

GOAT FARMING: A Livelihood for Rural Poor

I spent nearly two years in Himachal Pradesh where I was posted as Chief Postmaster General. During my tours in the mountainous territory it was a familiar sight to see herds of long hairy goats and sheep blocking large stretches of roads while their herdsmen, the Gaddi or Gujjar tribesmen moved from place to place for grazing them. Watching them languidly strolling besides their herds I got the impression that goat or sheep rearing was an easy occupation: All you needed was enough shrubs for them to graze upon. Goats survived in arid and drought prone areas. Goats and sheep mature soon, in about 12 to 16 months and their breeding time was short and they generally gave birth to two or three kids at a time; hence they multiplied fast. I therefore toyed with the idea of starting a goat farm after retirement. Goat milk was quite in demand as it was easily digestible and goats could be milked several times in a day. Moreover, goat meat was quite sought after in India, as there was no taboo against its slaughter. Further it had a religious and ritualistic significance and during festive seasons such as Eid they fetched very high prices.

But I soon learnt from a goat rearing experiment carried out for year by an acquaintance that though goat rearing did not require much investment, without proper training and adequate information of goat breeding it could lead to failure. The poor man found to his dismay that goat breeding was quite complex: Some of the goats aborted, quite a few kids were born in peak winter and in the absence of proper shelter they could not withstand the cold air and died. In a year's time he had to sell off the surviving goats after incurring considerable loss.

The difficulties encountered in rearing goats have been described quite well by Moin Qazi in his book: *Village Diary of a Heretic Banker*. In the chapter titled *Odyssey With Diary Farmers* he writes: "Although goat-herding is one of the world's oldest economic professions it turns out that goat herding is a little more complicating than it appears ..." And this he realised after his experience in Ashti in Chanderpur district of Maharashtra where he as a bank officer of State Bank of India had decided to give priority to goat farming. At that time he considered it as I had done that it was an easy way for villagers to make money, for a goat only needed to graze while the farmer worked. And grazing meant the goat would be eating just about anything. And so he gave priority to distributing loans to farmers for purchase of goats but soon learnt that they were quite vile and instead of purchasing the goats, just borrowed goats for a day on a meagre amount to procure the loan! The first lesson was to check and ensure that the goats were actually bought, and how he managed to do so is described through a few case studies. But having done this, the next challenge was to provide veterinary services in the rural areas for even a small infection can be fatal.

However success is always there if one is hard working and committed as demonstrated in the story of Gulab Kshirsagar – a case study which he describes in the book .

Gulab Kshirsagar was a landless agricultural labourer belonging to a family whose income was below the poverty line .Due to poor physical health he could not continue with the strenuous work of an agricultural labourer. He was financed by the bank under the IRDP for setting up a goattery unit and purchased seven does and one buck. He was able to repay the entire bank loan at the end of three years, by selling the goats during the festive season. He got enough profit to get his daughter married.

The main reason why Kshirsagar was successful was because he devotedly tended the goats .He grazed them personally, bathed them daily with soap and disinfectant .However he could not afford any supplementary food or veterinary tonic for stimulating growth

But his hard work paid off and now he had 150 goats with a servant to help him and can now also afford professional veterinary services.

As far as initial stage of goat-herding is concerned , the case study indicates complete devotion in tending to the goats and also that basic veterinary knowledge and training are required .There is a need to follow a particular medical schedule such as giving periodic dose of medicines to disinfect the goats intestines and prevent infections . Infections with parasites specially associated with the gastrointestinal tract such as roundworm and coccidia can cause substantial losses to goatfarmers, if precautionary measures are not taken in time

Besides the above case study, I also learnt from some goattery owners that breeding time and care of the pregnant doe is important. It is advisable to ensure that care is taken to have the impregnation take place at a time which would prevent the kids from being born in the peak period of summer or winter months when adequate shelter and care is required to be provided. Hence the buck normally should be kept in a different pen and during the pregnancy care should be taken to ensure that the does are not stressed .Needless to add that pens should be kept clean and disinfected . It should also be insured that does are not herded in trucks and chased by dogs as it can lead to abortion .Too many does should not be herded in a shed.

The Government of India has set up in 1979 a centre for research in goat rearing , the Central Institute For Research in Goats(CIRG) under Ministry of Agriculture , located at Farah, Makhdoom on NH 2 between Mathura and Agra . The Institute provides guidance and help to goat farmers round the clock and queries can be mailed to the Institute at ["goatnet"@cirgires.in](mailto:goatnet@cirgires.in) .

Getting finance for goatfarms is not difficult .Many Banks and NABARD have schemes for financing of goattries .The financial assistance is given for covering cost of development of land ,construction of sheds(which should be at least ten feet in height),purchase of equipment ,purchase of breeding stock ,rearing cost of animals etc.There is also a Technical officer provided by the bank who assists in purchase of healthy goats as also provides information on proper rearing and medication .Small and Marginal farmers can easily avail of the financial assistance and by diligently tending the stock ,like Gulab Kshirsagar they can repay their loan and earn sufficient income .Goat rearing is fast become a successful venture in rural areas .

I however did not venture into it :not enough diligence I suppose or dire need of money.