kazakhs of the Little and Middle Hordes it has been 1000 – 1500 kms. Amongst the Kirghiz the extent of vertical pastoral migration has varied between a few dozen and 150-200 kms and amongst the Turkmen the extent of radial circular migrations has varied between 20 – 30 and 150 – 200 kms. Amongst Rwanda in near east Africa the migrations cover 1500 kms, amongst Tuareg 300 – 1000 kms (*Nomads and the outside world*).

In many cases their routes are traceable for thousands of years. About nomads of Eurasian Steppes Strabo writes ‘they follow the grazing herds, from time to time moving to other places that have grass, living only in the marsh-meadows about Lake Malotis in winter, but also in the plains in summer’. Plano Carpini (*The Mongol Mission*) gives a similar account of the nomads of the Golden Horde: “All these men go south in the winter towards the sea, and in the summer they go up north along with banks of the same rivers to the mountains” (cf. Khazenov, p. 51). The movement of Kazakhs was also dependent on availability of pastures and water. The routes of Kalamucks migration in Eastern Europe seems to have been unchanged for more than two thousand years.

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## 2.5 SOCIETY AND ECONOMY

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The nomadic way of life through history was viewed as barbaric and can be found listed along with natural disasters by settled societies and civilizations. During middle ages, the Mongol and Huns with their periodic raids through the towns of Asia and Europe destroying all symbols of civilizations reinforced the savage barbarian images of these nomads. The data available on nomads in the period of prehistory and early history is very limited and fragmentary. However, with limited sources the researches by anthropologists archaeologists, pre-historians and scholars working on nomadic groups could somewhat displace the notions of savagery attached to nomads and establish that there was much more to these cultures than merely plundering savagery. As a result of these researches we are now in a position to understand to some extent the way of life, social and political structures and economy of pastoral nomads. Apart from the archaeological materials, documentations and historical evidence studies on these nomads are based on the living cultures of these groups to the present day. Scholars have made use of all these to have an insight in nomadic cultures.

In almost all nomadic pastoral communities, the family is the basic unit which consist of a man, wife and their children. The combination of these families formed smaller groups who moved and lived together. A number of such groups could have descended from the one common ancestor and were considered belonging to the same clan with common lineage. The ownership of animal herds lies undisputedly with the individual families almost in all cases. However, the right on the pastures is not as uniform. In some cases individual families have their identified territories of the common pastures of the community. In some communities the pastures are shared by all the families as a common territory. However the pastures for each community are clearly defined. Mongol aristocracy or chiefs were known to have reserved best pastures for their own stocks and nobody was allowed to use them. The same applies to the water resources. Tending and breeding of stock belonging to each family was their responsibility as also the control on products of their flocks. Dahl and Hjort

taking into account various factors have given general estimate for the subsistence of family of nomads. According to their estimate a family should possess 50 – 64 head of large stock (cattle), or 28 camels, or more than 100 head of small stock (cf. Khazanov, p. 30-31 as also for estimates for different regions). There were certain degrees of social stratification among nomads but in some cases it was very pronounced as in case of nomads of steppes.

The matrimonial relations in these cultures were governed by customary laws in different forms. Monogamy is dominant but polygamy and polyandry is also prevalent in a few communities. Cattle play an important role in their customs and rites. Wearing horns, tails, and skins at times are ways of expressing their identity with cattle. Ritual sacrifice of cattle is also practiced as part of their religious expressions. The meat, milk and dairy products along with vegetables food are their staple diet. Practice of consuming blood by obtaining it by bleeding the animal was also prevalent in a number of communities. The network of exchange is established with agricultural sedentary neighbours. They obtain grain and other vegetable products through exchange of animals and animal products. The hair of sheep and other animals used to weave blankets and other such objects or raw wool exchange is quite common in communities breeding the species producing wool. Their material culture was extremely simple which suited their nomadic way of life. Wood and leather were primary materials used by them. Requirement of pottery and other artisanal products was also met through exchange from the sedentary communities. Vadin M. Mason, writing about ways of life of nomads of Southern Siberia and Mongolia, remarks, “Enormous changes occurred in ways of life and in social psychology. In the nomadic and semi-nomadic economies new types of collapsible and easily transportable dwellings were made along with more easily transportable kitchenware and crockery, mostly of wood and leather. New items of clothing came into common use including soft, heelless shoes, long, wide trousers and very decorative belt plates usually indicative of rank and prestige. This dynamic and inventive society also established new aesthetic canons which were reflected in the so-called Scytho-Siberian animal style, in which animals are depicted in flight or entwined in fierce struggle” (*History of Humanity*, Vol. III, p. 446).

When we analyse the stability and potential of their economy it is evident that to begin with pastoralism was able to exploit the ecological zones which were not suitable for agriculture and other forms of economic activity. It provided a food producing mode of economy in arid, semi-arid and tundra zones. It survived because it was the most advantageous system in these zones. However, it had its limitations in developing in to complex economy and was based simply on simple reproduction of the similar types of animal species. Though some limited changes could be brought through the practice of having mixed herds to meet needs of food and exchange. But limits to increasing productivity are obvious. It was prone to natural disasters like drought, excess of rains or snow or spread of disease among the cattle. Its dependence in more than one way on other economies for acquiring grains, craft products and even exchanging or selling its own products, was inbuilt. In spite of these limitations many scholars feel that the pastoral nomadic economy was able to manage on its own in a much better way than many sedentary societies and this according to them was the reason for their continuation in many diverse regions. The other view is that the pastoral nomadic economy was unstable and lacks self sufficiency and bound to stagnate. According to Khazanov “most importantly, nomads could never exist on their own without the outside world and its non-nomadic societies, with their different economic systems. Indeed, a nomadic society could only function while the outside

world not only existed but also allowed for those reactions from it – reactions which were economic, social, political, cultural in a word, a multi-faceted response – which ensured that the nomads remained nomads. In this way, in my view, the important phenomenon of nomadism (while it remains nomadism) really consists in its indissoluble and necessary connection with the outside world; that is to say, with societies which have different economic and social systems.”

Many scholars feel that lack of self sufficiency was the basic reason for the decay of these societies and if it could survive it was because of presence of the sedentary societies around them. The regular raids and plunder by many of the pastoral nomadic group may be seen as measures and tactics for survival evolved by such groups.

It is a bit difficult to fully agree with either of these views for the long periods of history of existence of pastoral nomadic economy. While a few were unstable and fragile, others could manage and continued to manage their economies with a fair amount of success.

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## 2.6 SUMMARY

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In this Unit we have made an effort to provide a brief survey of nomadic pastoralism through different periods in different regions. Domestication of animals by the humans was the first step in the direction of adoption of pastoralism as a distinct mode of production of food. The domestication of animals was taking place side by side with the domestication of plants. This context the one was not a pre-stage of the other in the process of evolution of human cultures. We have provided some evidence to suggest the approximate periods of the beginning of pastoralism and breeding of specific species in different regions but it is difficult to say at what point nomadic pastoralism started. You must have noticed that there are various theories about the circumstances under which nomadic pastoralism started. It is difficult to completely reject any of these on the basis of the available evidence and researches conducted by scholars. As far as spread of these groups is concerned it seems that they were present in almost all regions at some or the other point of time from Neolithic times to the modern age.

We also familiarised you with the society and economy of these nomadic cultures. Compared to agricultural societies the nomadic cultures were less complex and their mode of production simple. In view of this many scholars have postulated that their economy was fragile and was largely dependent on the neighbouring sedentary societies. However, some of the pastoral nomadic groups succeeded in establishing powerful empires surrounded from all sides by developed civilisations.’ A few managed to sustain their mode of production and distinct identity to the modern times. In any case we do not need to view them always as competing cultures where only one was to survive after annihilating the other. Both could exist and develop together through mutual interaction.

According to many scholars the earliest civilization of the world i.e. the Sumerian civilization emerged as a result of interaction between pastoral nomadic groups and agriculturists. Once agricultural groups had settled down in villages they depended on pastoral nomadic groups for acquiring stones and metals from places far away. The mobility of the pastoral nomadic groups meant that they were in contact with different communities. These communities might develop new technologies and ideologies. So, the nomadic groups became the agents in the diffusion of this knowledge. In the subsequent periods of history invasions



and attacks by pastoral nomadic groups reworked the stagnant structures of agricultural societies. The example of Aryans in India and Persia, Hittites in Turkey, Hyksos in Egypt, Minoans and Greeks in Greece are some well known cases of pastoral nomadic communities catalysing the birth of great civilizations. It was the greater ability of the nomadic groups to learn and adapt new technologies that ensured their survival and military superiority after the domestication of horse. No wonder Chinggis Khan, the leader of a nomadic tribe established an empire larger than that of Alexander or Julius Ceaser.

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## 2.7 EXERCISES

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- 1) Write a short not on the domestication of animals.
- 2) What do you understand by nomadic pastoralism? How is it different from pastoralism?
- 3) What was the significance of horse among pastoral nomadic groups?
- 4) Briefly analyse the economy of pastoral nomads.