

ADMINISTRATIVE RECOMMENDATION IN REGARD TO UPKEEPING,
HEALTH, AND MANAGEMENT OF ANIMALS IN ANCIENT INDIA

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Information on administrative set up during Indus period when city life had established itself well is wanting since the scripts remain unciphered till today.

Vedic literature reveals that the early Vedic life was essentially tribal. Kingdoms as units of administration started taking shape in later Vedic period and a consolidation into the first Indian empire was brought about by Candragupta Maurya in 4th century B.C.¹ *Arthasāstra* created by Kauṭilya, the writings of Megasthenes and the edicts of King Aśoka can thus be regarded as the earliest authoritative sources for the study of administrative machinery of the State.

Subsequent is the period of mystification of polity with religion, and the codes for kings and the people were developed by sages, *viz.*, Manu, Bṛhaspati, Parāśara, Āpastamba, Gautama. For still later period, *Purānas* could be consulted for reference. Scope of the present article does not go beyond this period.

Vedic Period

Two aspects of the tribal life during Vedic period need emphasis. Firstly, the strength of the *Gaṇa*, as the tribe was then called, was so small and the inhabitants were so closely related that they needed no formal administration. Secondly, knowledge was complicated and mixed with magical practices, as could only be expected in any civilization at that stage of development. Like the natural forces (*Marut, Agni, Indra, Varuṇa, etc*), herbs like *arundhantī*, whose medical value stood proven, were worshipped as Gods. Hypothetic figures like *Raivanta*, god of horses, were also created. Demonology too was a part of early medical theory. Offering prayers was thus the way of getting the desired. Rhymes of *Atharvaveda* are reproduced in this context :

‘O *Arundhantī* (herb), protect our oxen and milky kine. Protect each one that is infirm, each quadruped, that yields no milk.²

‘Of every worm and insect, of the male and female alike, I crush the head to pieces with a stone and burn the face with fire.³

'If some *piśāca* in my food, raw, ready or thoroughly cooked, has deceived me, let the *piśācas* with their lives and offsprings, atone for this and let this man be healthy.'⁴

Need for formulating definite administrative recommendations came to be felt as the personal relations within the *Gaṇa* were in the phase of being replaced with impersonal relations due to establishment of kingdoms and then empires. It was at this stage that the intermediaries for administration were required.

Administrative Structure in the Post-Vedic Period

The topic may be classified under the following heads :

1. Functionaries of administration.
2. Wages and responsibilities.
3. Feeding.
4. Breeding.
5. Cruelty.

1. *Functionaries of Administration*

*Arthasāstra*⁵ mentions of the following functionaries :

- (a) Veterinary doctors for elephants, horses and cattle.
- (b) Special people for applying remedies against poison.
- (c) Superintendents for maintaining records of elephants, horses, cattle and slaughter houses.
- (d) Trappers of elephants.
- (e) Cowherds (who could be compared to livestock assistants of today).

Hundreds of well equipped veterinary hospitals were set up by King Aśoka. They were staffed by Śālihotriyas paid by the State. One of the edicts reads 'Everywhere the King Priyadarśinī, beloved of God, erected two kinds of hospitals; hospitals for men and hospitals for animals. Wherever there were no healing herbs, either for men, or for animals, he commanded that they be brought and planted'. These were the first ever veterinary hospitals known world over.⁶

Veterinary doctors were species specialists, *i.e.*, doctors for elephants, horses, or cattle. Veterinary surgeons examined animals and supervised the treatment. Elephant doctors were also to impart training to the trappers on the type of elephants to be caught, method of catching, detecting diseased animals to be avoided for trapping, feeding, bathing, and general health care. Equine doctors supervised diet, and general care of horses.

Superintendents of animals were appointed by the State primarily for census, and maintenance of livestock farms owned by the State. They could, however, be approached by individual cattle owners for protection against theft, by paying one-tenth of the dairy products.⁷

Superintendents of cattle were to ensure :

- (i) Classification into calves, steers, tamable, yoke bulls, breeding bulls, cattle for slaughter, buffaloes, draught buffaloes, female calves, heifers, pregnant cows, milch kines and barren cattle. Cattle census and pedigree register are described in Ghosagotraparva of the *Mahābhārata*.
- (ii) Classification of herd, mark of cow herds, mixing of cows, checking utilization of milk, quantity of butter yielded by the milk of cows, buffaloes, goats, sheep, accounting of the fodder, etc.

Superintendents of slaughter houses were to ensure that :

- (i) Cattle such as calves, bull or milch cow are not slaughtered. (He who slaughtered them was to be fined 50 *panas*).
- (ii) Flesh of animals killed outside slaughter house, headless and boneless flesh, rotten flesh, flesh of animals that died suddenly are not sold.
- (iii) Butchers sell only fresh flesh.
- (iv) Those using false balances are punished.

Superintendents of equine were to ensure :

Maintenance of a register of all classes of horses, according to the breeds. They were also to make report about the crippled and the diseased, housing and ration.

Superintendent of elephants were to ensure :

Housing, feeding, training and care of animals.

Cowherds applied medication and could be held responsible for loss of animals under their care. They had to make a report whenever an animal was caught hold of by a thief, a tiger, a snake, or a crocodile or when it was too infirm, owing to age or disease.

Professional herdsmen were responsible for grazing the cattle. Tinkling bells were attached to cattle so that their whereabouts in forests could be easily known. Cattle in tens of similar colour were to be grouped. In case of the death of an animal from natural causes, skin, fat, bile, marrow, teeth, horns and bones were to be surrendered to the owner.

2. *Wages and Responsibilities*

While cowherds were to be held responsible for the aforesaid losses, Manu (VIII-31) prescribed a heifer to be given to them annually for tending one hundred

cows, or a milch cow for tending two hundreds. Besides, they reserved the right to milk all the cows every eighth day.

Veterinary doctors were required to be careful in their responsibilities. As stated in the *Arthaśāstra*, if the disease became intense due to defect in medicine or carelessness of treatment, if the results were reverse, or if he failed to give treatment in the required time, there could be a fine equal to the cost of the animal.

3. *Feeding, Pasteurs*

Arthaśāstra (Book II Chapter 2) directed the King to ascertain pasture land in uncultivated tracts, which underlines common rights in pasteurs and forestry recognized by the State.

Manu prescribed that on all the sides of a village, about one hundred *dhanus* in extent would be reserved for pasteurs. The space around town shall be thrice.

4. *Breeding*

Mauryan State offered full facilities for cattle breeding by providing bulls for crossing cows, as distinct from draught oxen, yoke oxen, and bulls for supply of flesh. *Arthaśāstra* provides four bulls each for every herd of ten heads of cows or buffaloes. *Agnipurāna*⁹ enjoins the King to preserve the breeds of cattle. *Sukranīti* contains a complete chapter on criteria for selection of horses, elephants and bulls for breeding purposes. The fact that several breeds of domestic animals have been evolved in India shows the role played by selection criteria adopted for the purpose of breeding.

5. *Cruelty*

Cruelty to the animals was punished. Whosoever hurt or caused another to hurt a cow was to be slain because of its close association with the economy of the society. The same was the penalty for killing elephants, because victory of Kings in battles depended mainly upon elephants. Being of large body frame, they were considered capable of not only destroying the arrayed army of an enemy, his fortification, and encampment, but also of undertaking any work dangerous to life.

Other recommendations in this regard are hungry, thirsty, tired, deformed or diseased cattle should not be yoked to the plough.

Atri, Parāśara, Āpastamba, Gautama and Manu declared :

- He who used 8 oxen plough was a pious (man),
- He who used 6 oxen plough was a businessman,
- He who used 4 oxen plough was a cruel (man),
- He who used 2 oxen plough was a butcher.

Kṛṣi Samgraha observes

8 strong plough may be worked for whole day,

4 strong plough may be worked for half day,

2 strong plough may be worked for one quarter day.

While cows have been held sacred during Vedic period, bulls unfit for breeding were castrated and used for food. As stated earlier, *Arthaśāstra* defines breeds for meat purposes. Indication of the pragmatic approach in *Arthaśāstra* is contained in the citation 'Diseased or hardship from war stallion live only to consume food. They may be allowed to cross steeds'.

It appears that less logical prohibition of killing of the cattle has been a later development.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

¹ Chattopadhyaya, D. P., *Lokāyata*, Peoples Publishing House, New Delhi, 1957.

² *Atharvaveda*, VI, 59-1.

³ *Ibid.*, VI, 23, 13.

⁴ *Ibid.*, V, 29, 6.

⁵ Reddy, D. V. S., *Indian Vet. J.*, **21**, 320-324, 1945.

⁶ Smithcores, J. F., *Evolution of the Veterinary Art*, Bailliere, Tindall and Cox Ltd., London, 1958.

⁷ Krishnaswamy, A., *Indian Vet. J.*, **21**, 288, 1945.

⁸ *Agnipurāṇa* and *Śukranīti* have been referred to by A. Krishnaswami, *Indian Vet. J.*, **21**, 398, 1945.