Local Perception of Cattle, about Nature, Seasons and their Relationship with Herdsmen

Abstract:

The study of indigenous knowledge systems and local cultural context is one of the main areas of exploration in cultural anthropology. Based on ethnographic fieldwork in the village of Umerkot. Research paper investigates the local cultural perceptions and knowledge system of cattle, nature, and its relationship with herdsmen in a village, agriculture based and livestock forms an important position both in terms of livelihood and socio-cultural life including the interrelationship between nature and culture. In research, we argue that the study of local knowledge of cattle contributes to understanding the indispensable rich culturally sources of human knowledge which could be analyzed through various alternative forms of knowledge. We are to highlight the significance of folk knowledge, wisdom and local way of information through the perception and indigenous knowledge of cattle in this dominant age of science and technology. This paper attempts to highlight the relevance of local knowledge of nature, climate, rain, drought and cyclone and how village intellectual develop their understanding and make use of this knowledge. For instance, village intellectuals forecast the rain, cyclone, and drought through their close association with cattle; as latter help them to identify certain signs and symbols to indicate about rain, drought and cyclone. According to them, relationship of cattle, nature and culture is truth for them and they strongly believe in it.

Keywords*: Cattle, Season, Folk knowledge, Wisdom, Herdsman, Nature, Ethnography and Climate.*

Introduction:

My research locale was Goth Patail Mohammad Khan Wassan, Goth is a Sindhi word which means a village and patail is the title of the village leader. This village is named after Mohammad Khan Wassan who was the chief of the Wassan tribe. This village is located in the district Umer Kot Sindh. It is 40 km north of Umerkot. There are 50 houses perched on a *Bhit* (dune) that belong to different castes. Chhor Cantonment of the army is approximately 5-7 km away from the village. In the official record, the name of the village is Mohammad Khan Wassan. The land of this village was allotted to an elder of Wassan tribe by British in

1946. The source of livelihood of this tribe is Cattle raising.

The Cattle are kept at home if they are just a few in number, the larger herds are kept in (*wathan*) barns which are generally located by the side of the house or the village. Cattle provide food products such as milk, churned milk, yoghurt, butter, meat and skin. Cattle are also used as means of transport for the villagers. The cattle are known as *dhan* (wealth). Commonly, owners of large herds graze their own cattle. In some cases, other persons are hired for this duty. A person who possesses a large number of cattle is considered honorable.

Literature Review:

This research study includes related literature review on the topic by different global authors. Cattle herding is a common practice in many rural communities around the world, and it is often associated with a close relationship between humans and animals. The relationship between humans and animals has been studied extensively in the fields of anthropology, sociology, and animal studies. These studies have explored how cultural and social factors influence the ways in which humans perceive and interact with animals, and how animals can also shape human culture and society.

Anthropologists have long been interested in the relationship between humans and animals, and the role that animals play in human culture and society. In many traditional societies, animals are viewed as important members of the community, and their welfare is often closely tied to the well-being of humans. For example, in some African cultures, cattle are considered a symbol of wealth, and their care and management are essential to the survival and prosperity of the community. “In recent years, scholars in the field of animal studies have focused on the ethical and moral implications of human-animal relationships. This field recognizes that animals are sentient beings that have their own needs and interests, and that humans have a responsibility to ensure their welfare. For example, some animal studies scholars argue that humans have an ethical obligation to

treat animals with respect and to consider their welfare in our interactions with them." (1)

"In the context of cattle herding, the relationship between humans and animals is often complex and multifaceted. Cattle are important sources of food, income, and social status for many rural communities and their well-being is closely tied to the well-being of the community as a whole. At the same time, cattle are also viewed as individual animals with their own personalities, behaviors, and preferences."(2)

"In other cultures, herdsmen are viewed more as owners or managers of the cattle, and their relationship with the animals is more transactional."(3) Literature on animal and human relationships provides important context for understanding the local perception of cattle in the context of cattle herding. The relationship between humans and animals is complex and multifaceted, and is shaped by cultural, social, and ethical factors. Understanding the ways in which humans perceive and interact with cattle can help to improve the welfare of these animals, as well as the well-being of the communities that rely on them.

"Cattle-keeping Nilotes community of the southern Sudan. He has described the art and aesthetics of the cattle-keeping of the Nilotes community, which gives them pleasure when they decorate them. For them cattle are the most highly valued possessions."(4) "Prestige and identification of people who possess a large number of cattle. They are considered honorable and wealthy persons. He further described the function of cattle. Bells are tied and songs are composed. Few men can be considered wealthy in the *Pakot* (village) due to amount of cattle. It is believed by the villagers that a man with a hundred head of cattle is rich, and a man with no cattle is no one. Goats are also used in a gift exchange and serve to maintain good relations between lineage members and best friends."(5)

"Paleolithic painting of cattle in cave art that shows their relation with human beings. Humans painted marvelous pictures of cattle on cave walls, leaving the messages of love with

cattle."(6)

"Floral designs on the body of a camel decked out with colorful clothes and beautifully decorated haircut. He further states that; Khudabad an old capital of Sindh under the Kalhora rule is a center of artists who are famous for pottery making and the fascinating hair-cutting of animals- especial camels. Camel is a multipurpose animal, used in the area for purposes of breeding, transportation and a traditional irrigation system."(7)

Research Methodology:

The study was conducted using ethnographic research methods, including participant observation, interviews, and focus groups. We spent several months living and working with the cattle herders in the community, observing their daily activities and interactions with the cattle. We also conducted in-depth interviews with cattle herders, community leaders, and other community members to gain insights into their perceptions and beliefs about cattle and cattle herding. In addition to participant observation, the researchers conducted in-depth interviews with the cattle herders, community leaders, and other community members. The interviews were un-structured, meaning that the researchers had a set of predetermined questions, but were also open to exploring new topics and following up on interesting responses. The interviews were conducted in the local language, and were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis. The questions focused on the participants' perceptions and beliefs about cattle and cattle herding, as well as their relationships with the animals. "Participant observation is a qualitative research method in which the researcher observes and takes notes on the behavior, interactions, and practices of the participants in their natural setting."(8) In this study, the researchers spent several months living and working with the cattle herders in the community. They observed the herders' daily activities, including grazing, watering, and milking the cattle. The researchers also participated in some of the herding activities, such as helping to move the cattle to different grazing areas.

Perception of Cow about the Famine and Rain:

A cow has ability to perceive nature and season. The owner of the cattle told us that through the perception of cattle, we come to know about the drought, then migrate to any other part of Sindh to protect ourselves and our cattle. Cows forecast regarding the drought, when they come to the cowshed after grazing, lick the faces of each other, which means they love one another; it makes signs that the time of their separation has come. They will not be able to meet in future, because drought is about to come and there will not be a drop of water for drinking and grass for grazing. Due to local perception, it is predicted by the cows that they would die and separated from to one another. When there is no sign and symbol of drought then the cows hit their heads against dunes of sand (*bhit*), and trees. They also fight with each other. It indicates that the drought will not take place because they seem happy.

The cattle owner and herdsmen will come to know through the perception of cattle about the nature of the season; all the villagers are being informed about the forecast of the drought through the cows indigenous perception. When cows go on their way, if their feet pick up dust and it raises in the air that signs it is about to rain. Furthermore, when cows do not go for grazing in the pasture early in the morning and not leave the barns for grazing till 10' O clock, it means that there is a possibility of rain. When the cow looks at the sky and smells the cool breeze, it is considered as a forecast about the rain. Cow gives the final decision regarding the rain through the local perception.

A Goat's Perception about the Rain:

Goats return from pasture to the shed in the evening. If they sit facing towards the north direction, it indicates that rain is about to fall, because they have changed their direction while sitting. When goats go for grazing, they do not graze in one place; they keep on changing the grazing field because their habit. They cannot stay still without eating the plants or grass. Goats

are punctual of time. If the herdsmen draw water from the well at 2 p.m, they arrive in time for drinking water.

Camel's Perception for the Dust storm (Wachuro):

A camel's newborn baby is known as a *Ganwro* in Sindhi. A four-year-old is known as *Kanwath*, and has no teeth when two teeth are grown it is known as a *Bego*, with four teeth it is known as a *chugo*, with six teeth it is known as *chhgo*, then it is also called the *Naish.* Camel which is known also *pocket utth* . The camel is the most important cattle of Thar. It survives without water for long periods; it is most suited to the land and the climate conditions of Thar. Camel is also known as *sukey Jo bero* (ship of the desert). It is a source of transportation and communication. It is kept in the house like a family member and decorated beautifully with ornaments. Even the poor people keep a camel to earn their livelihood. It is also used in drawing water from deep wells. It carries water skin containers from one place to the other. Camel also provides milk which is used at home for drinking purposes. It is not churned to get butter or ghee. Some people depend only on milk for months; when owner of camel go on a long journey; their source of food is only milk. When heavy air blows in the desert of Thar, sand does not enter in the eyes of the camel, because its eyelashes are made in such ways which protect the camel's eyes.

Camel is a revengeful animal:

It was told by the natives that camel is revengeful animal. If it goes out of control, and the owner beats it with sticks, it keeps all the matters in its mind, and when the owner is alone riding in the deserted areas, the camel remembers the beating by his owner, it fells him down, starts biting owner for killing. If the owner is clever, he will save himself, otherwise, he will be killed by the camel. Moreover, it was told by the natives that "many owners have been killed by their camels". One of the owner informed about the qualities of the camel and its perception of the nature of a season. A Camel has good quality to fore-

cast regarding the dust storm (*wachuro*). Due to sand storms, the huts (*chunwars*) are destroyed in the desert areas and many children are killed. If a dust storm is 100 miles away from the villages, the camel forecasts about it. When a dust storm takes place, the camels are separated from their herd (*wegh*). They raise a hue and cry, hit their heads to the people and move people from the path from where the cyclone will appear. The villagers come to know through the perception and signs of camel's behavior and they change their way and protect their children and houses.

Sheep:

The sheep are another domesticated cattle that are much useful for the owner. They not only provide milk but also wool which is used to knit shawls (*loyun)* to protect from cold in the winter. The sheep are either white or black. The wool of black sheep is especially of more value. Sheep is a bold animal; it does not fight with another animal.

Relationship of Herdsmen with their Cattle:

During field work, many days were accompanied with cattle's herdsmen. They prepared tea from the fresh goat's milk. They served us cup of tea. Herdsmen take breakfast only with one bread and a cup of tea or glass of buttermilk. They take supper with bread and glass of milk. During the fieldwork, the relationship of herdsmen with their cattle was observed; their actions and habits were similar because the herdsmen passed long time with their cattle.

Relationship of Herdsmen with their Goats:

Goats have a habit of grazing from one corner to another corner on green land. Goats do not stay in one place; graze from one corner to another corner of the grassy land. Goat is punctual of timing; come to drink water at the well at fixed time. Goat's herdsman has the same habits like those of goat. Where there is

a gathering *(kachari*) in a guest room *(autaq*), the herdsman reaches at the fixed time like a goat. He does not sit in one place; he changes the sitting place and moves from one corner to another corner. If he has to go out of a gathering, he would go without informing anyone. Goat's herdsman has same actions and behavior like a goat. One herdsman Sawan mentioned that "I want to be independent like a goat. If anybody objects to my independence, then he is not a friend of mine, but an enemy".

Herdsman's relationship with his Buffaloes:

A buffalo has normal habits and is a relaxed animal among the cattle. She grazes at one place and does not move to another place. She always sits under the shade of a cool tree and in cold water. If anyone comes in front of her. She would not move and change its place. Herdsman of buffaloes has the same habits and behavior like a buffalo. He is cool and has normal nature like a buffalo. He does not say anything to anybody. He remains silent, calm and cool. He also sits under the cool place under tree and besides the buffalo. He does not fear anybody, as buffalo is not afraid of anybody. He is a loving and romantic like a buffalo. When he sits under the shadow of a tree, he sings a romantic song of Sasuee, Punhun, Umer and Marui.

Cattle as a Protector of their Owners:

According to the native people of the village, cattle help them in every walk of life; we are informed about a thief or an enemy by our cattle. We have been protected by our cattle. We sleep at night without any tension because we have cattle and they protect us.

Cows as Protector of their Owners:

The cattle owner argued that cows are their protectors. If my enemies come to kill me, then our cows would make a close circle around me and they would save me. After enemies return then break their circle. He said that cows also fight with my ene-

mies and they hit their heads against them. In this way, enemies run away. Furthermore, cattle owner told that, it has happened to him twice. Cows also have other good habits. If a thief comes to the barn (*wathan*) to steal the cows, all cows would gather, make a hue and cry, and start fighting with the thief. They would hit their heads and horns against the thief; the owner of the cow reaches on the spot and catches the thief or a thief!. The cow has ability to know whether a man is a villager or a thief.

Buffaloes as a Protector of their owners:

Had informal discussions with the owner of the buffalo. Owner provided a lot of knowledge about his buffaloes and admired them. He also grazes his buffaloes himself. He narrated the story of buffaloes, which saved his life. He recalled that once he was sleeping in the shed (*wathan*) of his buffaloes, when his enemies came to kill him. They had sticks in their hands. They tried to hit him with sticks. He saw that all the buffaloes started to fight with the enemies and knocked out them with horns. Enemies broke his legs and fled away. Buffaloes saved his life; otherwise, he should have been killed by the enemies.

Conclusion:

An ethnographic research study deals with the local perception of cattle regarding seasons, nature, behavior and herdsmen's relationship with them. An ethnographic research field work was conducted at 'Mohammad Khan Wassan's village, Thar district Umerkot, Sindh'. Natives were attached with their cattle because they help the villagers in every walk of life. Cattle are their source of information about nature and seasons. According to them, this is an authentic source of information to know about any natural, seasonal climate change or any disaster through the perception of cattle. In the era of science and technology, the villagers depend on their cattle's perception and forecast regarding weathers, seasons, thunderstorm and any other natural disasters. The local people come to know through the perception of cattle about the nature and season as to what

will happen within days? Cattle have certain signs and symbols which forecast about rain, famine, calamity and sandstorm. It is believed by the villagers that the perception of cattle about nature, they have a blind faith on that. In this way, cattle owners and herdsmen come to know about the natural phenomena.

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