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Contribution of Indian Cow in Rural Economy

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Abstract

From a source of milk to a provider of labor and religious inspiration, cows often play prominent role in Hindu society. There are different views about the exact origin of the Indian cattle breeds and as to whether or not they were brought into India by the Aryans or existed in the country even prior to that. Cow has been a corner stone of Indian agriculture for centuries and has served as source of nutrition for farmer's families through milk and milk products, as well as providing draught animal power for both agricultural operations such as ploughing and tilling the land, as well as for transportation of goods. Nearly all basic necessities of life were woven around the cow, with contributions in all aspects of life, including farming and manure, food and nourishment, transport, fuel (burning of dried cow dung cakes) and medicinal usage of cow dung and cow urine.

Introduction

Indian cow was worshiped in India since ancient times, due to many scientific reasons. Agriculture was the major economic force of India and almost every major Indian festival was related to agriculture activity. Indian cow has been a symbol of wealth for people of India. The cow dung has been used as source of fuel and fertilizer for Indian farmers. It was all organic and produced high yielding crops. Cow was the only base of sustainable agriculture with environment friendly practices. In fact, cow was regarded more than gold at that time. Krishna used to herd cows and had very high regard for them. Guru Nanak Dev Ji also spent a lot of time to herd cows.

When Mughals came to India, they had a tradition of killing goats and sheep as sacrifice on Bakra-Eid. Cow was new to them as there were no cows in Arab countries. Slowly, they began to sacrifice cow. But later all the Mughal rulers prohibited killing of cows except Aurangzeb. He was considered to be the cruelest ruler among Mughals. The last Mughal ruler Bahadur Shah Zafar also banned the cow slaughter.

When British came to India and explored all over the subcontinent, they found that they cannot rule the country directly. Indian economy was strongly held by Indian cow and organic agriculture. Indian education system was fully based on values, science and Gurukul system was deeply rooted in the culture. Governor of British India Robert Clive made an extensive research on the agriculture here. He found that:

- Cows were the basis of Indian agriculture. In India agriculture cannot be executed without the help of cow.
- Cows are the Backbone of Indian agriculture.

On the other hand, the milk of Indian cow is found to be most

nourishing. Cow, being a mammal gives milk for her calves but shares her milk with the people for their welfare. Today we can make curd, cream, butter, and around 30 more food items with milk. Hence the status of mother or Gau Mata was given to her. Cow was considered part of one's family.



Figure 1: Indian cow

Role of Cow in Farmers' Economy

The cow plays an important role in the economy of farmers. The farmers in India maintain mixed farming system i.e. a combination of crops where the output of one enterprise becomes the input of another enterprise thereby realizes the resource efficiency. The cow serves the farmers in different ways:

Income

Cow is a source of subsidiary income for many families in India especially the rural poor who maintain few heads of animals. Cow's milk will provide regular income to the farmers through sale of milk. Animals like sheep and goat serve as sources of income during emergencies to meet exigencies like marriages, treatment of sick persons, children education, repair of houses etc. The animals also serve as moving banks and assets which provide economic security to the owners.

Employment

A large number of people in India being less literate and unskilled depend upon agriculture for their livelihoods. But agriculture being seasonal in nature could provide employment for a maximum of 180 days in a year. The landless and less land people depend upon livestock for utilizing their labor during lean agricultural season.

Food

The livestock products such as milk, meat and eggs are an important source of animal protein to the members of the livestock owners. The per capita availability of milk is around 375 g / day.

Social Security

The animals offer social security to the owners in terms of their status in the society. The families especially the landless which own animals are better placed than those who do not. Gifting of animals during marriages is a very common phenomenon in different parts of the country. Rearing of animals is a part of the Indian culture. Animals are used for various socio religious functions. Cows for house warming ceremonies, Bulls and Cows are worshipped during various religious functions. Many owners develop attachment with their animals.



Figure 2: Cow and calf



Figure 3: Milking cow

Traditional Use of Cow Related Products

Cow is the mother of the universe. She helps in agriculture, transportation, food, health, industry, sports, and religious functions. From time immemorial, cow has a special place in Indian society.

Indian cow has been considered as sacred animal by Hindus. Cow is described as Kamdhenu (one which fulfills all the wishes) since Vedic times in Indian civilization. It is believed to

be a “mobile hospital” for the treatment of various ailments. A number of diseases can be cured by the use of byproducts derived from the cow.

Cow-Based Agriculture Products

Cow Milk

Cow milk is a healthy food because of low calorie, low cholesterol and high micro-nutrients, protein, calcium, vitamins, and plays an important role in meeting requirements of various essential nutrients. It contains carotenes, Vitamin A, Vitamin B complex group and Vitamin C. It possesses rejuvenator health protecting properties and is one of the best vitalizers. It has bio-protective role in human health and is easily digestible. It is found to be effective in curing fever, pain, tumors, diabetes and weaknesses and importantly act as a medium to administer medicine. It delays the processes involved in aging.



Figure 4: Cow Milking

Cow Dung

Cow dung possesses antiseptic and disease preventive properties. Cow dung can act as skin tonic. When mixed with crushed neem leaves and smeared on skin, it proves good for boils and heat rashes. Cow dung also used as tooth polish and relieves toothache, so instead of toothpaste which is made of chemicals & dead bones of animals, it is a good alternative. The fresh cow dung kills the germs of Malaria and T.B. Smoke from ashes actually increases our eyelids to close and open so many times that lot of water from the eyes comes out which increases the vision life of a person. Cow dung is antiseptic; it destroys microorganisms that cause disease and fermentation. Cow dung also possesses antifungal components, which inhibit growth when used in combination with cow urine.

Cow Urine

Gomutra is called “Sanjivani” and “Amrita” in Ayurveda. In addition, it has applications as a biopesticide in organic farming along with cow dung. Cow urine, used as an insecticide and as a regulator for various ailments like intestinal gas, acidity and cough. It is claimed to make humans wiser and can be used as a universally available and easily



Figure 5: Cow Dung Cake

digestible medicine. Cow urine is known to help in weight loss and reversal of certain cardiac and kidney problems as well as indigestion, stomachache and edema. Cow urine is considered useful in treating colic, jaundice, anemia, diarrhea, gastric infection, piles and skin diseases including vertigo. It is also considered as an appetizer and is known to reverse inflammation and acts as a protective agent.



Figure 6: Collection of Cow Urine

Cow Farming

Cow farming involves rearing and management of two types of animals- one group for food requirements like milk production and another for labor purposes, the bullocks are the backbone of Indian agriculture. The farmers especially the marginal and small depend upon bullocks for ploughing, carting and transportation of both inputs and outputs etc. Animals which provide milk are called as milch/dairy animals. Since dairy animals are cared and bred for milk, we need to improve the milk production to meet the requirements. Dairy farm management is the management of the milch animals with the goal of enhancing the quantity and quality of the milk produced.

Medicines Prepared from Cow Products

Medicines prepared from cow-based products are excellent alternatives to costly chemical based products floated in market by big companies.



Figure 7: Cow Farming

Farmers can limit their spending by producing these medicines at almost zero cost at home.



Figure 8: Cow Medicines

Importantly while accomplishing all this, the Cow-based farming maintains ecological balance beautifully. The fertility of soil increases with the use of cow based products. This makes it possible for farmers to take multiple crops in a year and earns more profit.

Cows in Religious Rituals

Our culture has retained a strong relationship between cows and temples.

- Cow is accepted as divine.
- Worship and feeding of cow is part of daily rituals.
- There are several festivals where cow is prominent.
- Many temples have cow sheds at the entrance, enhancing the divine feelings.
- Preparation of various offerings to the God use ghee and milk.
- Butter is used in decorating deities.



Figure 9: Cows in Religious Rituals

Conclusion

In our country with small holdings and small scale farming, there is no better alternative to employing cattle in farming. While ploughing, the oxen stride with gentle gait, not harming the surface of the earth, organic manure; green leaf manure and slurry manure with cattle manure bond with the nature and make the land fertile. Insecticides prepared from cow urine or well fermented butter milk does not affect these helpful insects. Dung from one cow is adequate to fertilize 5 acres of land and its urine can protect 10 acres of crop from insects. Oxen do not pollute the atmosphere. Although if we treat cow as a source of milk, dung, ghee, curd, and urine we can use a single cow for a long time as well as its benefit are far more.

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