

Cattle and colonial rule in united provinces

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Abstract

Animal rearing have been one of the most important economic activities of the Indian people for many centuries and it has been a source of income, employment and nutrition food. When English East Indian Company came to rule a varied and complex Indian rural society, Animal husbandry was important of part agrarian society but under the colonial administrative and economic policies animal husbandry was adversely affected. Due to recurring famines and expansion of cultivation activity on grazing land, livestock perished. This paper has tried to assess the role of livestock in agrarian society under the colonial rule. Why did the livestock perish? What was the impact of colonial policies on livestock? How the livestock were playing the role in changing in caste structure? This paper is mainly divided into two sections. First section deals with the reason behind the decline of animal husbandry under the colonial rule while the second section deals with the impact of decline of animal husbandry on agrarian society.

Keywords: livestock, famine, agrarian society, moneylender, peasants, nineteenth century, cash crops etc

Introduction

Cattle have been an important part of rural life. They are playing important role in economic, social and cultural life of agrarian society. Since the advent of civilization livestock always remain base of cultivation activity. During pre-British era India was known as Golden bird, livestock were also an important pillar of that prosperity. But Under the colonial rule decline in cattle population was became a common phenomenon and India lost this important pillar of prosperity. Multiple factors were responsible were responsible for the decline of cattle population. First and foremost, factor was famine. Famines in British India were severe enough to have a substantial impact on the long-term especially on livestock. During the famine of 1803-04 Benares Division was severely affected and revenue was collected by the Government without any concession. During this period, the cattle died in thousands however accurate data is not available. During the famine of 1813 and 1819, the Benares was severely affected, peasant faced a lot. They lost their livestock, only assets which peasant had, due to scarcity of fodder. During famine of 1837-38, which was one the most sever famine, cattle reportedly died in thousands ^[1]. In 1873-74, severe famine was visited in Gorakhpur region. During this period, unusual shortage of rain falls leads decline of cattle population. During famine of 1860-61 Baird Smith reported the mortality of cattle, bullocks and other animals ^[2]. Henvey Report also showed that lack of fodder drove many to strip the trees of their leaves and bark to sustain their cattle or drive them as far as to other region or sell them at low prices to butchers ^[3].

Jhansi, Jalaun Saharanpur, Mathura, Agra and parts of Benares and Gorakhpur division were the most affected region during 1860-61. Around 50 % of total cattle population was perished ^[4]. it is estimated that 500000 pairs of cattle died or were sold, representing at moderate estimate, a loss of about £500000 and power of cultivating no less than two million acres ^[5].

Second main reason behind the decline of livestock was also a product of the particular “anti-cattle ideology” ^[6] of the British, who wanted to restrict the importance of mobile cattle in the interest of their economic activity such as Horse. This anti-cattle ideology can also be traced in government reports.

About cattle of Gorakhpur district H R Nevill mentioned “The ordinary cattle of the district are small and decidedly inferior in strength to those of the west.....horses and Ponies are of even more inferior types than the horned cattle ^[7] In Imperial Gazetteer, it is mentioned about the cattle of district Mirzapur that “The cattle bred locally are very inferior and animals are imported from Bihar for the plough, from the Districts north of the Gogra for other agricultural work and from Surguja for use as pack-animals. The buffaloes of the District are of a better stamp and supply milk and are used for hauling stone. Ponies are very inferior; sheep and goats are largely kept but no particular breeds are recognized ^[8].”

About the cattle of district Jaunpur it is mentioned “The cattle of the District are inferior, and the best animals are imported. A Government bull was once kept and its services were

¹ C. E. R. Gridlestone, Report on Past Famines in the North-Western Provinces, 1868, p. 46.

² Baird Smith, Famine Report, Bombay, 1861, p. 59.

³ Frederick Henvey, A Narrative of the Drought and Famine which prevailed in North Western Provinces, Allahabad, 1871, p. 19.

⁴ Ibid, p. 126.

⁵ Ibid, p.126.

⁶ This term is borrowed from Laxman D. Satya.

⁷ H. R. Nevill, Gorakhpurs: A Gazetteer, District Gazetteers of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, Vol. XXXI (Allahabad, 1909), pp. 29-30.

⁸ Imperial Gazetteer of India: United Provinces of Agra and Oudh: Vol. II., Calcutta, 1908, pp. 148-149. Also in H R Nevill's District Gazetteer.

eagerly sought for. The ponies are also of a poor stamp but are largely used as pack animals. Sheep and goats are of the ordinary type ^[9].” About the cattle of Ballia district, it is mentioned “The cattle of the District are of a poor type and the best animals are all imported or purchased at the large fair held near Ballia town. Horse-breeding operations under the Government Stud department were formerly carried on in and near the District at Korantadih, Buxar, and Ghazipur, and at that time the Government stallions were used by the Zamindars. The sheep and goats are generally inferior ^[10]” Same attitude of colonial ruler towards cattle in India can be traced in other government reports.

In addition, as Radhika Ramasubban mentioned that the British believed that the British were healthy people and the Indians were diseased, hence they need for protection. They used European medicine as means for controlling India segregation became the official ideology of colonial medicine ^[11]. The same approach was also applied on the livestock of United Provinces.

Third main reason responsible for decline of cattle was spreading severe diseases. There was a considerable increase in all kinds of disease throughout the province and most of the official reports attributed these diseases were natural. Famines under colonial were typically followed by various infectious diseases such as bubonic plague and influenza rinderpest along with food and mouth disease etc., which killed a large section of livestock already destabilized by starvation due to lack of fodder. Even as signs of increasing cattle mortality and deterioration increased, the British thus did little to counter it. Most of the time British ruler blamed the India Environment for recurring cattle deceases. Official attitude was that Environment of Indian subcontinent was responsible for its backwardness, then what the British Ruler could do. Due to such negative Ideology, the most sever victim was the cattle of United Provinces and of the country. Various forms of disease were prevalent and the mortality was often severe. Foot and mouth disease and rinderpest were the most common and anthrax occurs sporadically, while in the lowlands black-quarter and the malignant sore throat known as hemorrhagic septicemia are particularly to be dreaded. The latter broke out epidemic often led to the inoculation of some thousands of animals ^[12].

Irrigation was also playing as means of changes in agrarian structure. Expansion of irrigation and Cash crops plantation programs further reduced grazing areas and adversely affected animal husbandry. Canal irrigation as mentioned by W.J. Macpherson ‘The Greatest Monument to British Rule ^[13]’ was an important development under the Colonial rule and it impacted deeply the agrarian society. As irrigation development projects were related directly to the commercial

crops such as Opium, Indigo etc. due to cash crops, the cattle lost their single fodder the Paul or Rice straw on which the most of the cattle population are fed during several months of the year was probably one of the poorest kinds of fodder on which plough It resulted into decline of crops related to fodder and expansion of cultivable area in grazing land. As David Gilmartin in his study ‘Scientific Empire and Imperial Science: Colonialism and Irrigation Technology in the Indus Basin’ irrigation development system in Punjab shows how the British ignored traditional knowledge and skills of water conservation and management with disastrous consequences like Silting, Leaching and Salination ^[14] Guided by imperialist arrogance, the British ignored these time-tested water management skills and knowledge that were soon forgotten as these ancient dams, anicuts, tanks and reservoirs lay in a state of neglect and disrepair. This was also true in the context of United Provinces.

Last main reason was decrease in Grazing area. From 1850s government started imposing tax for grazing land. During the years 1850 to 1880 the right to collect grazing tax was auctioned to private contractors who extracted as high tax as they could recover. On the one hand the cattle population was decreasing while on the other hand the total collection of grazing dues was increasing and by end of nineteenth century, it became impossible for peasant to rise good cattle on account of the state’s takeover of the pasture and grazing lands. The land which was freely available for peasant but under the colonial rule it was charged for grazing under strict government provision. Later period revenue settlement often translated into distribution of public grazing lands, even as the landlords continued to possess fertile lands. The landless were given the worst kind of land and the village lost its common grazing spaces. Grazing land was placed under the landlords and Zamindars colonial. Grazing land, which was invariably free in pre-colonial period, now became restricted during colonial rule. Additionally, scarcity of grazing lands was also outcome of the encroachment of wasteland or uncultivated lands by the British Government. The open forests were given to trader for the commercial exploitation and put ban on the cattle and people to use forest product freely. As Ajay Skaria ^[15] mentioned in the name of scientific forestry and protecting forests, the colonial rule forced out the cattle and people from the forest. The British ruler exploited the natural resources to fulfill their natural needs and this led the environmental degradation and that doom the fate of cattle of United Provinces as well as of other parts of the country.

Impact

As the earlier mentioned that cattle were important part of the rural life. The loss of cattle and bullocks had many short term and long-term implications; it meant a loss or reduction in agriculture output, even among cattle that did survive meant low or no calving rates in normal years, further reducing the productive capacity of livestock enterprise. It also reduced

⁹ Ibid, p.164.

¹⁰ Ibid, p.192.

¹¹ Radhika Ramasubban, ‘Imperial Health in British India, 1857-1900, in Disease, Medicine and Empire: Perspectives on Western Medicine and Experience of European Expansion, ed. R.Porter and M.Lewis (London: Routledge, 1988).

¹² H. R. Navill, Ghazipur: United Provinces District Gazetteer, Volume – XXIX, Allahabad, 1909.

¹³ W. J. Macpherson, ‘Economic Development in India Under the British Crown’ 1858-1947, in A.J. Youngson (ed.), Economic Development in the Long Run, (London, 1972), pp.140-146.

¹⁴ Gilmartin David, Scientific Empire and Imperial Science: Colonialism and Irrigation Technology in the Indus Basin, Journal of Asian Studies, Volume-53, Issue 4, November 1994, pp. 1127-1149.

¹⁵ Ajay Skaria, Hybrid Histories: Forests, Frontiers and Wildness in Western India, Delhi: OUP India, 1998.

yields and short lactation periods of milking animals. When animals fall sick and die, small livestock holders suffer enormously in multiple ways. The loss often goes unnoticed and uncompensated. They did not get any support from government. Peasant were pushed into severe poverty once they lost their livestock to disease, scarcity of water and fodder or sheer poverty which forced them to sell their animals for cash and it is often impossible for them to repurchase their stock. The selling of animals, especially cattle, signified poverty and destitution while rearing denoted luxury and prosperity. It also impacted their social status. Many time peasants were forced to work as slave on landlords and zamindars area to survive and this was happening with even those peasants which were traditionally independent tenants which were self-dependent and had their social status. In case of loss of cattle and failure to rebuild them, usually Peasant lost their credit capacity. Now, during the adverse situation, moneylenders were little willing to give money to peasant as peasants lost their one of the mains assets which they could put a collateral or as guarantee at time of borrowing money to survive. Contemporary the famous Nobel Writer Munshi Prem Chand in his *Godan* depicted very clearly the importance of cattle in a poor peasants' family, which can make their life and enhance their status in society and also can make their life hell as happened in the case of Hori and his family. His novel also indicated the adverse situation of peasant during the colonial rule.

Livestock were considered as moving banks because of their potentiality to dispose off during emergencies. They served as capital and in cases of landless agricultural labourers many time it was the only capital resource they possessed. Livestock served as an asset and in case of emergencies they served as guarantee for availing loans from the local sources such as money lenders in the villages but when peasants lost their crops and animals and were forced to borrow money from money lender which led to eviction from their own land in long run. Many villages were completely wiped off the map as almost all of their inhabitants died in the famines. Lakhs of Indians were forced by starvation to sign up as labourers and shipped off to work in plantations in different parts of country and many were migrated as indentured labourers to Sri Lanka, Mauritius, Guyana and Natal^[16]. Such forced migration did not solve the problem of the people and even worsen their situation of the migrated people. In addition, these disasters forced the people to migrate from these divisions to other parts of the country. As male members of society were migrated to other region of country. It created another type of social and demographic problems and Also, they had to live in adverse situation and very far from their homeland and family members.

The livestock were the source of nutrition of poor's and provides food items such as Milk, Meat and Eggs for human consumption. When these sources declined under the exploitative policies of colonial rule, poor lost their source of nutrition and this affected their resistance capacity against occurring deceases. Thus decline of cattle population resulted in death of lakhs of people, directly and indirectly. The

condition of Indian women under the British Raj was not good and further worsened due to decline of animal husbandry. Food items provided by animals were the main sources of nutrition were not available now. As per the custom, male members of family were fed first and Female members were usually eaten last and often had to make do only with the left food, therefore during scarcities women and female children tended to suffer more although this does not necessarily mean that they experienced higher rate of mortality. Apart from this, the parents were ready to sale their children to survive or to save their children from casualties. In Mirzapur, there are evidence that parents sold their children to Mahajans or Gosain during famines^[17]. During the famine period Gosains assumed a important status in eastern specially in Mirzapur and Benares district. They were involved into moneylending and action purchasing activity. Even during famine, The Gosains also appear to have bought children from their parents to become members of the Gosains, or they sell themselves for support during a famine.

Additionally, A number of suicides were reported from different parts of the famine tract. Even according to the Magistrate reports that these suicides were outcome of the diseases caused by the poorness and scantiness of food during the famine. Even those persons who were too proud to beg, and had bartered all they possessed for food were poisoning themselves and their families sooner than endure the pain of starvation. Death was imminent, and they hailed any course which enabled them to escape protracted agony¹⁸. It was also outcome of fear of losing one's caste in a relief camp by consuming unclean food must have been an overriding consideration for many in a ritually differentiated hierarchical society. Many family took opium rather than beg or took poison and died all together, rather than expose their distresses and submit to the degradation of begging.

In such adverse condition dependency of peasant on landlord, moneylender and government increased. This dependency had been used for legitimizing their control over rural society. As In the nineteenth century the new sources of income and new administrative measures were used by very few landlords to strengthen their traditional way of life and traditional position but till 1880s most of the traditional land owners disappeared and new land-owning castes established themselves as landlords. By providing relief against hardship faced by peasant due to lose of crop and cattle, these new emerging castes such as Bania, Moneylender Caste and Urban based trader etc. tried to legitimize their status and control over the agrarian society.

On the basis of above facts, it can be said that rearing of livestock was the backbone of India agrarian society in nineteenth century but under colonial rule peasant lost this backbone. Due to colonial policy, the natural events such as drought, flood, hailstorm etc. got converted into disasters which took the life million people and cattle. Ill administrative and economic policies such as land revenue policy, taxation

¹⁶ Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts, El Nino Famines and Making of the Third World*, London: Verso Books, 2000.

¹⁷ Bernard S. Cohn, *The Role of the Gosains in the Economy of Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Upper India*, the *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 1964, Vol. 1, Issue 4, Pages 175-182.

¹⁸ C.E.R Girdlestone, *Report on Past Famines in the North-Western Provinces* (Allahabad, 1868), p. 50.

policy, the colonial auction of grazing lands, expansion of irrigation and cultivation activities and colonial control over the forest adversely affected the cattle which aggravated the already grave situation of peasant and forced them into situation of hunger and poverty.

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