

Our Cattle-Wealth.

BY JAYADAYAL GOYANDKA.

All thoughtful people would probably shudder at the present miserable plight of India. The ancient culture of Bhāratavarṣa, its system of education, and its life full of strength, wisdom, and splendour is now a thing of the past. Where is the matchless grandeur of India, which furnished an object-lesson to thousands of men and women of all countries, and imitating which they elevated their lives? Today she is a subject nation, having lost her glory and power, knowledge and wisdom. What is the root cause of this decline? Many would present themselves to our view on sober consideration. Dwindling of the number of cattle appears to be one of the main causes of this downfall. The following is an attempt to shed some light on the question.

If we lend full thought to the question as to how abundant the cattle were in this country in days gone by, and an estimate of their number be made, the figure would appear fabulous to many. But the figures available are authentic and historical. A story appears in *Ayodhyā-Kāṇḍa* of the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Vālmīki that a Brahman, Trjātā by name, came to Bhagavān Śrī Rāmachandra and begged some wealth of him. The Lord asked him to throw a staff with his hand, and offered to give him as many cows as could be made to stand within the distance attainable by the staff. One can

easily infer from this how many cows the gifter possessed, who could part with thousands out of fun. The story of King Nṛga occurring in *Śrīmad Bhāgavata* is too well-known to bear repetition. He used to gift away thousands of cows every day. Only five thousand years ago, Nanda, Upananda and other cowherds possessed a lakh of cows each. This is also mentioned in the *Bhāgavata*. A study of the *Virāt-Parva* of the *Mahābhārata* will show that the king of Virāṭa possessed lakhs of cows. They were so numerous that in order to take possession of them by force the mighty forces of the Kauravas had to be split into two portions while invading the capital of Virāṭa.

Just as there was a large abundance of cows so other cattle, too, were found in large numbers during those days. Let us roughly calculate the number of elephants and horses. One complete unit of an army of *Akṣauhīṇī*, as it was called, consisted of 21,870 elephants, 65,610 horses of cavalry and 87,480 horses for chariots. Jarāsandha, the redoubtable ruler of Magadha, attacked Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa with a huge army consisting of twenty-three such units as many as seventeen times and each time they were all slain by the invincible Lord. In the *Udyoga-Parva* of the *Mahābhārata* it is narrated that eleven such units

were ranged on the side of the Kauravas and seven on that of the Pāṇḍavas in the historic battle-field of Kurukṣetra. Out of the entire army consisting of eighteen units only eleven souls survived and all the rest perished. In spite of such huge devastations crores of cattle still existed in our country. But it has to be observed with great mental agony that not even one-sixteenth of the number then existing are to be found now.

Cattle-wealth has been reckoned to be an important factor in the preservation and progress of a country, nation, religion or society. Possession of cattle-wealth has been looked upon as a matter for pride by all communities from the economic point of view. For the Vaiśyas in particular, preservation of cattle has not only its economic significance, but it has been ordained for them as an important part of their duty—*Dharma*. The *Manusmṛiti* says:—"The duty of the Vaiśyas is to rear cattle, to give alms, to perform sacrifices, to study the Vedas and other scriptures, and to earn their livelihood through trade, money-lending and agriculture."

It should be borne in mind that agriculturists of all classes and communities belong to the same category as the Vaiśyas. Therefore, protection of cattle becomes an integral part of their duty also; but there are very few Vaiśyas or agriculturists in India today who are keenly alive to this fact, which is of supreme importance to them both from the economic and the religious points of

view. The majority of Vaiśyas, as well as agriculturists, make their living through grain and other agricultural products produced with the help of the cattle; nay, their very body is nourished by grain grown with the toil of the cattle. But they care a jot to improve the condition of the poor dumb cattle, to devise means for multiplying and nourishing them.

Amelioration of the live-stock in general would be a far cry; even the least among them, the cow,—the importance of which even from the religious point of view has been stressed in the Śāstras and was practically demonstrated by Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa Himself by tending them in Vraja, nay, the rearing of which has been declared by Him to be the main item of *Dharma* for the *Vaiśyas* (*vide Gītā XVIII. 44*) and which satisfies gods, Ṛṣis, Pitṛs and men alike with its milk and butter,—is being neglected and treated with callous indifference today, which cannot but arouse a feeling of deep concern in the mind of all thoughtful men. Millions of cows are disappearing every year; nevertheless the Hindus are so indifferent in the matter of their protection as if they are quite ignorant of the fact. The horrible result of this is that it is becoming increasingly difficult for the general public to get milk, *ghee* and curd, etc., which have been recognized as essential for human life from the religious and the economic points of view. How the health of the younger generation of India is deteriorating

today owing to scarcity of milk and *ghee* can be realized even by those who do not care for *Dharma*. In this very country where only a few years back pure milk sold at one pice a seer and pure *ghee* at three or four annas a seer, pure milk is not available to the general public at all places even at two annas a seer and pure *ghee* at one rupee a seer. If our countrymen do not wake up in time and continue to remain unmindful of their bovine wealth and do not endeavour to arrest the increasing fall in the number of cows, the future may be still worse and no attempts will then be of any avail. Therefore all thoughtful men will be well-advised to wake up before it is too late. It has become particularly obligatory on every Hindu to give serious thought to this question and strain every nerve to protect and preserve this useful and sacred species. The following are the main reasons for the dwindling of the number of the cows:—

1. (a) The fear of *Dharma* and God is losing its hold on the minds of the people from day to day, so that a large majority of Hindus do not hesitate to sell such cows as do not give sufficient milk, or which do not give milk at all, to the butchers.

(b) Many hard-hearted cultivators turn out of their houses such cows as have ceased to give milk. These cows knock about from place to place, and eventually find their way to the cattle pound from where they pass into the hands of the butcher.

2. Millions of cows are butchered in the slaughter-houses every year for the sake of dry and fresh beef and skin.

3. Many greedy persons of a mean mentality purchase cows giving a large quantity of milk and thinking their calves to be useless sell them to butchers and milk the cows to the last drop by overpowering them through a device known as *Phunka*, the result being that the cows become useless very soon, and are eventually sold to the butchers.

4. Owing to the paucity of good bulls, the breed of cows is deteriorating, and therefore healthy calves are not produced. They are generally short-lived, weak and emaciated.

5. Landlords as well as their tenants, reclaim out of greed, year by year, the pasture left for the cows. Therefore thousands of cows die every year for want of fodder.

6. Hundreds of thousands of cows perish through floods, pestilence and famine, or are slaughtered every year for the sake of the meat-eating population.

For checking this rapid decline in the number of cows, the following methods may be employed with advantage:—

1. People of a religious bent of mind should try to arouse, through the press and the platform, religious feelings among the people, so that they may feel compassion for the cow, may refrain from selling cows to

butchers and may no longer treat cows giving no milk with indifference.

2. The Government may be moved to stop the slaughter of cows for the export of thousands of tons of beef to foreign countries every year.

3. The meat-eating population of the country should be mildly and lovingly persuaded to give up the practice, by showing that *ghee* and milk are more nutritious and conducive to health than beef, and that decline in the number of cows is sure to bring about the downfall of the country.

4. The Government may be moved to stop the corrupt practice of *Phunka* (which is also illegal) by agitating against it in all villages with great assiduity.

5. Well-to-do persons and managers of Goshālās (a place where uncared for cows are kept and taken care of) should maintain good bulls with a view to multiply cows of good breed; or the Government may be moved to do the same.

6. The Government, the wealthy classes, the landlords as well as the

tenants should be requested to leave pastures for cows in villages.

7. Wherever owing to floods, earthquake, or other natural calamities the cows may be found dying for want of fodder, it should be the duty of all to strain every nerve to procure fodder for them and thus try to save their lives by making sincere efforts in that direction through body, mind and resources.

8. Every tenant or householder should maintain at least one or two cows in his house according as his means permit.

9. Efforts may be made to get such a legislation enacted as may abolish cow-slaughter altogether.

Thoughtful persons should try their level best to protect the cow by taking recourse to the above-mentioned means. Arjuna voluntarily accepted exile for twelve years for protecting the cow. If it is not possible to do so in this age, one should at least try to do all that lies within his power to protect the cow.* †

(Kalyan)



* In Rajputana, as well as in the Hissar district of the Punjab, the cattle are passing through great distress owing to failure of the monsoon. Hundreds of thousands of cows are dying for want of fodder. Everyone should render unstinted help in the worthy cause of preserving their lives.

—Editor.

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