

Comprehensive Analysis of Animal Welfare Practices at Gaushalas: Alignment with Established Guidelines and Observed Benefits

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides an in-depth examination of animal welfare practices at Gaushalas, focusing on feeding, housing, healthcare, and general management. Through detailed observation and literature review, we analyze the alignment of these practices with established guidelines and their impact on cattle well-being. Our findings reveal a strong commitment to ethical standards, although certain challenges remain in resource-scarce settings. Data was gathered through field observations, interviews with Gaushala staff, and a review of existing literature after obtaining permission from the University Ethical Committee, in two Gaushalas, one in a peri-urban setting and another in an urban setting. Practices were compared to established guidelines, including those from the Federation of Indian Animal Protection Organizations (FIAPO), to assess compliance and identify areas for improvement. Implementing welfare standards in non-traditional cattle care settings contributes to advancing animal welfare practices in diverse environments.

KEYWORDS: Gaushala, animal husbandry.

INTRODUCTION:

Cows are treated as mother goddesses according to Hindu culture. Therefore, cows that are unproductive are abandoned in conventional cow shelters called Gaushalas has been an old Indian custom since Vedic times. An efficient Gaushala is an epicenter of Indian Agricultural Rejuvenation because it enhances crop yields, improves soil fertility, and makes farming more profitable and healthful through the production of biofertilizers, organic pesticides and insecticides, organic energy, methane gas, panchagavya, and other medicines. Therefore, Gaushalas are no longer considered an economic drain but must be essential in every part of India. Commercial dairy farms concentrate mainly on milk production; only healthy, productive cattle are housed here. When the cattle become old and stop lactating, they are abandoned. But the scenario in Gaushalas is different. They are traditional cow shelters that are synonymous with the protection of cows and safeguarding the cattle wealth of our country. [Kennedy U, et, al 2018]. Their prime concern is providing shelter to non-lactating, weak, unproductive, and malnourished cows that their owners abandon (Yadav K, 2007). They favor conservation of pure breed cows and produce quality males. As per the 20th Livestock Census, India has about 192 million cattle population, 74% indigenous and the rest 26% are crossbred or exotic (Singh A, 2018). According to Rashtriya Gokul Mission, GOI, the development of Integrated indigenous cattle centers- 'Gaushala' envisages the enhancement of

productivity of indigenous breeds through the practice of modern farm management practices and promotion of common resource management.

Hinduism promotes Ahimsa or nonviolence to all living beings including animals. Hence, animal welfare has promoted human-animal bonding naturally among Indians. The cow is worshipped on all auspicious occasions and any harm to this animal deity cannot cross the mind of any true Hindu. Cow slaughter is considered a sin in Hinduism. So, the concept of Gaushalas started in the Vedic times which is a shelter for cows and is being practiced even today. The number of these shelters is increasing in number and they take care of the cows till their natural death. The public, and businesses, including corporate philanthropy, charitable societies, temple trusts, or government fund the Gaushalas. The livestock population is affected by various endemic infectious diseases which may reduce their lifespan. Adoption of good management practices in the Gaushalas has gone a long way in improving the living standards of the cattle and providing them with a disease-free life till their natural death.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

1. To evaluate the feeding schedules, types of feed, and water quality management at Gaushalas.
2. To examine the living conditions.
3. To analyze the working conditions and training of Gaushala staff.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

The products obtained from cows have varied beneficial uses in agriculture, as sources of energy, and high medicinal values (K Dhama et al., 2005). Panchagavya is a wonder medicine made using cow milk, curd, ghee, urine, and dung. It has many beneficial applications in organic farming, treating diseases in humans, as an alternate energy source, and as a biopesticide (Chauhan R S et al., 2005).

Le Blanc, et al., 2006, emphasized the prevention of diseases in cows rather than treatment through vaccination, understanding cows' metabolism and humans' management skills (Le Blanc, et al., 2006).

Dinesh Kumar Yadav, 2007, talked about the use of ethnoveterinary medicine which has negligible side effects and is also pocket-friendly (Dinesh Kumar Yadav, 2007). Musculoskeletal disorders (MSD) are caused by monotonous and repetitive work in awkward positions, and lifting heavy objects (Christina Lunner Kolstrup, 2012).

The main objective of the gaushalas is to protect the native breed of cows and to spread awareness of the same in the interest of our nation. An increase in the population of Indian Desi cows will help to develop food security and save our country from foreign dominance. (Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries, Ministry of Agriculture, GOI, 2014)

“Prevention is better than cure”. Diseases among animals may be easily controlled by periodic vaccinations. (Prakash Kumar Rathod, et al., 2016)

Methane emitted due to enteric fermentation by ruminants as a part of their normal digestive process is about 37% of the overall anthropogenic sources. When the cattle are fed with slow/less digestible feed, the methane produced will be less. (Nidhi R Parmar et al. 2017)

The current livestock production statistics in India have been done by Amandeep Singh, of ICAR- Indian Veterinary Research Institute, Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh, India in 2018.

The major expenditure in the gaushalas is incurred by animal feed, animal shelter maintenance, and labor wages. (Kalyan Mandi et al., 2019)

According to Kalyan Mandi et al., (2020) Gaushalas, in India cater to the needs of diseased, unproductive,

nonlactating, weak, and stray cattle. They also qualify for the conservation of indigenous purebred cows. Good management practices help to improve the living standards of the cattle.

Gaushalas are traditional ancient institutions that need to be managed well by skilled and dedicated workers who should only focus on the welfare of cattle to give them a healthy and stress-free life. (Arvind Sharma et al., 2020)

Hygiene at the Gaushalas is highly significant because it is the major cause of zoonotic diseases. (Sharma A et al, 2020)

Ledo J et al., 2021 have spoken about the significance of hygiene and a healthy balanced diet in the prevention of diseases in cattle.

According to Kennedy, et al, 2021, cows play a vital role in the Hindu religion and ideology, and their slaughter is banned by law in a majority of Indian states. A direct result of these anti-slaughter laws is a large population of abandoned, aged, or unproductive cattle housed in cow shelters or Gaushalas (Kennedy, et al, 2021).

According to Niha Ayman et al., 2022, Gaushalas not only provide shelter to disowned animals but also employ many needy people, and encourage organic farming by the use of cow-urine and cow-dung-based manure (Niha Ayman et al., 2022).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION:

After an extensive field observation, interviews with Gaushala staff, and a review of existing literature in two Gaushalas, one in a peri-urban setting and another in an urban setting, the following observation was made:

ANIMAL-BASED OBSERVATION:

At the Gaushalas, the animals are fed twice a day with fresh fodder and hay or powdered rice bran. The males and female are allowed to graze separately in the Gaushala premises. Fresh feed is also sourced from nearby villages after a thorough inspection because contaminated feed can easily cause diseases in the cattle. Potable water is either sourced from rivers or a borewell. Water is stored in huge tanks which are cleaned periodically. Water quality is checked regularly. The cattle are fed with slow/less digestible feed, to reduce the amount of methane emission. The cattle are not tied continuously and cows and oxen are allowed to graze separately to avoid mating of animals unnecessarily. New and diseased animals are kept separate from the rest of the herd till they attain fitness levels. BST and oxytocin are not used at all for the animals. The complete ban on illegal drugs has increased the longevity of the animals. Drugs are prescribed only by a veterinarian.

Milking, at the Gaushalas, is done twice a day by trained personnel, manually. Hand hygiene is of utmost importance at the Gaushalas. The hands are washed using a liquid handwash soap prepared at the rural Gaushala premises and the cosmopolitan Gaushala uses a synthetically prepared liquid handwash soap. Milking is a strenuous job that may cause musculoskeletal disorders (MSD). The milk obtained at the Gaushalas is not sold for money. It is used in the kitchen for cooking and during worship to God in the temple located in the Gaushala premises.

The issues that are addressed are as follows – a daily thorough inspection of the external body, the color of the urine, and abnormal behavior if the para veterinarians and the workers observe any of every animal. Vaccination is the best strategy for disease control and prevention and for minimizing economic losses due to diseases. Vaccination for prevalent diseases like foot and mouth disease, lumpy skin disease,

brucellosis, mastitis, and tuberculosis is administered periodically. Deworming is compulsorily done for cattle of all age groups. Animal health care is a major challenge in the Gaushalas because of the scarcity of resources, trained manpower, and field veterinarians. Commonly noticed reproductive health issues among the cows are: anestrus, repeat bleeding, uterus bleeding, cervicitis, pre- and post-partum vaginal prolapse, retention of placenta, dystocia, and mastitis. The causes for these issues are a lack of an adequate balanced diet, the non-availability of expert veterinary help, and the untreatable condition of these animals. The solution is the use of ethno-veterinary medicine which is less expensive, safe, time-tested, and has negligible side effects. The resources saved by the use of ethno-veterinary medicine could be utilized to improve the productivity of healthy animals. At the Gaushala, this medicine is given by local villagers who have learned this system of medicine from their forefathers.

Parasitic infections are common in tropical and subtropical countries because hot weather conditions promote the growth of parasites and their lifecycle. They cause huge economic losses to farmers because of reduced milk production and feed efficiency, low body scores, lowered fertility, and thus less productivity among cattle. This calls for deworming all animals in a herd three times a year or at least once or twice for better productivity and efficiency. At the gaushalas, deworming is done twice a year compulsorily. The workers and medical staff look for symptoms like stunted growth, reduced milk production, and diarrhea from parasite infestation. The type of worm is first identified, its lifecycle is understood, and the right dosage of medicine at the right time is given to the animal either through injection or orally mixed with the feed of the animal. The workers look for the following signs in the animals before deworming- loss of weight, delay in puberty, weakness, soil licking, eating of cloth, decrease in milk production, slow growth, thin and rough growth, and even mortality. The commonly used drugs are albendazole, oxfendazole, mebendazole, ivermectin, and levamisole. At the Gaushala, parasitic infection is reduced by reducing overcrowding, rotational grazing, regular deworming, control of the parasitic host, and providing hygienic food and water.

Simple machines are used to facilitate the work of the farmers. Dairy farming is physically very demanding because most farm work is manual. Therefore, it paves the way for musculoskeletal disorders. The most frequently reported MSD is low back aches followed by aches in the shoulders, neck, hand/wrists, and legs. The major causes of MSD are repetitive and monotonous work in awkward working positions, and lifting heavy objects. Injuries caused by slips, trips, and falls add to the misery of the workers. At the Gaushalas, the worker-animal ratio is disproportionate. Each worker has to take care of many animals. Hence, the problem of MSD is prevalent among the workers. All the workers are literate and therefore help in the documentation work and even assist the medical staff in administering drugs to diseased animals.









Calving protocol is strictly followed at the Gaushalas and the calves are nurtured with utmost care. The calves are not separated from the mother initially because they have to be fed with colostrum compulsorily since it provides immunity from pathogens. Weaning is a gradual process; as solid food is given; the quantity of milk is slowly reduced. They are fed with more proteins that help in growth and immunity. Under no circumstances are the animals abandoned at the Gaushalas. All animals are taken care of until their natural death and later buried on the premises with due respect.



At the Gaushalas, all the workers are literate so that they can handle duties like first aid, administering drugs to diseased animals, maintaining hygiene protocol, and any special care as per the requirements of the animals. The division of labor among the workers is done based on their educational qualifications, age, work experience, and their level of intelligence.

CONCLUSION:

This comprehensive analysis of animal welfare practices at Gaushalas highlights a robust adherence to guidelines and showcases a variety of effective strategies employed to ensure the well-being of cattle. The feeding practices, which include fresh fodder and inspected feed, along with consistently available potable water, underscore a commitment to nutritional adequacy and safety. The housing conditions, characterized by well-ventilated, clean sheds, and stress-free environments, further contribute to the animals' overall health and longevity. Healthcare protocols in Gaushalas are rigorously maintained, with regular vaccinations, deworming, and the strategic use of both modern and traditional medicines. These practices not only prevent disease outbreaks but also address common reproductive health issues, thereby enhancing the productivity and well-being of the cattle. The separation of sick and new animals, as well as the prohibition of illegal drugs like BST and oxytocin, ensures a humane and ethical approach to cattle management. In conclusion, by maintaining rigorous standards in feeding, housing, healthcare, and worker management, these shelters contribute significantly to the holistic well-being of cattle populations. The findings of this study underscore the potential of Gaushalas to serve as exemplary institutions for animal welfare, capable of inspiring similar initiatives in diverse environments.

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