

Vedic Insights into the Domestication of Animals for a Sustainable Rural Economy**Dr. Sanatan Das**

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Abstract

The Vedic corpus, one of the earliest and most comprehensive repositories of ancient human knowledge, provides profound insights into the interdependent relationship between humans, animals, and the natural environment. This study investigates the Vedic conception of animal domestication as a pivotal element in the sustenance and advancement of rural economic systems. Drawing upon textual evidence from the R̥gveda, Atharvaveda, and related Vedic literature, the paper elucidates how the Vedic worldview perceived domesticated animals not merely as economic resources but as essential collaborators in agricultural productivity and ecological equilibrium. The analysis emphasizes traditional Vedic principles concerning animal care, breeding, utility, and ethical stewardship, revealing a holistic framework that aligns material prosperity with moral responsibility and environmental balance. By contextualizing these insights within modern frameworks of rural development and environmental ethics, the paper proposes a Vedic model of animal domestication that supports economic efficiency, cultural continuity, and ecological harmony.

Keywords: Animal, Rural Economy, Husbandry, Agriculture, Hymns, Mantras, Science etc.

1. Introduction

Extensive studies exist on the scientific thought of early Greek and Chinese civilizations, but similar research on India lags due to insufficient documentation of relevant literature. Sanskrit literature is among the richest and most valuable, as it contains profound ideas and insights into various scientific subjects. Such as Astronomy and Mathematics, Architecture and Iconography, Horticulture as also Chemistry and Physics. This boundless store of literature however could not so far attract due attention of the Sanskrit scholars who, in most cases, felt that it was outside the domain of their study, chiefly for the reason that they were not properly equipped with the knowledge which was required to understand the technical texts. The technical experts, on the other hand, are either unaware of the existence of this literature or find it beyond their reach because of its language which is Sanskrit.

Then and even now, a large number of population has dependency on non-investment or less-investment source of income. Agriculture has immense role on rural income strategy. Without Agriculture a society can't go ahead as the earth feeds and protects us by its infinite products. Systematic management of the earthly resources is the efficient management of National Economy. If National Economy being

managed properly then only rural economy shall be efficient enough and rural life as well as the livelihood of rural artisan shall be protected properly.

According to the Arthaśāstra, “कृषिपशुपाल्यं वार्ता”– Vārtā is a Vidyā related to agriculture and domestication of animals, essential for good governance and management. The Ṛgveda advises, “Kṛṣimit kṛṣasva,” urging engagement in farming as a means of economic development. The Atharvaveda, also known as Brahmadeva or Bhiṣagveda, contains numerous references to agriculture and animal husbandry. Different modes of agri-animal sciences are also referred to in the Atharvaveda.

Here, this paper shall be divided into two parts. Part-A shall highlight on a database oriented description of domestication of animals, their utility and their management. This part of the paper shall concentrate only on the references out of Vedas. Part-B shall emphasise on the analysis of the facts and shall hint upon the management and protection of socio-economic standard of rural residents of the Globe. Again this shall compare the age old system with the modern and scientific alternatives and shall try to draw a line of best solution to the Efficient Management of Rural Economy.

Part-A

It is clear that the people of the Vedic age mainly depended on agriculture for their livelihood. The wide stretches of plains and forests likely encouraged them to cultivate the land and become agriculturists. Their surroundings consisted of fertile soil, abundant vegetation, and various animals. Some of these may have the character to stay aside the human habitation. On the basis of Ṛgvedic mantra-

“पुनरेता नि वर्तन्तामस्मिन्पुष्यन्तु गोपतौ

इहैवाग्ने नि धारयेह तिष्ठतु या रयिः॥” (Ṛgveda 10.19.3)

it is well evidenced that The people of the Vedic period lived a pastoral life. They moved from place to place in search of new pastures. The herdsmen took the cattle to the pastures and forests for grazing. Again from the verses visualised by Maitrāvaruni-Vaśistha (Ṛgveda 7.13.3) lord Agni looks upon the world as a herdsman watches his calves. This simple simile in an indirect manner has establishes the truth that nomadic people of that age have close association with cattle. In this context the hymns addressed to Pūṣan i.e. Ṛgveda 6.53-56 and 6.58 have important role. Here in these hymns Pūṣan is said to be holding a tuft a leather strafe as the controller of cattle. He is also narrated as the leader of the animal property. Seer Gāthina-Visvāmitra praises Indra as a good herdsman who nourishes the cows and feeds them with grass and guards them. Similarly Indra is prayed to lead the cattle and protects them-

“पृथू करस्त्रा बहुला गभस्ती अस्मद्रक्सं मिमीहि श्रवांसि।

यूथेव पश्वः पशुपा दमूना अस्माँ इन्द्राभ्या ववृत्स्वाजौ॥” (R̥gveda 6.19.3)

has the noble information that when cows were freed for grazing or otherwise their calves tied to ropes. This is a clear indication of domestication of cows and extraction of milks from them. In addition to these facts the Mantras like R̥gveda 6.54.5-7, 10.19.5, 10.169.1, 10.105.7, Atharvaveda 3.14.1-6 and Kauśikasūtra 2.26 are aptly associated with the description of various aspects related to the relationship of animals with human. From the above references one can get sufficient data regarding the association of the cows with the human being of Vedic period-

“एह यन्तु पशवो ये परेयुर्वार्युर्येषां सहचारं जुजोष।

त्वष्टा येषां रूपधेयानि वेदास्मिन्तान्गोष्ठे सविता नि यच्छतु ॥

इमं गोष्ठं पशवः सं स्रवन्तु बृहस्पतिरा नयतु प्रजानन्।

सिनीवाली नयत्वाग्रमेषामाजग्मुषो अनुमते नि यच्छ ॥” (Atharvaveda 2.26.1-2)

are predominantly establishing the similar truth that cows and bulls were very much associated with the Vedic life and economic establishment. In most of the mantras related to Indra are showing the same character that the priest as well as the seer requests Indra to get good number of cattle. In some cases different mantras have also narrated sacrifices and use of animal products in those sacrifices. It is obvious that the cattle of cattle products also used by the Ṛsis as well as the common people of Vedic age.

From different mantras of R̥gveda, Yajurveda and Atharvaveda it is evidenced that Vedic people have close association with different animals. Some are domestic in character and some are forestry in character.

2. Animals and insects are mentioned in different Vedic texts

Cow, Buffalo, Bull, Bullocks, Cat, Camel, Carnivorous, Chameleon, Crocodile, Deer, Dog, Donkey, Elephant, Frog, Goat, Hawk, Horse, Insects, Jackal, Lion, Mongoose, Mosquitoes, Mouse, Pig, Sheep, Snake, Tiger, Tortoise, Wolf and Rhinoceros. Some animals and insects lived close to humans in the Vedic period, while others did not. The animals that stayed near humans and could be tamed were likely domesticated for human use.

Important and frequently referred animals of Vedic texts are Cow, Bull and Bullocks, Buffalo, Horse, Dog, Sheep, Goat, Pig, Elephant, Camel and Donkey. From direct and indirect references these animals were considered as domestic animals. How and when they have been domesticated is not clear from any textual reference but from the social structure socio-cultural aspects of Vedic habitants this can be apprehended that probably just after the end of pre-historic nature domestication of animals has been

initiated.

2.1. Cow

The cow was very important in the life of the Vedic people. Many references show that the cow was described and worshipped. The Vedic people knew how to use milk, butter, ghee, and curd. It is also evidenced that those people have knowledge regarding use of leather and leather products of animals in general and cow in particular. In Vedic age wealth considered as much in the number of cows as in the number and size of the full granaries. Use of Milk and Milk based products in day to day life of Vedic people establishes the truth that cows were means of livelihood for common people and the social economy was also dependant on them.

A good number of Vedic mantras where the Vedic seer expresses his kinesis with cows and its social utility as well as productive character has been referred are- R̥gveda 1.10.7-8, 1.120.9, 3.31.15, 4.32.18, 5.34.5, 10.42.7, 10.44.10, Yajurveda 13.49, Atharvaveda 4.21.1-7.

R̥gvedic mantras “ये अश्वदा उत वा सन्ति गोदा ये वस्त्रदाः सुभगास्तेषु रायः॥” (R̥gveda 5.42.8) has praise Visvadevas as giver of horses, cows and garments. From enumerable number of Vedic chants the close association of the Vedic civilization with the cattle, more specifically cows were established. There are some other references from where we can get sufficient information regarding the utility of cows in Vedic period are- R̥gveda 1.28.4, 1.32.2, 1.64.26, 1.72.8, 1.117.20, 1.152.6, 2.16.8, 2.32.3, 4.58.6, 6.28.3, 6.28.7, 6.47.31, 6.54.7, 8.8.15, 8.46.10, 8.69.3, 9.69.1, 10.27.8, 10.39.13, 10.42.2, 10.101.5, Yajurveda 3.59, 5.28, 12.70, 12.84, 18.65, 19.86, 24.5-9, Samaveda 2.3.10.1, 2.5.3.5, Atharvaveda 8.7.23-25.

In chants of Atharvaveda, Agnipurāṇa Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa one can trace many references regarding use of animal/cow remaining for treatment of animals and humans. Even in modern therapeutic science use of animal remaining is a common practice. All these references or thoughts expressed by Vedic seers has the noble intention that there was a society of cooperation and co-existence between man and animal.

2.2. Bull and Bullocks

The Vedic people lived in an agrarian society. They were closely associated with cow cultivation. The word “Go” was commonly used for animals of this group. Inclusion of words like valivarda, valada are establishing the same truth. In addition to this we can get words like Śakata and Anas from which use of Bulls and Bullocks as well as horses can be well apprehended. In different Vedic texts the association of Bullocks with trade and transport has been established, The mantras related to the plough worship and ploughing of cultivating land shows the implementation of bullock power in cultivation. In this regard

Kṛṣiparāśara a famous book on agriculture has discussed thoroughly the implementation animal power in agriculture. Use of human power as assumed by historians for ploughing and transporting has been substituted by the use of animal power in this sector. In addition to these facts one can also get references non cruelty to the homely or domesticated animals means excessive use of animal power for human benefit was forbidden. This shows their domestication and higher place in the Vedic society.

2.3. Buffalo

Apart from the cow and her calves, there are also many references to male and female buffaloes. The male buffalo is called Mahisa and the female is called Mahisī. These terms are mentioned in the R̥gveda 1.121.2, 5.29.8, 5.37.3, Yajurveda 12.105, and Sāmaveda 3.4.11. From these Vedic mantras, it appears that female buffaloes were used for milk, while male buffaloes were used for carrying loads and transporting goods. It is also notable that the use dung in agricultural land narrated in mantras like-

“आ निमृचुः सकृदेको अपाभरत्।” (R̥gveda 161.10) “सकृन्पण्डेभ्यः कृष्माः।” (Jain. Br. 2.267)

2.4. Horses

In many hymns of almost all the Vedas, horses are mentioned. Different kinds of horses are described. They include riding horses, chariot horses, war horses, race horses, ploughing horses, and sacrificial horses. Horse was called Vāhah, Aśvah and Arvat, while mare was known as Aśvā and Arvatī and the horse child is called Aśvatarah. On the basis of mantras R̥gveda 1.38.12, 7.3.9, 9.107.8, 10.5.2, 10.101.7, Atharvaveda 4.4.8, 10.4.21 it is well evidenced that horses were employed for ploughing of land and transportation of agricultural products. The famous etymology of Asvah, “अध्वनं गच्छतीति” have immense role regarding its use in Vedic age. There are some more references where horse, its use, its charter etc. have been narrated properly are- R̥gveda 1.22.3, 1.25.3, 1.63.1, 2.43.2, 3.36.6, 5.58.7, 5.61.2-3, 6.47.23-24, 6.47.31, 6.69.4, 6.75.13, 8.25.22 Atharvaveda 2.14.6 and Yajurveda 29.44.

2.5. Dogs

The dog (Śvā, Śunī) embodies both sacred and liminal qualities, symbolizing loyalty, vigilance, and the connection between humans and the divine. The R̥gveda mentions two key canine figures: Saramā, Indra’s divine hound who discovers the stolen cows (R̥gveda 10.108), representing intuition and faithfulness; and the Saraméyas, the four-eyed dogs of Yama (R̥gveda 10.14), guardians of the path of the dead, symbolizing spiritual insight and protection.

In the Atharvaveda (Atharvaveda 8.2.1-4), dogs are invoked for protection against evil forces, emphasizing their apotropaic power. Yet, in ritual contexts, they are sometimes viewed as impure– a duality typical of liminal beings. The Śatapathabrāhmaṇa (1.1.2.6) even prescribes purification if a dog

enters the sacred enclosure.

2.6. Sheep and Goats

Sheep and goats are mentioned only once in the Ṛgveda as Ajā and Avi. In the Puruṣasūkta of the Ṛgveda and Yajurveda, their creation by Puruṣa is described. However, it is not clear whether these animals were domesticated or not. Their association with cows we can draw an assumption regarding their domestication. Taittirīyasamhitā 6.5.10.1 has the opinion that origin of human beings followed by animals among which the Sheep and Goats are refer to. Apart from these references we can get some other references were Sheep and Goats. Some important references are- Kāthakasamhitā 29.10.9, Atharvaveda 5.21.5, 8.7.25, 11.2.9, Taittirīyabrāhmaṇa. 3.9.8.3 and Śatapathabrāhmaṇa 4.5.5.6

2.7. Donkey

The donkey (Gardabha, Khara, Rāsabha) held an important place in the Vedic period, especially as a hardy beast of burden supporting transport and agricultural activities. The Ṛgveda refers to donkey-drawn carts in verses such as “शकटेषु रासभासो वहन्तु।” (Ṛgveda 1.28.5) and “रासभो न दृंहतः पृष्ठ्यः शकटेषु वः।” (Ṛgveda 10.86.13), highlighting its economic significance in daily life. Symbolically, its harsh voice is compared to meaningless noise in “इव गर्दभस्य ह्रस्वा वाचः।” (Ṛgveda 1.51.5), indicating an early negative metaphorical association. In addition, donkeys appear in ritual and medicinal contexts, as seen in the Taittirīya Samhitā 6.1.11, where the donkey is linked with fertility symbolism, and in Atharvaveda 1.33.4-5, mentioning the use of donkey hair and bones in treatments for certain skin diseases. Although the donkey’s status gradually declined in later Sanskrit literature, where it is portrayed as foolish or low-valued, Vedic evidence clearly shows its role as a resilient, service-oriented animal. Overall, the donkey in Vedic culture symbolizes endurance, utility, and the dignity of humble labor that supported ancient society.

2.8. Pigs and Others

In Vedic literature, the pig is called Varāhah. A hymn in the Ṛgveda says that the pig has a bright family and a purifying nature. It also mentions that the female pig moves around noisily with her young ones and keeps the surroundings clean. However, this type of description in the Vedic hymn seems careless and meaningless. Whatever may be the intention of the Ṛṣi, this information cannot be refuted arbitrarily. From this mantra it is established that Pig was not a forest animal. It has domestication, it was very much available within the human habitation, Some other references where pig has been discussed are- Ṛgveda 1.61.7, Śatapathabrāhmaṇa 5.4.3.19.

Domesticated animals like camels, elephants, donkeys, etc. were also referred in mantras like Ṛgveda

1.138.2, 1.29.5, Yajurveda 24.39, 30.11, Atharvaveda 3.22.3, 5.31.3, 20.24.5.

Part-B

Vedic people got many benefits from domestic animals. They used them for milking, transportation, ploughing the land, Load Caring, Land Fertiliser, Animal Protine Provider, Nuclearray Protector, Cleaning, Physical Power Provider, Medicinal purposes, natural household products etc.

3. Modern Context

We have accepted artificial milk instead of natural milk. Unfortunately, synthetic milk is not real milk. It is only white water that causes stomach and mental diseases. In the field of transportation, we now use too much mechanical power instead of natural biological power. Biological power can be recreated and can be used several times where petro-power cannot be reutilised. It not purpose to complete prohibition of petro power from this sector however, it can come certain limitation. By which the environmental threaten can be minimised. Use of man power and animal power shall be helpful to Management of Rural Economy. Rural unemployment caused by less use of biological power has become vital constraint for development of Rural Economy. In this context we can observe rural scenario where Man-pulled Cycle-Rickshaws have been supplemented by Auto-Rickshaws. In this place we have employed One man and compelled Four to Five rural poor to be unemployed. We have welcomed a good amount of Carbon-Dioxide to the rural settlement. Again compelled the poor to be diseased and to use non-herbal medicines, which is beyond the rich of a rural poor, and as consequence Man-power as well as the animal-power dies. This may be called Unethical Management of Rural Economy.

Similarly use of Tractors, Hervestors, Seeders, Cultivators, Drone Sprayer etc. in our agricultural sector has generated huge unemployment. It is not refutable that production increases but side by side increase in Rural Unemployment has become a threat to the Rural Economic Development. Use of Bullocks has been supplemented by the petromachine and the pollution entered to the paddy field. It can also be observed that who are bringing the machine-power to the paddy field, are they poor? No, even in rural setup rich becomes richer and the economic standard of the poor becomes worst. Instead of natural fertiliser Carbon-Dioxide is being provided to our land of food cultivation.

Load caring by Cart, donkey, elephant, horse, buffalo and bullocks or by man have been supplemented by modern transport systems. Unfortunately as a consequence a poor villager has to purchase the rural product in higher price? But it is also a fact that, producer is deprived from the same benefit. Middleman becomes rich and the rural economic structure being destroyed.

Export of cattle for slaughter has deprived our agricultural land of natural fertilisers. Dung and bone fertilisers are natural fertilisers. Because of their loss, the productivity of land has decreased. As a

result, cultivators now depend on chemical fertilisers. Scientific studies show that chemical fertilisers increase production for a short time. But they reduce the natural fertility of the land. After some time, the land stops producing crops. This cannot be called real development. Agricultural costs increase. Middlemen become more powerful. The real farmer gets less benefit. This is not good management of the rural economy.

4. Conclusion

Increase in the number of living beings is very important. Animal protein cannot be replaced by noodles or any other food. Decrease in cattle farming is a great danger to the rural economy. Cow dung is known to protect against nuclear radiation. So, it is necessary to protect the dung-based economy for the welfare of human society. Pigs, dogs, jackals, and vultures help to clean the environment. Their decreasing numbers are a threat to human life. Use of animal power does not harm the environment. To protect nature, we must think about using animal power again instead of machines.

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