ABSTRACT

From time immemorial, India possessed the largest cattle population. The statistics reveal that of the 690 million World's cattle population estimated in 1930, 215 millions belong to India, which accounts for nearly one-third of the World's cattle population. Economic value of cattle in Indian agriculture is enormous. Cattle are used for cultivating millions of our acres, for drawing water from wells and for transporting produce from field to market. It is in fact, extremely difficult to derive a definite monetary value on cattle labour. Rough estimates regarding the cost of cultivation of crops carried out by imperial council of Agricultural Research and similar enquiries in India and elsewhere have shown that between 15 to 25 per cent of the cost of cultivation is contributed by cattle.

It is thus understood that rural economy is mainly sustained by livestock. However, the productive value of the livestock industry is not commensurate with its numbers because of the poor quality of the Indian cattle. Like most livestock breeds around the world, the Ongole bulls take their name from the region of their main breeding area-the Ongole region. Until 1904, this tract was in the Nellore district, hence the breed was called "Nellore" by foreigners. However, the natives always called them Ongole after the region in which they are predominantly breed.

The Royal Commission on Agriculture, 1928, was of the opinion that the aim should be to provide on an average at least one Veterinary Assistant Surgeon for every 25,000 cattle. On this basis, the total number of Veterinary Assistant Surgeons required for the Province of Madras was 880 but there were only 300 Surgeons. But the improvement of the vast cattle population of the Province continued to be a major problem on account of the paucity in the number of approved bulls available for service. The general neglect of the cow and her female calf, which are starved from birth, had a very deleterious effect on the breed of the cattle. What was required was a sustained drive towards increasing the number of breeding stock.

Cattle Breeding In Madras Presidency – Some Measures During The British Rule

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This paper focuses on the measures taken by the British administration to improve cattle breeding, especially Ongole breed in the Madras presidency. It is a well-known fact that Indian sub-continent is a treasure house of cattle-breeds that are well suited for live-stock production in the tropics be it for their drought power, milk, meat or others economic gains.

From time immemorial, India possessed the largest cattle population. The statistics reveal that of the 690 million World's cattle population estimated in 1930, 215 millions belong to India, which accounts for nearly one-third of the World's cattle population. Interestingly, England possessed only seven million animals, coming closer to one-third of the cattle population in Madras Presidency alone during the same period.(1)

Economic value of cattle in Indian agriculture is enormous. Cattle are used for cultivating millions of our acres, for drawing water from wells and for transporting produce from field to market. It is in fact, extremely difficult to derive a definite monetary value on cattle labour. Rough estimates regarding the cost of cultivation of crops carried out by imperial council of Agricultural Research and similar enquiries in India and elsewhere have shown that between 15 to 25 per cent of the cost of cultivation is contributed by cattle.(2) These investigations did not include the contribution of cattle in providing natural manure which maintains soil fertility and other incomes derived from horn, hides and skins from dead cattle.

It is thus understood that rural economy is mainly sustained by livestock. However, the productive value of the livestock industry is not commensurate with its numbers because of the poor quality of the Indian cattle. For ex., India had as many milk cattle as Europe had but the milk production was only one-fifth of that of Europe.(3) In spite of the poor cattle owned by the average cultivator, there are also fine cattle in Madras belonging to certain well recognized breeds like Ongoles, Kangayams and Alambadis.

The Ongole breed have won all-India fame and it is an outstanding example of careful cattle breeding undertaken by professionals in this field. The Ongole is a dual purpose animal, being useful both for draught and milk. Its breeding tract consists of the villages located between Gundlakamma and the Alluru rivers of the Guntur and the Prakasam districts of Andhra Pradesh respectively.

Like most livestock breeds around the world, the Ongole bulls take their name from the region of their main breeding area-the Ongole region. Until 1904, this tract was in the Nellore district, hence the breed was called "Nellore" by foreigners. However, the natives always called them Ongole after the region in which they are predominantly breed.

Because of the breed's economic importance to the farmers of the region, the Nellore district Collector started the Ongole Cattle show in 1858 to encourage the breeding of good-quality Ongoles in the breeding zone. This event was conducted annually until 1871, with the 12 shows serving to inculcate a competitive spirit in the Ongole cattle breeders. The great pride that the prize winning cattle brought to their breeders as well as to the village boosted the quality of the Ongole breed. The shows were a great encouragement for small and big breeders alike to produce better stock.

But there was a dearth of good breeding bulls and the need to increase their number was pointed out in a survey of the Ongole tract made by the Livestock Officer who estimated only 670 fit for breeding for 93000 cows. The need for the distribution of good bulls of known pedigree in adequate numbers was realized.

In 1916, a scheme called 'premium' scheme was introduced by the government towards this end. The essential feature of that scheme was that the government will give a monetary grant to the owner of the breeding bull.

To improve breeding, a stock raising farm for Ongole cattle was established at Chintaladevi in 1919. Another farm for the breeding of buffaloes was opened at Lam near Guntur in 1923. The Chintaladevi station was abolished in 1923 as a measure of retrenchment and the herd of Ongoles maintained there was transferred to the Lam farm. This station carried out research on all livestock problems including an investigation into the possibility of evolving a strain of high-milking cows and serve the purpose of keeping the breeds pure and of supplying a limited number of approved breeding bulls to the districts.(4) Scarcity of good breeding stock was partly responsible for the existing poor condition of our livestock.

The improvement of livestock was to be brought about by 'better feeding and better breeding'. The government also recognized that one major reason for the deterioration in the quality of cattle is inadequate nutrition. So in 1867 itself the government laid down a principle that, out of its uncultivated land, each village should reserve for common grazing an area equivalent to 30 percent of its land under cultivation, thereby providing additional pastureland for the Ongole bulls.

The Royal Commission on Agriculture stated that "no substantial improvement in the way of breeding is possible until the cattle can be better fed".(5) As per recommendations of the commission, steps were taken even in early 20th century to increase grazing lands. Forest panchayats were established. This measure did not materially help to improve the position.

The livestock section was transferred from agriculture department to the Veterinary department in 1938. Consequently, a clear and comprehensive scheme for the improvement of cattle in the province was formulated. As a result, a 'Provincial Livestock Improvement Board' was constituted by the Government in 1940.

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But the improvement of the vast cattle population of the Province continued to be a major problem on account of the paucity in the number of approved bulls available for service. The general neglect of the cow and her female calf, which are starved from birth, had a very deleterious effect on the breed of the cattle. The introduction of commercial crops such as chilly and tobacco further reduced the availability of grazing lands. Hitherto uncultivated pastureland that was used to raise Ongole cattle herds started being planted with these crops. This had a twofold effect on Ongole breeding: the crops encroached on the pastureland that sustained the Ongole herds while their residues were unsuitable to be fed to livestock, thus putting enormous pressure on the Ongole herds in the breeding tract. What was required was a sustained drive towards increasing the number of breeding stock. Lack of such effort led to the tightening the noose around the neck of the Ongole breed by obstructing their development in their homeland. However, it should be remembered that the British administration began a step in right direction.

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4. *Livestock of Southern India by Captain R.W. Littlewook, p.26*
5. *Royal Commission on Agriculture in India, 1928, p.201*
6. *Royal Commission of Agriculture in India, 1928, p.312.*