

Topic two: Economic Realities in Ancient Economic and Social Systems (Primitive Communalism)

Humanity has known a series of social relationships formed for the purpose of collective action to meet basic human needs. These relationships have evolved throughout history.

The first system known to humankind was the communal system, where people gathered in herds, roaming through forests and along riverbanks, gathering whatever food they could find.

At the beginning of this system, humans did not yet know how to make clothing or shelter, living instead in caves and grottos. As humans, endowed with reason, began to observe the phenomena around them and started using tools to aid their daily lives, such as using stones as tools and weapons for hunting. Later, cutting tools for digging the earth appeared. These tools facilitated the lives of early humans, as hunting became their primary activity, after they had previously relied entirely on nature's readily available resources. Humans began to perform even the simplest tasks collectively to cope with the harsh realities of their lives.

Collective work led to the development of the human mind, as the need for communication arose. Sounds and gestures formed the first language of communication in primitive communal societies, which later evolved into distinct words and a language that facilitated the transfer of productive experience and expertise.

First: Characteristics of the Primitive Communal System:

1- Level of Productive Forces: Primitive production was characterized by a low level of productive forces and tools. This was the dominant feature of the primitive production process. Therefore, in their continuous struggle with nature, humans sought to develop their means of production. This process required a long period of time, during which:

a- Discovery of Fire: Fire was discovered in this system by striking stones together. This discovery aided humans in their daily lives, as they used it as a means of self-defense and a tool for work.

B- The Discovery of the Bow: This discovery was a major step in the development of productive forces, and hunting became the most productive form of practical activity. Hunting began to exceed daily needs, so humans learned to confine animals to specific areas for extended periods and, from this, to domesticate them. The first animal domesticated by humans was the dog, which accompanied them in the search for food, followed by goats, then cattle, and finally horses.

Around 8,000 to 9,000 years ago, animal husbandry spread widely in Africa, West Asia, India, China, and Europe. Animal husbandry provided, in addition to food products, wool, hides, and other necessities. Humans began to utilize the power of animals for pulling and plowing the land. With the gradual settlement of settlements, humans began to build dwellings, manufacture clothing and household tools, and create the first means of transportation, such as sleds, boats, and wheels. Gradually, the economic activities of early humans diversified, and their tools became more specialized and sophisticated.

C. The Emergence of Grain Sowing: People realized that it was possible to sow grain near the village and that it was no longer necessary to travel far and wide in search of plants. Corn, barley, and wheat were among the first crops cultivated by humans. Primitive forms of agriculture initially appeared in arable regions such as Mesopotamia, the Nile Valley, India, and Iran. In these areas, agriculture gradually became the main branch of the economy, completely separating it from gathering and hunting. Since the era of communal farming, humans have cultivated almost all the plants we know

today. The transition to agriculture reduced human dependence on nature because the relatively high returns on farm labor allowed farmers to build up reserves to help them cope with natural disasters.

In general, it can be said that the development of tools had significant consequences, as it facilitated the emergence of primitive forms of agriculture. The gradual transition from gathering plants to more sophisticated agricultural practices began, and on the other hand, nomadic tribes gradually began to settle in specific locations, leading to an overall improvement in living conditions.

2- Production Relations in Primitive Society: Since individuals do not engage in production alone, relationships arise between individuals called production relations. It is worth noting here that production relations are defined by the fundamental economic law of the primitive communal production system: "ensuring the necessities of life for humankind by relying on primitive means of production, on the basis of communal ownership of the means of production, collective labor, and the equitable distribution of products." From this law, we can conclude that production relations in primitive society are characterized by:

A- Collective Labor: This takes the form of simple cooperation, where all members of the clan work collectively to accomplish only one task (hunting, for example), without specialization or division of labor, except for the physiological division of labor, whether according to gender (between men and women) or age. Women were responsible for gathering plants and managing household affairs, while hunting was the domain of men. Perhaps the main reason behind the collective nature of work is the low level and limited availability of tools (the absence of advanced tools), which prevented individuals from facing nature alone.

Therefore, collective work was both obligatory and necessary in the primitive era. Individuals moved together from one activity to another, such as hunting, farming, or herding, according to what the elders of the community deemed appropriate and in line with the community's interests.

B- Collective Ownership of the Means of Production: This is closely linked to the first characteristic (collective work and simple cooperation). Land and all resources (tools of production) were owned by everyone, with the exception of certain items such as clothing and some means of self-defense, which were used individually.

C- Equal Distribution of Products: Due to the limited productive force, communal ownership of the means of production and the products of labor imposed a specific form of distribution: equal distribution, regardless of the quantity or type of labor exerted in collective production.

3- Social Organization (The Clan System): The clan represented the economic, social, and political unit upon which primitive society was based. It is worth noting that women held a prominent position and played an important role in the early stages of the clan system due to the material conditions of life.

Primitive agriculture and animal domestication were the domain of women and were economically more important than hunting (the domain of men), as hunting offered uncertain returns.

The role of women grew to such an extent that lineage was traced back to them, a stage known as the matrilineal clan system. This continued until the development of productive forces and the emergence of advanced domestication (pastures) and sophisticated agriculture (grain cultivation), which had previously been the domain of men. This led to a shift in power dynamics, with dominance passing from women to men, lineage being traced back to the father, and the patrilineal clan system replacing the matrilineal one.

Furthermore, due to the absence of surplus, investment, private ownership of the means of production, and social classes, the formal government apparatus (the state) did not exist at that time. Custom alone served as the means of governance and formed the basis of the prestige of tribal chiefs.

4- The Development of the Social Division of Labor: The social division of labor was linked to the emergence of both agriculture and pastoralism, i.e., cultivating the land and raising livestock. This led to specialization in labor (division of labor) based on communal lands. The first major social division of labor (division of labor based on communal lands) was the formation of pastoral and agricultural tribes, which significantly increased labor productivity.

The most important result of this social division of labor was the development of what is known as exchange between pastoral and agricultural tribes. The scope of this exchange began to expand with the emergence of other social divisions of labor resulting from the development of production tools. The professions of pottery making and hand weaving arose, and with the advent of iron, it became possible to manufacture iron tools (plows, axes, swords, etc.). This paved the way for a new and important division in society: craft or occupational specialization within the communal land itself, which led to a further expansion of the scope of exchange.

The first social division of labor (pastoral communes, agricultural communes, artisan communes) expanded the scope of exchanges by:

- Pastoral communes: surpluses in livestock, hides, wool, meat...
- Agricultural communes: surpluses in grains, vegetables, fruits.
- Craftsmen's commons: Surplus metal tools (copper, iron, bronze, etc.).

It should be noted that trade was initially conducted on a tribal basis between tribal chiefs and in the name of their tribes. Later, after livestock became privately owned, it shifted to trade between individuals. This transformation was gradual until individual exchange became the sole form of trade.

Second: The Emergence of Private Ownership and Social Classes:

When discussing private ownership and social classes, we can say that we are addressing a very advanced stage of the communal system (almost a transitional stage between the communal system and slavery). Following advancements in the tools of production, work became more productive, eliminating the need for collective work at the clan level. Increased productivity allowed for agricultural, herding, and craft production on a smaller social scale than the clan—the family, which became the new economic and social unit in society. This paved the way for private work within the family to gradually replace communal labor, leading to the emergence of private ownership of the means of production. History indicates that private ownership began with livestock. Clan leaders began acquiring livestock, which had previously been collectively owned by clan members. Private ownership then extended to all means of production, with land being the last to fall under private ownership.

The emergence of private property led to the division of the clan, first into large families and then into smaller family units. It also altered the social structure of primitive society, as owners of the means of production separated themselves from the general population and assumed social and political positions. This contributed to the rise of aristocratic families. Furthermore, the scope of ownership expanded to encompass all means of production, including human beings themselves. Previously, prisoners were killed because, given the low level of tools, they could not produce more than they needed. However, with the development of tools, keeping prisoners became economically viable, as they began to generate a surplus of products. This justified not killing prisoners of war but rather

enslaving them. Thus, the system of slavery emerged and expanded, with historical development, to include members of the tribe itself. In this way, communal relations of production ended and were replaced by new relations of production.

Third: The Dissolution of the Primitive Communal System:

The reasons for the dissolution of the primitive communal system can be summarized as follows:

- The development of the level of production and the emergence of surplus production due to the development of social productive forces.
- The shift from collective to individual labor due to the specialization of tools and resources, and their ownership by individuals.
- The end of the equal distribution of the products of labor among members of the community and the emergence of possessiveness, leading to economic inequality.
- A crisis in production relations as the role of producers became unequal. Private property flourished at the expense of public property, and family lands became hereditary. This exacerbated the wealth disparity among members of the community, enabling landowners to force the dispossessed to work for them, thereby appropriating the surplus of their labor. The first victims of this exploitation were prisoners of war, who were gradually enslaved. The emergence of slavery ushered in a new historical era: the exploitation of man by man. Society, which had previously known only one form of ownership—collective ownership—gradually divided into three main classes, formed according to their relationship to the tools and resources of production.