UNIT 1: EARLY PASTORAL AND AGRICULTURAL COMMUNITIES IN INDIA

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1.1 Learning Objectives

After going through this unit, learners will be able to:

- Explain the emergence and characteristics of early village settlements in prehistoric India.
- Discuss the development of agriculture and animal husbandry and their impact on human society.
- Analyze the role of agriculture and pastoralism in the economy of the Harappan Civilization.
- Examine the pastoral character and socio-economic organization of Vedic society.
- Assess the transition from pastoral communities to agrarian societies in ancient India and its historical significance.

1.2 Introduction

The history of human civilization is closely linked with the development of agriculture and pastoralism. The transition from a hunting and gathering economy to food production marked a significant turning point in human history. In India, evidence of early agricultural and pastoral communities can be traced back to the Neolithic period. These communities gradually established permanent settlements, domesticated animals, cultivated crops, and laid the foundations of organized social and economic life. The study of early pastoral and agricultural communities helps us understand the origins of village life, agricultural practices, social organization, and economic development in ancient India.

1.3 Village Settlement, Agriculture and Animal Husbandry in Pre-Historic India

1.3.1 Emergence of Village Settlements

The emergence of village settlements represents one of the most important developments in the history of human civilization. In the Indian subcontinent, early human communities during the Paleolithic and Mesolithic periods lived as hunter-gatherers, relying on hunting wild animals, fishing, and collecting fruits, roots, and other natural resources for their survival. These groups led a nomadic life and moved frequently in search of food and shelter. Over time, through continuous observation of nature and seasonal cycles, humans learned to cultivate plants and domesticate animals, leading to a gradual transition from food gathering to food production. This transformation, known as the Neolithic Revolution, brought about a fundamental change in human life and encouraged the establishment of permanent settlements. The development of agriculture enabled people to cultivate crops such as wheat, barley, rice, millet, and pulses, ensuring a more stable and reliable food supply. At the same time, the domestication of animals such as cattle, sheep, goats, and dogs provided meat, milk, wool, hides, and labour for farming and transportation. The availability of fertile land and water resources near rivers, lakes, and streams further encouraged communities to settle in one place. Archaeological evidence from sites such as Mehrgarh, Burzahom, Koldihwa, Chirand, and Daojali Hading reveals the existence of permanent dwellings, storage facilities, hearths, and agricultural activities, indicating the growth of organized village life. These settlements became centres of economic and social activity where people engaged in farming, animal husbandry, pottery, weaving, and tool-making. The production of food surplus supported population growth and led to greater cooperation among community members. Family and kinship ties formed the basis of social organization, while the sharing of resources and labour strengthened community life. The emergence of village settlements thus marked the beginning of a settled agricultural economy and laid the foundation for the development of rural society, social institutions, economic specialization, and the later growth of complex civilizations in the Indian subcontinent.

1.3.2 Development of Agriculture

The development of agriculture in prehistoric India marked a revolutionary change in human life and laid the foundation for the growth of settled communities and civilizations. During the Paleolithic and Mesolithic periods, human beings depended

primarily on hunting, fishing, and gathering wild plants for their subsistence. However, with the onset of the Neolithic Age, people gradually acquired knowledge about the cultivation of plants and the domestication of animals, leading to the emergence of agriculture as a regular economic activity. This transition from food gathering to food production was a gradual process that resulted from careful observation of natural phenomena, including the growth of plants from seeds and the seasonal patterns of rainfall. Archaeological evidence suggests that agriculture began in different regions of the Indian subcontinent at different times, with some of the earliest evidence coming from sites such as Mehrgarh in present-day Pakistan, Koldihwa and Mahagara in Uttar Pradesh, Burzahom in Kashmir, and Chirand in Bihar. Early farmers cultivated crops such as wheat, barley, rice, millet, lentils, peas, and other pulses depending on regional climatic and environmental conditions. Rice cultivation, in particular, became an important feature of agricultural development in the Ganga Valley. The adoption of agriculture was facilitated by the use of simple tools made of stone, wood, and bone, including digging sticks, stone hoes, sickles, and axes. These tools helped in clearing forests, preparing the soil, sowing seeds, and harvesting crops. Agricultural activities were largely dependent on rainfall and natural water sources such as rivers, streams, and lakes, as organized irrigation systems had not yet developed. Alongside crop cultivation, the domestication of animals such as cattle, sheep, goats, buffaloes, and dogs contributed significantly to agricultural productivity by providing labour, manure, and supplementary food resources. The growth of agriculture ensured a more reliable and stable food supply, reducing dependence on uncertain natural resources and supporting population growth. It also encouraged the establishment of permanent settlements, leading to the emergence of village communities and more complex forms of social organization. The production of surplus food enabled some individuals to engage in specialized occupations such as pottery-making, weaving, tool production, and trade, thereby contributing to economic diversification. Thus, the development of agriculture in prehistoric India was a transformative process that not only changed the subsistence patterns of early human communities but also laid the economic and social foundations for the rise of settled village life and the subsequent development of civilization in the Indian subcontinent.

1.3.3 Domestication of Animals and Animal Husbandry

The domestication of animals and the development of animal husbandry constituted a major milestone in the economic and social evolution of prehistoric India. During the Paleolithic and Mesolithic periods, humans depended largely on hunting wild animals for food and other necessities. However, with the advent of the Neolithic Age, people gradually began to domesticate certain animals and rear them for various purposes, leading to a more stable and productive way of life. The dog is believed to have been one of the earliest animals domesticated by humans, followed by cattle, sheep, goats, buffaloes, and pigs. Archaeological evidence from sites such as Mehrgarh, Burzahom, Chirand, Koldihwa, and Daojali Hading indicates the widespread practice of animal domestication and livestock rearing in different parts of the Indian subcontinent. Domesticated animals provided a regular source of food in the form of milk and meat, while sheep and goats supplied wool and hides used for clothing and other purposes. Cattle and buffaloes played a particularly important role by providing

draught power for ploughing fields, transporting goods, and supporting agricultural activities. Animal dung was used as manure to improve soil fertility and increase agricultural productivity. The close integration of animal husbandry with agriculture created a balanced and self-sustaining rural economy, reducing dependence on hunting and uncertain natural resources. The management of livestock also encouraged the development of pastoral communities, some of which practiced seasonal migration in search of grazing lands and water sources. Animal husbandry contributed significantly to economic security, food production, and social stability, while livestock often became a measure of wealth and status within communities. Thus, the domestication of animals and the growth of animal husbandry played a crucial role in the transition from a nomadic hunting-gathering lifestyle to a settled agricultural society and laid an important foundation for the economic development of prehistoric India.

1.3.4 Social and Economic Life of Early Village Communities

The social and economic life of early village communities in India was primarily based on agriculture, animal husbandry, and collective cooperation. Villages emerged as settled communities where people cultivated crops such as wheat, barley, and later rice, using simple tools made of stone and metal. Domesticated animals like cattle, sheep, goats, and buffaloes played an important role in farming, transportation, and food production. The family formed the basic social unit, and kinship ties helped maintain social organization and mutual support. Villagers often lived in mud or thatched houses and participated in community activities related to cultivation, irrigation, and harvest. Economic life was largely self-sufficient, with people producing most of their daily necessities. Surplus agricultural produce encouraged barter and exchange, leading to the growth of local trade. Craft activities such as pottery, weaving, tool-making, and basketry also developed, contributing to the village economy.

Agricultural surplus generated by farming communities provided the economic basis for the growth of towns and cities. Since not everyone was required to engage directly in food production, a section of the population could devote itself to specialized occupations such as pottery, metallurgy, bead-making, weaving, and trade.The availability of surplus resources encouraged the development of craft specialization and commercial activities. Harappan artisans produced a wide range of goods, including pottery, jewellery, seals, and metal objects. These products were exchanged within the civilization and traded with distant regions such as Mesopotamia, Central Asia, and the Persian Gulf. The expansion of trade networks further stimulated economic growth and urban development.

The management of agricultural surplus, trade activities, and urban infrastructure required some form of administrative organization. Although the exact nature of Harappan political authority remains uncertain, the uniformity of weights and measures, standardized brick construction, and planned urban layouts suggest the existence of effective systems of coordination and regulation. Thus, agriculture and pastoralism not only sustained the population but also facilitated the emergence of complex urban centres and administrative structures.

1.4 Agriculture and Pastoralism in Harappan Society

Agriculture and pastoralism formed the backbone of the economy of the Harappan Civilization (c. 2600–1900 BCE). The Harappans cultivated crops such as wheat, barley, peas, sesame, and cotton, making them among the earliest cotton growers in the world. They utilized the fertile alluvial soil of the Indus River system and practiced irrigation and floodwater farming to enhance agricultural production. Alongside farming, animal husbandry played a vital role in their livelihood. The Harappans domesticated cattle, buffaloes, sheep, goats, and pigs, which provided milk, meat, wool, and draught power for agricultural activities. The combination of agriculture and pastoralism ensured a stable food supply, supported urban growth, and contributed significantly to the prosperity of Harappan society.

1.4.1 Sources for the Study of Harappan Economy

The economic life of the Harappan Civilization (c. 2600–1900 BCE) can be reconstructed through a variety of archaeological sources. Since the Harappan script has not yet been deciphered, historians and archaeologists depend mainly on material remains recovered from excavation sites to understand the nature of production, trade, agriculture, crafts, and economic organization. These sources provide valuable insights into the economic foundations of one of the world's earliest urban civilizations.

- Archaeological Excavations

Archaeological excavations at major Harappan sites such as Harappa, Mohenjo-daro, Dholavira, Kalibangan, Lothal, Rakhigarhi, and Banawali constitute the primary source for studying the Harappan economy. The discovery of granaries, warehouses, workshops, residential structures, and urban planning reveals a well-organized economic system. Excavated artifacts help scholars understand agricultural practices, craft production, trade networks, and resource management.

- Agricultural Remains

The discovery of charred grains, seeds, and agricultural tools provides evidence of farming activities. Archaeologists have found remains of wheat, barley, rice, millet, peas, sesame, and cotton at various Harappan sites. At Kalibangan, traces of a ploughed field have been discovered, indicating the use of systematic agricultural techniques. These findings demonstrate the importance of agriculture as the foundation of the Harappan economy.

- Animal Bones and Faunal Remains

Animal bones recovered from Harappan settlements offer information about pastoral activities and dietary habits. Remains of cattle, buffaloes, sheep, goats, pigs, and camels indicate that animal husbandry was an important economic activity. The predominance of cattle bones suggests their significance in agriculture, transportation,

and trade. Faunal remains also help scholars understand patterns of domestication and livestock management.

- Tools and Implements

Various tools made of stone, copper, bronze, and bone have been discovered at Harappan sites. These include sickles, axes, knives, chisels, fishhooks, and needles. Such implements provide evidence of agricultural operations, hunting, fishing, and craft production. The availability of specialized tools suggests a developed economy with occupational specialization.

- Craft Production Centres

Evidence of bead-making workshops, pottery kilns, shell-working units, and metalworking centres indicates the existence of specialized crafts. Sites like Chanhudaro and Lothal have yielded evidence of large-scale bead manufacturing. The presence of standardized products points to organized production and skilled craftsmanship, which played a significant role in the Harappan economy.

- Seals and Sealings

Harappan seals made of steatite are among the most important sources for understanding economic activities. These seals often contain animal motifs and inscriptions. Scholars believe that they were used for trade, identification of goods, and administrative purposes. Sealings found on storage containers indicate systems of control and regulation in commercial transactions.

- Weights and Measures

The discovery of standardized weights made of chert and measuring scales demonstrates the existence of a sophisticated system of trade and commerce. The uniformity of weights across different Harappan sites suggests centralized regulation and standardized commercial practices. Such measures facilitated both local and long-distance trade.

- Trade and Transport Evidence

Evidence of trade is found in the form of imported raw materials and finished products. Materials such as lapis lazuli from Afghanistan, copper from Rajasthan and Oman, and shells from coastal regions indicate extensive trade networks. The dockyard at Lothal provides evidence of maritime trade. Harappan seals and artifacts discovered in Mesopotamia further confirm overseas commercial contacts.

- Pottery and Manufactured Goods

Harappan pottery, terracotta objects, beads, ornaments, and metal artifacts reveal the level of technological advancement and industrial activity. The widespread

distribution of similar pottery styles across the Harappan region indicates economic integration and exchange among settlements.

- Harappan Script and Inscriptions

Although the Harappan script remains undeciphered, inscriptions on seals, pottery, tablets, and other objects are valuable sources. They may contain information related to trade, ownership, administration, and economic transactions. Future decipherment could provide direct evidence about the economic organization of Harappan society.

1.4.2 Agricultural Practices and Major Crops

Agriculture formed the backbone of the Harappan economy and played a vital role in sustaining its urban centres and supporting a growing population. The fertile alluvial plains of the Indus River and its tributaries provided ideal conditions for cultivation, enabling the Harappans to develop a highly organized agricultural system. They practiced farming on lands enriched by the annual floods of the Indus, which deposited fresh silt and moisture, making the soil highly productive. This method of floodwater farming reduced the need for extensive artificial irrigation. Archaeological evidence from Kalibangan in Rajasthan reveals the remains of a ploughed field with distinct furrow marks, indicating the use of systematic cultivation methods and possibly mixed cropping. The Harappans likely used wooden ploughs drawn by oxen to prepare the land for sowing. Although there is little evidence of large-scale canal irrigation, they employed wells, reservoirs, and water-storage structures to support agriculture, especially in areas with limited rainfall. The sophisticated water-management system at Dholavira demonstrates their ability to conserve and utilize water efficiently. Agriculture was closely integrated with animal husbandry, as domesticated animals such as cattle and buffaloes provided draught power for ploughing fields and transporting agricultural produce.

The Harappans cultivated a wide variety of crops suited to different ecological conditions. Wheat and barley were the principal food crops and formed the staple diet of the population. Rice was cultivated in certain regions, particularly at sites such as Lothal and Rangpur in Gujarat. Millets were grown in semi-arid areas and contributed significantly to food security. Various pulses, including peas, lentils, and chickpeas, provided an important source of protein, while oil-seeds such as sesame and mustard were cultivated for the production of edible oils. One of the most remarkable achievements of Harappan agriculture was the cultivation of cotton, making the Harappans among the earliest cotton growers in the world. Cotton was used in textile production and likely became an important item of trade. Archaeological evidence also suggests the cultivation of fruits such as dates and a variety of vegetables, contributing to a balanced and diverse diet. The high level of agricultural productivity generated surplus food, which supported artisans, traders, administrators, and other non-agricultural groups. This surplus encouraged craft specialization, trade, and urbanization, leading to the growth of well-planned cities such as Harappa and Mohenjo-daro. The presence of large granaries at these sites further indicates the

organized storage and management of agricultural produce, highlighting the central role of agriculture in the prosperity and development of Harappan civilization.

1.4.3 Irrigation and Agricultural Technology

Irrigation and agricultural technology played a significant role in the success of Harappan agriculture. The Harappans mainly depended on the seasonal flooding of the Indus River and its tributaries, which deposited fertile silt on agricultural lands and provided natural moisture for cultivation. In regions with limited rainfall, they developed efficient water-management systems, including wells, reservoirs, tanks, and channels to store and distribute water. Archaeological evidence from sites such as Dholavira reveals advanced techniques of rainwater harvesting and conservation. The Harappans also used agricultural tools made of wood, stone, copper, and bronze. Evidence from Kalibangan of a ploughed field suggests the use of wooden ploughs, likely drawn by oxen, for preparing the land. Domesticated animals such as cattle and buffaloes were employed for ploughing and transportation, increasing agricultural productivity. The use of improved farming methods, water-management practices, and animal power enabled the Harappans to cultivate crops efficiently and produce agricultural surpluses that supported urban growth and economic prosperity.

1.4.4 Animal Husbandry and Pastoral Activities

Animal husbandry and pastoral activities were vital components of the Harappan economy and complemented agricultural production. The Harappans domesticated a variety of animals, including cattle, buffaloes, sheep, goats, pigs, dogs, and, in some regions, camels and elephants. Among these, cattle were the most important and were extensively used for ploughing fields, transporting goods, and other agricultural activities. Sheep and goats provided meat, milk, wool, and hides, while animal products such as bones, horns, and leather served as raw materials for various crafts. Archaeological excavations have yielded large quantities of animal bones, terracotta figurines, and seals depicting animals, indicating their economic and cultural significance. Pastoral activities were often combined with farming, creating a mixed agricultural economy that ensured a stable livelihood. Herds of cattle, sheep, and goats were grazed on nearby pastures, and seasonal movement of livestock may have been practiced in some areas. Animals also played an important role in trade and transportation, as evidenced by terracotta models of bullock carts found at several Harappan sites. Thus, animal husbandry not only provided food and raw materials but also contributed significantly to agriculture, trade, and the overall prosperity of Harappan society.

1.4.5 Agriculture, Surplus Production and Urbanization

The development of agriculture marked a major transformation in the economic and social life of early Indian communities. With the gradual domestication of plants and animals, people began to practise settled cultivation, producing crops such as wheat, barley, rice and pulses. Improved

agricultural techniques, the use of tools, irrigation and the cultivation of fertile river valleys increased agricultural productivity. The production of a surplus beyond immediate subsistence needs enabled communities to support people engaged in non-agricultural occupations such as artisans, traders, priests and administrators. Surplus production also encouraged exchange and the accumulation of wealth, leading to increasing social differentiation. Over time, the growth of agriculture and the availability of surplus contributed to the emergence of permanent settlements and eventually urban centres. Cities became important centres of craft production, trade, administration and religious activities. Thus, the expansion of agriculture and surplus production played a crucial role in the transition from predominantly rural and pastoral communities to more complex and urbanized societies in ancient India.

1.5 Vedic Pastoral Community

The Vedic period (c. 1500–600 BCE) marks an important phase in the history of ancient India, during which the Indo-Aryans settled in the northwestern and later the Gangetic regions of the Indian subcontinent. The early Vedic society, as described in the Rigveda, was predominantly pastoral in character, with cattle rearing forming the basis of economic life. Wealth and social status were measured largely in terms of cattle ownership, and livestock played a central role in subsistence, trade, religious rituals, and social relations. Although agriculture was known and practiced, it occupied a secondary position in comparison to pastoral activities during the early Vedic period. The Vedic people lived in tribal communities led by chiefs and depended on their herds of cattle, horses, sheep, and goats for their livelihood. Over time, with the expansion of settlements into the fertile Gangetic plains, agriculture gradually gained importance, leading to significant social and economic transformations.

1.5.1 Sources for the Study of Vedic Society

- **Vedic Literature**

The most important source for the study of Vedic society is the Vedic literature, particularly theVedas. The Rigveda, the oldest of the four Vedas, is the principal source for understanding the Early Vedic period. It contains hymns dedicated to various deities and provides detailed information about the pastoral economy, tribal organization, social structure, religious beliefs, and daily life of the Vedic people. The other three Vedas—Samaveda, Yajurveda, and Atharvaveda—also contribute to our understanding of Vedic society, especially its rituals, religious practices, and evolving social institutions.

- **Brahmanas, Aranyakas, and Upanishads**

The Brahmanas are prose texts that explain Vedic rituals and sacrifices. They provide insights into the religious practices, social hierarchy, and political organization of Later Vedic society. The Aranyakas discuss philosophical aspects of rituals and

reflect the transition from ritualism to spiritual inquiry. The Upanishads, composed during the later phase of the Vedic period, contain philosophical teachings and help scholars understand the intellectual and religious developments of the time.

- **Vedangas and Sutra Literature**

The Vedangas, which include subjects such as grammar, phonetics, astronomy, and ritual practices, offer additional information about education, knowledge systems, and social customs. The Sutra literature, particularly the Grihya Sutras and Dharmasutras, provides details regarding family life, social duties, marriage customs, inheritance, and legal regulations, thereby enriching our understanding of Vedic society.

- **Epics and Later Literary Sources**

Although composed later, the Indian epics—the Ramayanaand the Mahabharata—preserve many traditions and social practices that originated during the Vedic age. These texts offer useful information about social values, political institutions, kinship relations, and religious beliefs. Puranic literature also helps in understanding certain aspects of Vedic culture and traditions.

- **Archaeological Sources**

Archaeological evidence supplements literary sources in reconstructing Vedic society. Excavations of sites associated with the Painted Grey Ware (PGW) culture and the Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW) culture provide information about settlements, agriculture, tools, pottery, and material life during the Later Vedic period. Discoveries of iron implements, agricultural tools, and village settlements support literary references to the expansion of agriculture and the growth of settled life.

1.5.2 Pastoral Character of Early Vedic Society

The Early Vedic society was predominantly pastoral in character, with cattle rearing forming the basis of its economy and way of life. The Rigveda, the principal source for this period, contains numerous references to cattle, indicating their central importance in the social and economic life of the Vedic people. Wealth was measured primarily in terms of the number of cattle a person possessed, and cows were regarded as valuable assets that provided milk, dairy products, and other necessities. Cattle were also used as a medium of exchange and were often given as gifts, tributes, and sacrificial offerings. The Vedic people reared other domesticated animals such as horses, sheep, goats, and oxen, which contributed to transportation, warfare, and subsistence. Frequent references to cattle raids and conflicts over grazing lands suggest the importance of livestock in the economy. The people lived in tribal communities and often moved from one place to another in search of suitable pastures and water sources for their herds. Although agriculture was known, it occupied a secondary position compared to pastoral activities during the Early Vedic period. The pastoral nature of society influenced its social organization, religious practices, and cultural values, with many Vedic hymns reflecting the significance of cattle and

livestock. Thus, pastoralism constituted the economic foundation of Early Vedic society and played a crucial role in shaping its social and cultural development.

1.5.3 Social Organization and Tribal Life

The Early Vedic society (c. 1500–1000 BCE) was predominantly tribal and pastoral in nature. The social and political organization of the Vedic people was based on kinship, blood relations, and tribal affiliations. The Rigveda, the principal source for this period, provides valuable insights into the structure of society, family organization, tribal institutions, and patterns of social interaction. The tribal way of life reflected the economic conditions of a pastoral society in which cooperation, collective responsibility, and kinship ties played a crucial role.

● Family

The family (**Kula**) was the fundamental unit of Vedic society. It was generally patriarchal, with the eldest male member acting as the head of the household. He was responsible for the economic well-being, protection, and religious duties of the family. Families often lived together in joint households, sharing resources and responsibilities. Respect for elders and obedience to family authority were important social values.

Women occupied a relatively respected position in Early Vedic society. They participated in religious ceremonies, received education, and in some cases composed Vedic hymns. Marriage was considered a sacred institution, and women enjoyed a degree of freedom in social and religious life that gradually declined in the Later Vedic period.

● Tribal Structure of Society

The Vedic people lived in tribes known as **Jana**, which formed the most important social and political unit. Society was organized in a hierarchical manner based on kinship relations:

- Kula (Family): The basic social unit.
- Grama (Village): A group of families living together.
- Vis (Clan): A collection of several villages or families belonging to the same lineage.
- Jana (Tribe): A larger tribal community consisting of several clans.

The tribe provided security, economic cooperation, and a sense of collective identity. Loyalty to the tribe was a significant feature of Vedic life, and tribal interests often took precedence over individual concerns.

● Rajan (Tribal Chief)

Each tribe was headed by a chief known as the Rajan. Unlike later kings, the Rajan was not an absolute ruler but the leader and protector of the tribe. His main

duties included defending the tribe against enemies, leading military expeditions, settling disputes, and ensuring the welfare of the people. The position of the Rajan was often hereditary, but his authority depended largely on the support of tribal members and assemblies.

The Rajan was assisted by several officials, including the **Purohita** (priest), who advised him on religious matters and performed rituals, and the **Senani** (commander), who led the tribal army during conflicts.

Popular Assemblies

An important feature of Early Vedic society was the existence of tribal assemblies that participated in governance and decision-making. The two most significant assemblies were:

Sabha

The Sabha was a smaller assembly consisting mainly of elders, experienced members, and influential persons of the tribe. It discussed important social, political, and judicial matters and advised the Rajan.

Samiti

The Samiti was a larger and more representative assembly that included members of the tribe. It played an important role in public affairs and may have participated in the selection or approval of the Rajan. The Samiti reflected the collective nature of tribal governance.

These assemblies indicate that Early Vedic society possessed participatory political institutions and that the authority of the chief was not entirely unrestricted.

Social Structure

The social structure of Early Vedic society was relatively simple and flexible. Social distinctions existed, but they were not rigidly hereditary. The earliest form of the Varna system began to emerge during this period, dividing society into four broad groups:

- Brahmanas (priests and scholars)
- Kshatriyas (warriors and rulers)
- Vaishyas (farmers, traders, and pastoralists)
- Shudras (service providers and laborers)

However, these divisions were not yet firmly established, and social mobility was possible. Occupations were not strictly determined by birth, and tribal identity remained more important than caste distinctions.

Economic and Social Cooperation

The pastoral economy of the Vedic people encouraged cooperation among tribal members. Cattle rearing, grazing, hunting, and occasional agricultural activities were often carried out collectively. Tribal members assisted one another during conflicts, religious ceremonies, and community activities. The sharing of resources strengthened social bonds and promoted unity within the tribe.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.1: What type of soil was most suitable for Harappan agriculture?
Q.2: Which domesticated animals were commonly used for ploughing fields?
Q.3: Name one oilseed crop cultivated by the Harappans.
Q.4: Which crop became important in some regions of Gujarat?
Q.5: What evidence suggests the use of systematic cultivation at Kalibangan?
Q.6: Name one pulse cultivated by the Harappans.
Q.7: What was the main purpose of wells and reservoirs in Harappan society?
Q.8: How did agricultural surplus benefit Harappan society?

1.5.4 Growth of Agriculture in the Later Vedic Period

The Later Vedic Period (c. 1000–600 BCE) witnessed significant changes in the economic life of the Vedic people, marked by the gradual transition from a predominantly pastoral economy to an agrarian one. As the Aryans expanded eastward from the northwestern regions into the fertile Gangetic plains, agriculture assumed a more central role in the economy and became the principal source of livelihood. The availability of fertile land, abundant water resources, and favorable climatic conditions encouraged the establishment of permanent settlements and the cultivation of larger tracts of land. The introduction and widespread use of iron technology, particularly iron axes and ploughshares, enabled the clearing of dense forests and the expansion of agricultural activities into new areas. Various crops such as rice, wheat, barley, pulses, sesame, and sugarcane were cultivated, with rice emerging as an important staple crop in the Gangetic region. The use of animal-drawn ploughs, improved agricultural implements, and knowledge of seasonal cultivation increased productivity and led to higher yields. Agricultural surplus became a defining feature of the Later Vedic economy, supporting a growing population and facilitating the emergence of specialized occupations beyond farming. As production increased, trade and exchange also expanded, contributing to the development of markets and commercial activities. The growing importance of agriculture brought about significant social and political changes, including the strengthening of the varna system, the rise of territorial kingdoms (janapadas), and the increasing authority of kings who controlled land and agricultural resources. Land ownership and agricultural wealth became important markers of status and power. Religious texts such as the Brahmanas and later Vedic literature contain numerous references to agricultural practices, land grants, and harvest rituals, highlighting the central place of farming in society. Thus, the growth of agriculture during the Later Vedic Period transformed the economic foundation of Vedic society, promoted settled life, encouraged social stratification, and laid the groundwork

for the emergence of complex political institutions and the growth of early states in ancient India.

1.5.6 Transition from Pastoralism to Agrarian Society

The transition from pastoralism to an agrarian society was one of the most significant developments in the history of the Vedic period and played a crucial role in shaping the social, economic, and political structure of ancient India. During the Early Vedic Period (c. 1500–1000 BCE), the economy was predominantly pastoral, with cattle rearing forming the principal occupation of the people. Wealth was measured in terms of livestock, especially cattle, which were regarded as symbols of prosperity, social status, and economic security. The Vedic tribes frequently moved in search of grazing grounds and water sources for their herds, and their social and political organization reflected a semi-nomadic way of life. Agriculture was known but occupied a relatively subordinate position in the economy. However, during the Later Vedic Period (c. 1000–600 BCE), important changes began to take place as the Aryans expanded from the northwestern regions into the fertile plains of the Ganga-Yamuna Doab and the middle Gangetic valley. The availability of extensive fertile land, favorable climatic conditions, and abundant water resources encouraged the adoption of settled agriculture on a larger scale. The introduction and increasing use of iron technology proved to be a turning point in this transformation. Iron axes facilitated the clearing of dense forests, while iron ploughshares improved cultivation and increased agricultural productivity. As a result, farming gradually replaced pastoralism as the primary economic activity.

The growth of agriculture led to the cultivation of a wider variety of crops, including rice, wheat, barley, pulses, sesame, and sugarcane. Rice, in particular, became an important staple crop in the Gangetic region. The use of animal-drawn ploughs, improved farming techniques, and greater control over land resources enabled the production of agricultural surpluses. These surpluses not only ensured food security but also supported a growing population and allowed many people to engage in non-agricultural occupations such as craftsmanship, trade, administration, and religious activities. Consequently, occupational specialization increased, leading to a more diversified economy. The transition to an agrarian society also resulted in the establishment of permanent settlements and villages, replacing the earlier semi-nomadic lifestyle. As people became attached to land and agricultural production, concepts of land ownership, inheritance, and property rights gained importance.

This economic transformation had far-reaching social consequences. The relatively simple and flexible social structure of the Early Vedic period gradually evolved into a more stratified society. The varna system became more rigid, with Brahmanas and Kshatriyas occupying positions of privilege, while Vaishyas became primarily associated with agriculture, trade, and pastoral activities. Shudras increasingly occupied subordinate positions within the social hierarchy. Agricultural surplus strengthened the power of kings and chiefs, enabling them to collect taxes and tributes from cultivators. This contributed to the growth of larger territorial units known as *Janapadas* and laid the foundation for the emergence of early states and kingdoms. Political authority became increasingly centralized, and the role of tribal assemblies such as the Sabha and Samiti gradually declined. Religious practices also reflected the growing importance of agriculture, with rituals and sacrifices being performed to ensure fertility, good harvests, and prosperity.

The transition from pastoralism to an agrarian society thus marked a fundamental shift in the history of Vedic India. It transformed the economic base from

cattle-centered pastoralism to land-based agriculture, encouraged the growth of permanent settlements, promoted social differentiation, strengthened political institutions, and paved the way for the rise of complex state systems. This process laid the foundations for the subsequent development of Indian civilization and remains one of the most important socio-economic changes of the Vedic age.

1.6 Let Us Sum Up

After going through this unit, you have learnt-

1. The transition from hunting and gathering to food production marked the beginning of settled life, leading to the emergence of early pastoral and agricultural communities in India.
2. Agriculture and animal husbandry became the main economic activities, providing a stable food supply and supporting the growth of permanent village settlements.
3. The Harappan Civilization developed an advanced agricultural economy, cultivating crops such as wheat, barley, rice, pulses, and cotton, supported by efficient water-management practices.
4. Animal husbandry played a vital role in Harappan society, with cattle, buffaloes, sheep, and goats contributing to agriculture, transportation, and food production.
5. Agricultural surplus in Harappan society encouraged trade, craft specialization, and urbanization, leading to the growth of well-planned cities and a prosperous economy.
6. Early Vedic society was predominantly pastoral, with cattle serving as the principal measure of wealth, while social and political life was organized around tribes and kinship groups.
7. During the Later Vedic Period, agriculture gradually replaced pastoralism as the dominant economic activity, resulting in permanent settlements, social stratification, territorial kingdoms, and the foundation of an agrarian society in ancient India.

1.7 Further Reading

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✓ 1.8 Answers To Check Your Progress

Answer 1: Alluvial soil
Answer 2: Cattle and buffaloes
Answer 3: Sesame
Answer 4: Rice
Answer 5: Furrow marks in a ploughed field
Answer 6: Lentils
Answer 7: Water storage and irrigation support
Answer 8: It supported trade, crafts, and urban development

? 1.9 Model Questions

A) Very Short Questions

Q.1:What was the principal occupation of the Harappan people?

Q.2:Name two major crops cultivated by the Harappans.

Q.3:Which Harappan site has provided evidence of a ploughed field?

Q.4:What was the importance of cattle in Harappan agriculture?

Q.5:Which crop made the Harappans among the earliest cotton growers in the world?

B) **Short Questions**

Q.1: Discuss the importance of agriculture in the Harappan economy.

Q.2: Explain the agricultural practices followed by the Harappans.

Q.3: Describe the role of irrigation and water management in Harappan agriculture.

Q.4: What were the major crops cultivated by the Harappans? Discuss briefly.

Q.5: How did agricultural surplus contribute to urbanization in the Harappan Civilization?

C) **Long Questions**

Q.1: Discuss the agricultural practices and major crops of the Harappan Civilization. How did agriculture contribute to its economic prosperity?

Q.2: Examine the role of irrigation, water management, and agricultural technology in the development of Harappan agriculture.

Q.3: Analyze the significance of animal husbandry and pastoral activities in the economic life of Harappan society.

Q.4: Explain the relationship between agriculture, surplus production, and urbanization in the Harappan Civilization. How did agricultural surplus facilitate the growth of urban centres?