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Yogic perspective of economic importance of cow in modern India

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Abstract

Cow has been regarded as the most important sacred animal since Vedic ages having very high value in country's religion, history and with deep impact on economy, spirituality, social strata and Yogic traditions. In Rig-Veda, Cow is sometimes said to be as Indra's mother which highlights its importance. The cow, now a days, are being into focus for their possible role in supporting the sustainable organic economy through their main and allied products. The cow products have been an essential portion in Indian Yogic traditions since time immemorial and we can often see them being used in daily worship rituals in the Indian households. The Yogic perspective of economic importance of cow helps us to see and strengthen their contemporary importance in modern scenario.

Keyword: Cow, yogic traditions, organic economy, cow products

Introduction

The Indian civilization promotes and respects the rights of fauna to co-exist with society; therefore, persons in India are taught to have sincere affection in harbouring and worshipping them in some form. The religion prevailing in the country promotes the notion that various ancient gods and divine entities adopt incarnation in various animal forms and often we see some animal form associated with them for ambulation. Many festival celebrations in different parts of India are organised in honour of sacred animals^[1]. Since the ancient age, emperors and royal dynasties used animal emblems in their flags and royal seals e.g. emperor Ashoka used Lion as his state emblem^[2] which was later acquired by India to be its national emblem on 26th January 1950^[3].

Among the fauna, Cow has been regarded as undoubtedly the most important sacred animal since Vedic ages having very high value in country's religion, history and with deep impact on economy, spirituality, social strata and Yogic traditions. In Rig-Veda, Cow is sometimes said to be as Indra's mother (grsti) which highlights its importance^[4]. Yaska. One of the foremost commentators In Rig-Veda, announces nine names for the cow, giving first name as aghanya which means that cows are not killable under any circumstances^[5]. The cow, now a days, are being into focus for their possible role in supporting the sustainable organic economy through their main and allied products. The cow products have been an essential portion in Indian Yogic traditions since time immemorial and we can often see them being used in daily worship rituals in the Indian households.

Cow has been the spine of Indian economy in ancient and medieval ages where the agriculture driven economy developed along with cow welfare resulting in rearing of milk, ghee, cow dung and the products obtained from cow dung and urine. Admitting its importance, Mahatma Gandhi said that that the importance of cow in many ways is greater than the birth giving mother^[6]. Cows play a very important and much more pivotal role in Indian economy than what is usually assessed by the normal masses. It becomes evident with the fact that in 2017, India stood first in world in milk production accounting for twenty percent of global milk production whose roughly half portion is cow milk^[7]. Production of milk in the nation has increased at compound yearly rate of 6.2 percent to reach 209.96 mn tonnes in 2020-21^[8].

In Bhagwad Gita, Lord Krishna considers himself as Kamdhenu among the cows^[9]. This shows that cows are descended from divinity containing celestial nectar. Cows are said to be superior to the Yogis and they want to get spiritual benefits by cow service. Indeed, Cows has a special and important place in developing the Indian economy in gross. Most adamantly, it has been the core of economic activities taking place in villages. Not long time ago, the number of cows in a household was considered a strong parameter to access the social and economic influence of that household in the society. Indian economy in gross has been traditionally agriculture based in which bulls were used to plough the land and Cows were the source of fertilizer in the form of cow dung. Cow milk, ghee and other products obtained from the cow also had very important place in village commerce.

To decipher the effect and impact of cow products in agriculture driven Indian economy, we have to pay attention to the products in a value based analytical manner.

Cow milk is the most sought and valuable product which is used widely in perhaps every household of India. The milk of Indian desi cows like Gir, Sahiwal etc are special in the manner that these contain A2 type of beta casein protein which is not found in the milk of foreign races of cow. Indian cow milk contains almost every nutrient required to maintain bone strength and good teeth health, better working of muscles, balance of blood pressure, tissue repair and growth and increase of HDL level along with maintaining overall health and soundness of the body^[10].

Cow Dung is a good source of fertilizer nutrients which is solely organic, nature based and ultra low in cost requiring almost negligible money investment. Utilizing the compost and fertilizer made from cow dung also exert positive effect on soil health with the increased yield of the crop. In India, it is a common practice to mix cow dung with straw and dry it up in the sun heat. This dried cow dung with the straw is a very efficient fuel which provide heat and flame for cooking. Bio gas is also made from cow dung. In North America, this practice is widely in use to produce bio gas from cow dung^[11]. It is estimated in a 2011 study that only 40 percent of the produced cow dung is utilized in India for fuel. With capacity of generating 12 to 17 million biogas units, India is able to generate only 4 million units which show the potential up to which the capacity may be increased^[12]. Cow dung cakes supply may be a good source of income in urban areas where these are high in demand. Cow dung is also utilized as an insect repellent in rural areas when dried cow dung cakes are burned. If the cow dung is mixed and dried with other mosquito repellent phyto species, it can be potentially used as organic mosquito repellent products which can be supplied in the market^[13] to earn good profit.

One unexplored horizon of using cow dung is to use them in the form of cow dung cakes for the purpose of cremation of dead bodies. In India, there has been the tradition of burning dead bodies with the help of dry wood. Obviously, this require cutting of trees resulting in deforestation. Usually, at an average, five hundred to six hundred kilograms of wood is burnt for the cremation of a dead body for which fifty to sixty million trees are chopped every year which is a considerable number^[14]. A case analysis from odisha says that the apparent cost of wood used in the cremation may come around twelve thousand rupees but on the other hand, if small cow dung cakes are used with customized pyre, the cost becomes less around nine thousand rupees^[15]. Realising its importance, Rashtriya Kamdhenu Aayog is promoting the start ups giving them sixty percent of initial budget as government funding for

those entities which are working in the sector of Cow dung and Cow urine as well as other Cow products^[16].

Cow urine or Gaumutra is also a least explored Cow product which has a lot of economic value. As per Sushruta Samhita, the distilled form of Cow urine has healing medicinal properties useful for boosting immunity and preventing cardiovascular ailments^[17]. Cow urine can also be used in making floor cleaners and face packs whose demand is increasing not only in India but also in off shore countries^[18]. Many ayurvedic companies in India are making cow urine based products taking raw cow urine from the farmers thus giving him an income source of money. The government of Kerala owned ayurvedic Medicine Company named oushidhi has started selling cow urine products in 2021 which popularity rate is very high showing the acceptance of the value of cow products^[19].

Cow ghee is perhaps one of the most discussed cow products in India and abroad. In India, this product is used in every household for not only for eating but also for spiritual and medicinal purposes. Sushruta, The great ayurveda specialist of ancient india, in his book sushruta samhita, says that ghee has immense positive effects on whole human body with building tissues and pacifying Pitta and Vata doshas^[20]. Cow ghee has optimum quantity of antioxidants, Vitamins A, D, E and K and many other nutrients which keep the body healthy^[21]. The cow ghee has a significant market share in india whose value was 2624 billion rupees in 2021 with the potential to become almost double in next five or six years^[22]. It is evident from the discussion on cow products that Cow based Indian economy is a notion based not just on assumptions but based on the evidence based facts. Since the industrial advancement of our country, the dependence on agriculture has reduced but still major part of our workforce is working in agriculture without a promising income. The promotion of the industries and start-ups in the field of cow products can be the game changer in this regard. In India, the unemployment rate was 6.8 percent^[23] which is a challenge for the developing nation which can be tackled by revitalizing the cow based village commerce system thus generating million of jobs in rural areas.

In India, the cow breed population is said to be around seventeen crores^[24]. Conveniently, if we assume average cow dung production per day ten kilograms as well as average cow urine production per day 5 litres, in this scenario 170 crore kilograms and 85 crore litres of cow dung and cow urine will be produced respectively whose very small portion is utilized for the commercial purposes. The industries and start ups working in the cow sector have brilliant opportunities to produce a variety of products like, cow dung cakes, ghee, pesticides, insect repellents and medicinal products. A handsome revenue can be generated from these industries along with thousands of good jobs in rural areas thus reenergizing the whole village economical system.

The benefits of reviving the cow based rural economy are not just limited to the monetary dimensions. The practices of using cow dung based manures will improve the soil health and fertility along with reducing dependence on chemical fertilizers who ultimately pollute groundwater and affect soil health. The crops cultivated with the organic manures have high price value and they help in restoring the ecological cycle of the agriculture which were disturbed by using excessive pesticides and fertilizers. The restoration of ecological crop cycle and improvement of soil health and fertility enables the farmers to multiple crops round the year thus increasing the overall production.

In the end, it can be thoughtfully summarised that the Cow has a very significant importance in rejuvenation and revitalization of economy through the production, storage and promotion of Cow based products with the help of modern techniques and equipments. To restore the ancient glory of the Indian nation, the Cow may be a central factor to empower the society economically, religiously, socially and spiritually. This will enable our farmers and workers especially of the rural areas to improve their lives in a dignified and empowered manner.

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