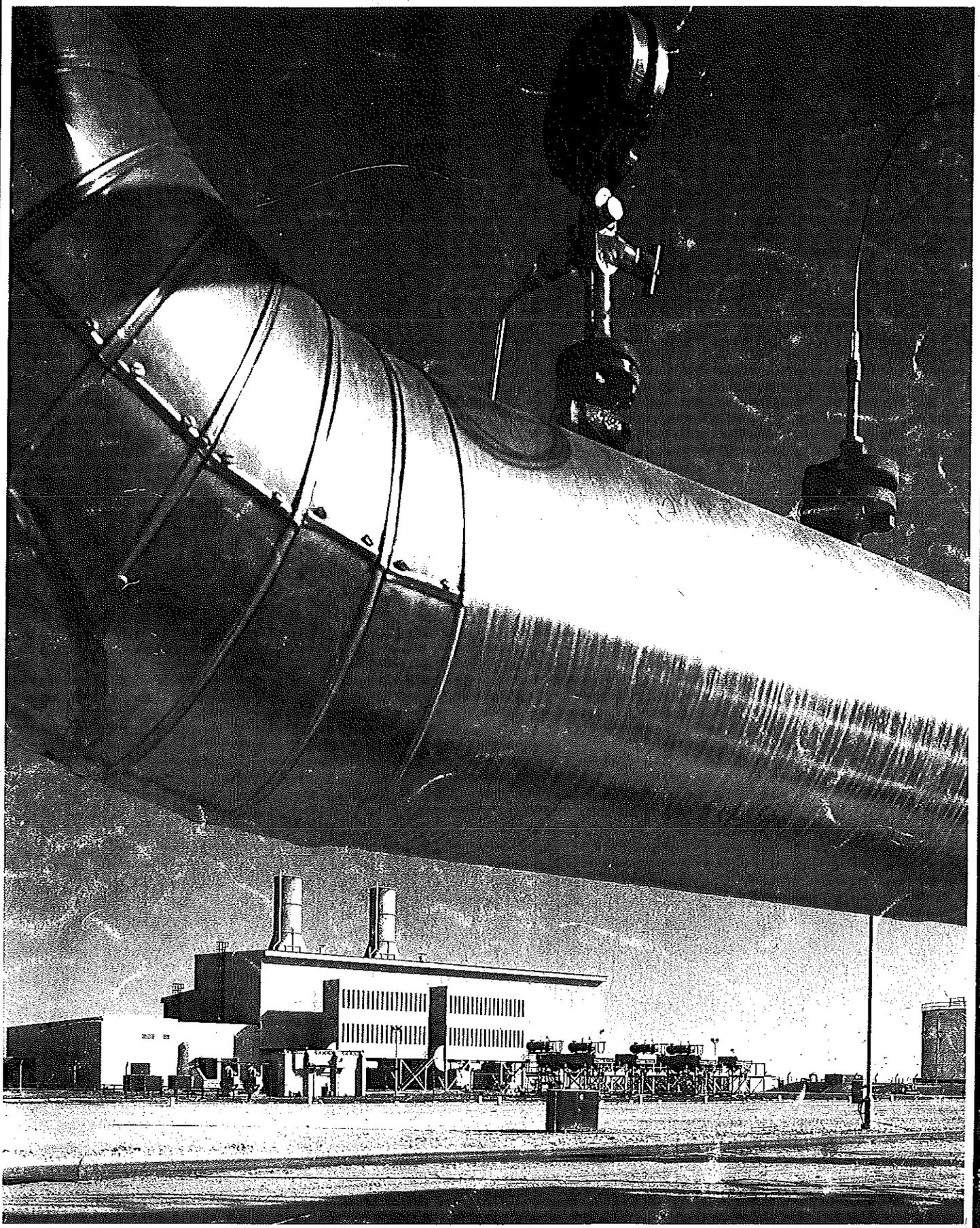


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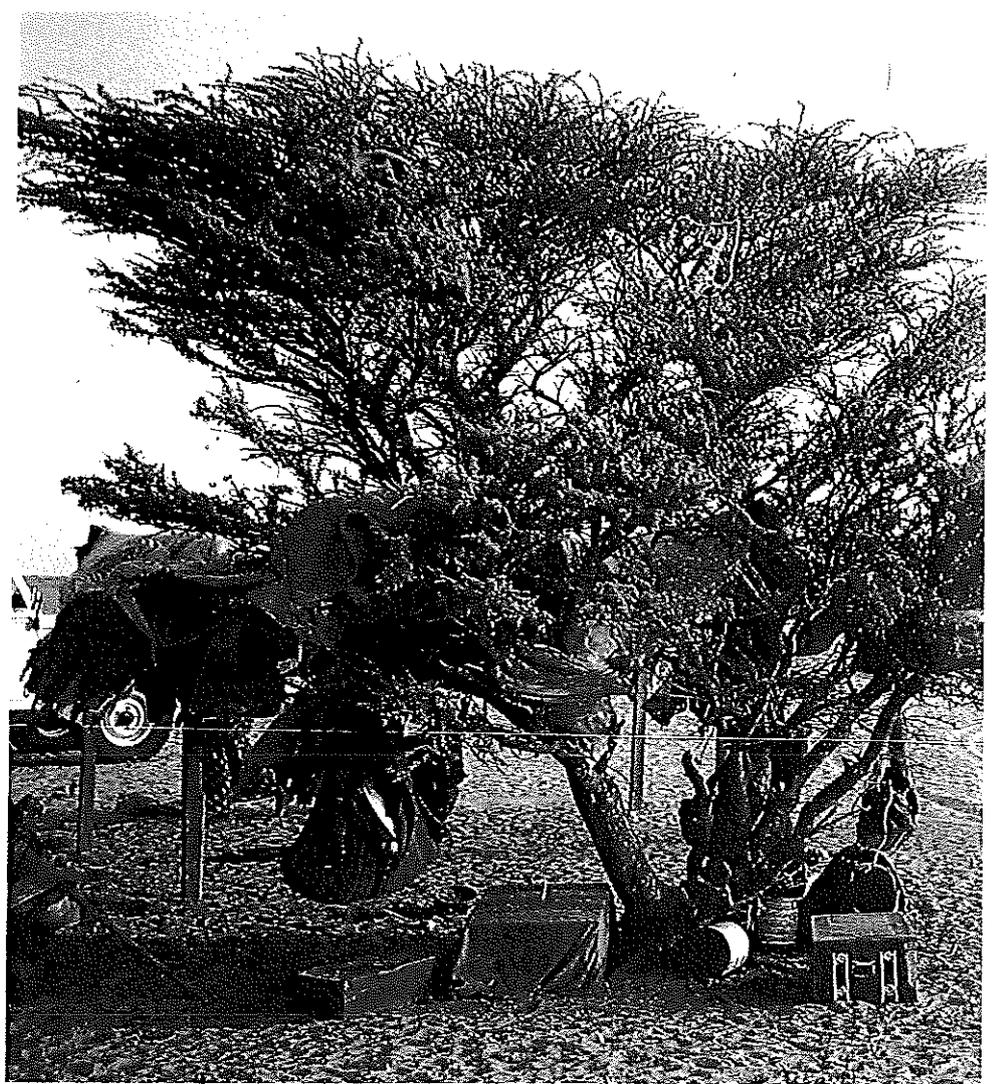


Rima Opening

**Right:** One 'type' of home for the Harasis.

**Far right, top:** The Wali of Haima, Abdullah Darmaki, visiting the Haima school accompanied by Sa'ad Aluweti (immediately on his left) a Harasis elder.

**Far right, bottom:** The Haima petrol station and restaurant



# Haima : Capital of the Jiddat al Harasis

**Haima lies in the centre of the PDO concession area, close to recent important light oil discoveries and the people of the area form part of the Company's work-force. PDO assisted with the work carried out, by the United Nations Development Programme on behalf of the the Oman Government, for the inhabitants of the Jiddat al-Harasis. Dawn Chatty, who was closely involved in the programme, writes about what has been achieved.**

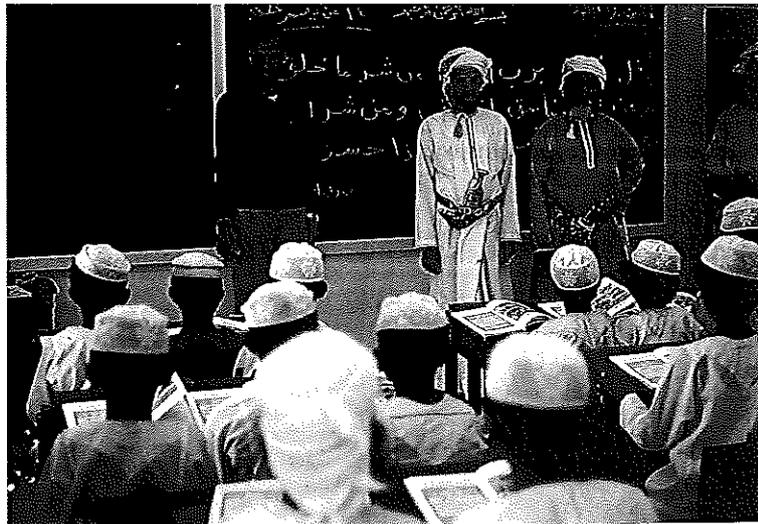
**T**he Jiddat-al-Harasis, that vast arid gravel plain which separates northern Oman from its southern region, has for ages been regarded as a singularly difficult and uncomfortable expanse to cross, let alone to live in. But the times have been kind, and today there is a modern tarmac road cutting vertically across the Jidda.

Approximately 400 kilometres from Nizwa and 500 kilometres from Salalah there is, today, a small but thriving community where not very long ago there was nothing but a brackish water well. This point, called Haima, is the seat of a newly opened government tribal centre.

Here, the traveller finds all the services that he needs - petrol station, grocery shop, restaurant cafe, automotive garage - to make Haima a comfortable halfway point between Salalah and Muscat.

For a small minority, however, Haima has become their focal point and Capital. These are the Harasis—a pastoral tribe that moves throughout the Jidda following the pastures for their herds of camel and goat.

Little is known of the origins of the Harasis tribe. They appear to have been originally a Dhofari tribe and they continue to speak a Mahri related language called Harsusi. According to their tribal traditions, the original section of the tribe lived somewhere between Salalah and the Hadramaut. There are still Harasis living there, and their rights to pasture in the area are recognized by the present inhabitants.



Though they are found widely scattered within Oman, their main concentrations are in the Jiddat-al-Harasis. The present population is very sparse though probably close to the saturation point that the terrain can support. Recent surveys seem to indicate that the Jidda itself holds a Harsusi population of between 2,500 - 3,000 people.

Their traditional economy is based on the raising of camels and goats for the production of milk rather than meat. Camels are owned and looked after by the men, while the women own and look after the goats.

The traditional diet consists of milk, dates and more milk. Up to a decade ago hunting was an important skill for the male segment of the population and it was not unusual for a household head to bring home one or two game animals each month to supplement the diet of camel and goat milk and dates.

Water played a relatively minor part in their diet. This was not so much because they weren't interested in drinking water, but rather because it was so difficult to come by. On the bare, stone and gravel Jiddat-al-Harasis, a region about the size of Scotland, there is only one sweet water well.

Unlike the Beit Kathir and other nomadic tribes of Arabia, home for the Harasis has never been a tent. Rather it was wherever shade could be created. They claim never to have used a hair tent, though the Harasis women know how to weave.

Their own explanation of this phenomenon is that they have been blessed with trees

in the Jidda upon which they throw blankets to create the shade that is their home. Other Bedouin, they say, have to make tents, because their traditional lands have no trees, only sand. This propensity to use trees for shade has resulted in the Harasis often being called the 'tree people' by visitors to the region.

The Harasis tribe, as with all pastoral groups, has never been entirely self-sufficient. It has always been tied, to some degree, in relations of interdependence to the sedentary communities of Dhofar or the Sharqiya. The Harasis require access to grain, dates and other agricultural products and they in turn supply the agricultural communities with livestock.

In the past, a journey into a town or village to buy needed produce and sell livestock was a major undertaking requiring a minimum of one man, several camels and as much as ten days supply of food and milk to make the round-trip. Adam, Sinaw and Ibri were the major trade centres for the Harasis.

Active oil exploration began in 1954 in the desert regions of Oman, and the futures of the pastoral tribes inhabiting these areas were destined to undergo very rapid change. In 1958, PDO began to prepare a new drilling location at a spot called Haima in the heart of the Jidda -al Harasis.

Suddenly, the pastoral tribes in this region were confronted with the 20th century. They responded to this dynamic new world in the only way open to them, exhibiting an

adaptability that was anything but resistant to change.

Taking full advantage of the new cash income from employment opportunities offered by PDO and its contractors, they rapidly moved into fields associated with their traditional way of life. Contrary to many fears, they did not give up their own way of life as a reaction to this sudden change in their universe, but rather they tried to make the best of two worlds, their own, and that of the twentieth century.

Unlike most upwardly mobile communities, little was spent on domestic material possessions, nor was there any demand for the construction of permanent shelters. For, as these tribes discovered long ago, shelters were derived from shade — be that under a tent, a canvas cloth or a truck. What was developed and expanded was transport and commerce with the urban centres that had always been on the margin of their universe.

In the span of only a few decades, it has become common to see these nomads in Toyota, Datsun and Bedford trucks crossing the arid land from one settlement to another carrying goats for sale in towns, or transporting recently purchased western commodities and animal feed for their herds and families. Today it is not uncommon to find each pastoral family owning one or two trucks. The family without such a modern form of transport is the exception.

Employment as guards, drivers or watchmen and now as a wildlife wardens

with the new Oryx project based at Yalooni with one or another company operating in the desert is the rule rather than the exception. Close to 60 percent of the adult male Harasis population is actively employed or owns trucks or tankers which are leased out thereby generating cash incomes for their families.

Even petrol stations are coming under franchise to some of the more wealthy tribesmen, like the Harsusi owned Shell station at Haima.

Yet, the traditional way of life, the raising of goats and camels, continues, albeit, on a more reduced scale than in the past. Those who are actively generating cash incomes today, tend to have smaller herds than those who for one reason or another have remained totally concerned with their animal holdings.

During the last decade, Oman has witnessed tremendous advances in national development and in government services to the population. Impressive programmes in health, education and agriculture have been undertaken and basic social services have been made available to the widely scattered, settled communities of Oman.

The pastoral or non-sedentary populations of central Oman, however, are not included in these schemes to improve people's standards in health, nutrition, housing and basic community services. The very nature of the pastoral way of life, its remoteness, mobility, and marginality makes it impossible to implement development programmes originally designed for settled communities. To do so destroys their traditional system of raising livestock in the desert.

The government of Oman, acutely aware of these difficulties, searched for a way of extending services to these peoples. With this in mind, the government took the experimental step of establishing a tribal administrative centre at Haima for the pastoral nomadic tribes of the Jiddat-al-Harasis. A modern centre was built consisting of Wali's office, health centre, mosque, school, reverse osmosis water plant, police station and petrol station as well as housing for the employees and, by late 1980, several government services were operating.

At first the Haima tribal administrative centre was little used. In the intervening years, the government of Oman began to examine the specific requirements of the region and recently has succeeded in setting up programmes and services which met some of the needs of these pastoral tribes.

The Ministry of Interior established itself at Haima in June of 1980 by opening up a Naib Wali's office as a subdivision of the Wilayat Adam. In 1981, Haima became a wilayat in its own right, and its Wali has successfully looked after the problems, petitions, and requests of the community.

The Ministry of Health's Centre now operates a mobile as well as a permanent medical service based at Haima. For the

past two years, the Ministry of Health, with the cooperation of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, the Ministry of Defence and the United Nations has conducted a mobile immunization programme for women and children in the desert against the six target diseases established by the World Health Organization (Diphtheria, Whooping Cough, Tetanus, Polio, Tuberculosis and Measles).

The Ministry of Education recently opened a boarding school for the children of the Harasis. Responding to the great demand for education, the Ministry opened the school in December, 1982 with 51 boys and set up a temporary dormitory for the boys until the permanent dormitory is completed in April of this year.

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour opened an office at Haima in November of 1982 assigning two officers to look carefully into the welfare needs of this segment of the Omani population.

The Ministry of Water and Electricity also operates a number of tankers that plough through the desert regularly delivering drinking water to the families living in the Jidda. This is seen as a temporary measure until such a time as more permanent access to drinking water can be set up by the government for the inhabitants of the desert.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries has also extended help to these nomadic peoples. First in 1982 a subsidized sale of animal feed was approved to tide the population over a drought period. Later in the same year, plans were underway to provide the region with a resident veterinarian to help look after the livestock.

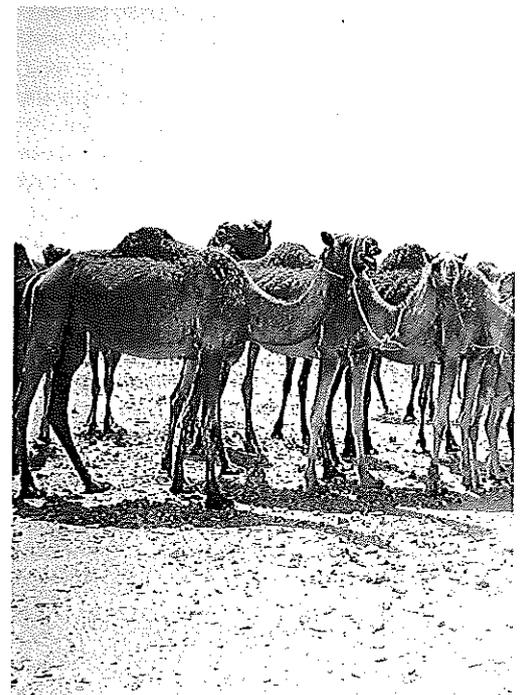
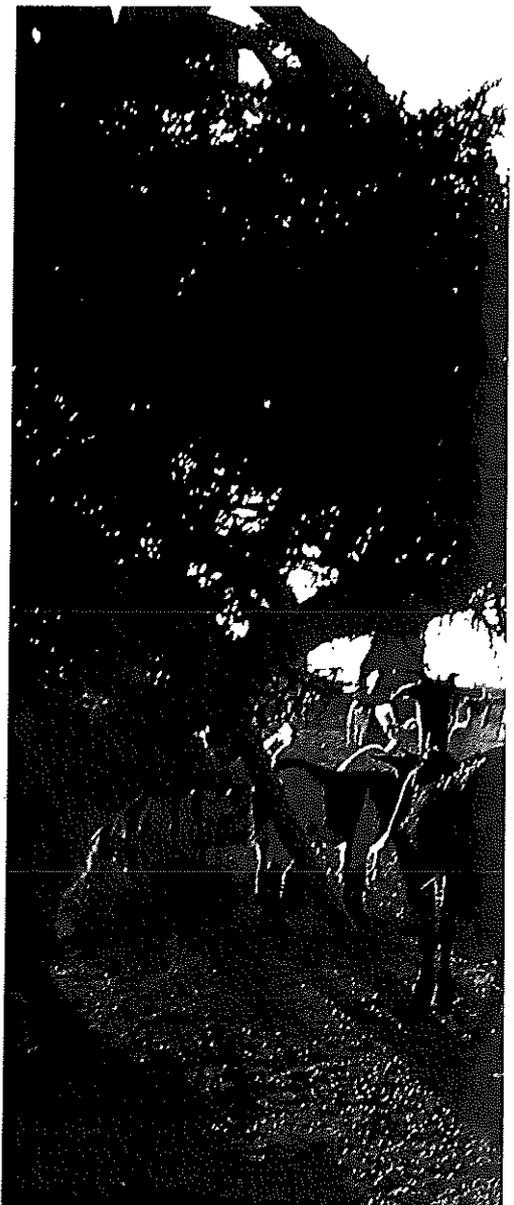
So far the Harasis and other tribes in the central desert of Oman have proved themselves to be highly flexible, in adapting their pastoral nomadic universe to the demands placed on it by the dynamic forces of the 20th century.

Few families have given up their way of life all together. Most families now incorporate truck transport and cash income with the more traditional life of looking after their herds of camels and goats. By reducing the size of these herds, many male Harasis are able to accept paid wage labour thereby taking the best of two worlds.

How long these people will continue to adapt their nomadic universe to meet the requirements of life in the modern 20th century is still in question. Will the web of modern economic and political forces eventually force them to give up their way of life and draw them into modern sedentary society? Or will the factors of low cost housing and low wage labour inevitably lure and crowd them into urban centers thus swelling the ranks of the landless poor?

There is hope that with enlightened planning, innovative adaptations will continue to be encouraged which best suit the pastoral tribes' perceptions of their needs. That hope lies with the newly operating government tribal centre at Haima. 

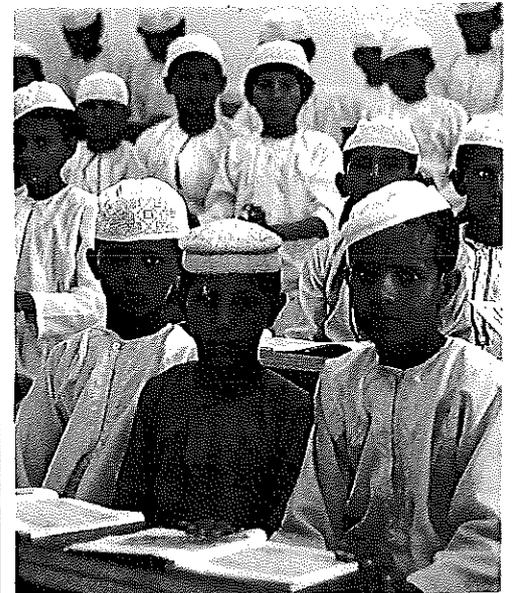
*A typical herd of black and white goats - which are*



*Traditional camel transport - now being replaced*

*owned and looked after by the Harasis women, while the men own and look after the camels.*

*Harasis woman weaving a camel strap.*



*by the Toyota, Datsun and Bedford trucks owned by almost every family.*

*Above: The Haima Askars villa.*