

**CULTURAL INTERSECTION: A STUDY ON THE ROLE
OF COWS IN SELECT COMMUNITIES
IN INDIA AND SOUTH SUDAN**

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CENTRE FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND TECHNOLOGY

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**CULTURAL INTERSECTION: A STUDY ON THE ROLE
OF COWS IN SELECT COMMUNITIES
IN INDIA AND SOUTH SUDAN**

by

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submitted

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to the



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Dedicated to my loving family:

Parents

(Dr. Kailash Chandra Kamliya & Late Ms. Nirmala Kamliya),

Wife

(Ms. Tina Porwal)

and Children

(Aradhya & Aadi)

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that:

1. The work presented in this thesis is original and has been carried out by me as a student of IIT Delhi.
2. To the best of my knowledge, the work presented in this thesis has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, to any other institution for the award of any degree or diploma.
3. I have adhered to the guidelines prescribed by the Institute for thesis preparation.
4. I have complied with the provisions of the Institute's Honor Code and have neither engaged in nor tolerated any form of academic dishonesty, including plagiarism, intentional data fabrication, data falsification, data misrepresentation, or unauthorized collaboration beyond that permitted by the Student Research Committee, as defined and approved by the Institute.
5. I take full responsibility for all data presented in this thesis and confirm that no data has been collected without appropriate permission. Where required, ethical approval has been obtained for the research, and all relevant approvals and documentation have been included as part of the thesis submission.
6. All sources of information, including data, ideas, and text, have been duly acknowledged and appropriately cited in the thesis.
7. The use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools (if any), including large language models, has been appropriately disclosed. All analysis interpretations, and conclusions presented in this thesis are my own. Alternatively, I declare that no AI tools, including large language models, have been used in the preparation of this thesis.
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Date: 18th May 2026

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled "**Cultural Intersection: Study on Role of Cows in Select Communities in India and South Sudan**", being submitted by **Mr. Vikram Kapali Porwal**, to the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi for the award of "**Doctor of Philosophy**" is a record of bonafide research work carried out by him. He has worked under our guidance and supervision and has fulfilled the requirements for the submission of this thesis. To the best of our knowledge, the results contained in this thesis have not been submitted in part or full to any other University or Institute for the award of any degree or diploma.



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“You have to believe that the dots will somehow connect in your future.”

- Steve Jobs

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Vikram Kapali Porwal

ABSTRACT

This thesis is an effort to explore the cultural relevance of cows within selected tribal communities in South Sudan and India. The research delves into how the various tribal communities, such as the Dinka - the most populous tribe of South Sudan, and Maldhari and Bhil in India, view cows with reverence as the constituent elements of their socio-cultural and economic spheres. The goal of this research is to provide insight into the role of cows at the intersections of culture, traditions, livelihood, environmental preservation, and conflict resolution mechanisms followed by these selected communities. Analysis of these practices would allow for contributing towards a better understanding of the sustainable resource management practices in pastoral and agrarian societies along with streamlining the policy frameworks for supporting cultural preservation and economic development in the tribal regions.

Drawing upon field-work conducted across South Sudan and India, the research adopted an ethnographic approach, engaging in in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and observational research involving the various stakeholders. The challenges faced in data collection were due to logistical, language, and security barriers but provided valuable insights into the resilience of these communities amidst socio-political and environmental pressures.

In South Sudan, the study was carried out in the Western Lakes State, having a predominantly Dinka population. In Dinka society, the respect for cattle reflects issues of social identity and relates to kinship bonds, social hierarchy, and economic status. Cattle as a bride price for marriage, sacrificial practices, and the practice of blood compensation for settling conflicts reflect the cultural importance of cattle. Nevertheless, the centrality of cattle to Dinka society has encountered contemporary disruptive armed conflicts and social strife, creating multiple resource-based crises specific to the region. The research describes how these ecological pressures have intensified the socio-political importance of cattle, shaping the inquiry into resource-based crises.

The pastoral Maldhari and agro-pastoral Bhil communities of India also integrate cows within their socio-cultural lives. In India, this study was carried out in the Kachchh District of Gujarat which is home to the Maldhari community, and in the Jhabua District of Madhya Pradesh which is home to the Bhil community.

For the Maldhari of the arid areas of Gujarat, pastoral migration and their sustainable

ecological practices form the bedrock of their peaceful co-existence with the ecosystem. Their cultural practices involve cattle at all stages of their lives. They have also taken up organized dairy farming leading to the strengthening of their economic sustainability.

Likewise, the Bhil culture involves a central role of cattle in agricultural activities, religious beliefs, and in their day-to-day lives. Their traditions for the preservation and reverence of cows in rituals and festivals speak volumes about their values, and the care accorded to these animals. Such practices reflect the deep-rooted faith toward ecological balance and sustainable resource management. Their ritual observances and festival traditions centered on the protection and veneration of cows form the cultural, economic, and symbolic significance attributed to cattle within the community.

Despite their different contexts, the three selected communities have a common thread of having cattle at the center of their lives. This commonality speaks of the fact that cattle hold a universal significance among pastoral and agrarian societies, but that they also play distinct cultural roles depending on the context to which they belong.

The research gains significance from the fact that it was carried out in the inaccessible areas of South Sudan where the people moved with automatic weapons in the open. In South Sudan, cattle are part of what make up the social skeleton on which the rest of the cultural, social and economic superstructures are built. Cattle are indicators of their wealth, status and culture. The limitations of the study were overcome with the help of adequate support garnered from various sources. The fact that the South Sudanese people hold Indians in high esteem also added to the smooth conduct of the research. The similar role of cows in the selected communities across the continents sets the tone for policy makers to evolve appropriate strategies for a sustainable future of such communities.

The study delves into policy implications as a wider canvas to examine. Appreciating the cultural, economic, and environmental value attached to cattle in these communities enables policy-makers to create a more effective and sustainable framework that is culturally compatible and financially viable, for instance, by making sure that other developmental interventions geared towards animal health improvement or productivity enhancement appreciate cultural values with respect to cattle, and align developmental initiatives with local customs and practices.

The research also paves the way for taking up more detailed studies to serve the ends of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for the global community at large.

सारांश

सांस्कृतिक समानता एवं जुड़ाव : भारत और दक्षिण सूडान में चुनिंदा समुदायों में गायों की भूमिका पर अध्ययन

यह शोध दक्षिण सूडान और भारत के कुछ चयनित जनजातीय समुदायों में गायों के सांस्कृतिक महत्व को समझने का एक प्रयास है। इस अध्ययन में यह जानने की कोशिश की गई है कि दक्षिण सूडान की सबसे बड़ी जनजाति डिंगा तथा भारत के मालधारी और भील समुदाय गायों और अन्य मवेशियों को किस प्रकार सम्मान और श्रद्धा की दृष्टि से देखते हैं। इन समुदायों के सामाजिक, सांस्कृतिक और आर्थिक जीवन में गायों का विशेष स्थान है। इस शोध का मुख्य उद्देश्य यह समझना है कि गायें इन समुदायों की संस्कृति, परंपराओं, आजीविका, पर्यावरण संरक्षण तथा विवादों के समाधान में किस प्रकार महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका निभाती हैं। इन प्रथाओं का अध्ययन पशुपालक और कृषि आधारित समाजों में संसाधनों के टिकाऊ प्रबंधन को समझने तथा जनजातीय क्षेत्रों में सांस्कृतिक संरक्षण और आर्थिक विकास के लिए बेहतर नीतियाँ बनाने में सहायता कर सकता है।

यह अध्ययन दक्षिण सूडान और भारत में किए गए क्षेत्रीय अनुसंधान पर (फील्डवर्क) पद्धति का उपयोग किया गया (एथ्नोग्राफिक) आधारित है। शोध में मानवशास्त्रीय, जिसके अंतर्गत लोगों के विस्तृत साक्षात्कार, समूह चर्चाएँ और प्रत्यक्ष अवलोकन किए गए। शोध के दौरान भाषा, परिवहन और सुरक्षा से जुड़ी अनेक कठिनाइयों का सामना करना पड़ा, लेकिन इन चुनौतियों ने सामाजिक, राजनीतिक और पर्यावरणीय दबावों के बीच इन समुदायों की संघर्ष क्षमता और दृढ़ता को समझने का अवसर भी प्रदान किया।

दक्षिण सूडान में यह अध्ययन वेस्टर्न लेक्स राज्य में किया गया, जहाँ मुख्य रूप से डिंगा समुदाय निवास करता है। डिंगा समाज में गायों का बहुत अधिक महत्व है और वे उनकी सामाजिक पहचान का आधार मानी जाती हैं। गायें रिश्तों, सामाजिक प्रतिष्ठा और आर्थिक स्थिति से भी जुड़ी होती हैं। विवाह के समय वधू मूल्य प्रदान-के रूप में गायों का आदान (ब्राइड प्राइस) किया जाता है। धार्मिक अनुष्ठानों और बलिदानों में भी गायों की महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका होती है। इसके अतिरिक्त, विवादों और संघर्षों को समाप्त करने के लिए रक्तक-षतिपूर्ति ब्लड के रूप में भी गायों का उपयोग किया जाता है। इससे स्पष्ट होता है कि डिंगा समाज (कम्पेन्सेशन मेंगायें केवल आर्थिक संपत्ति नहीं, बल्कि उनकी संस्कृति और परंपराओं का अभिन्न हिस्सा हैं। हालांकि, आधुनिक समय में सशस्त्र संघर्षों, सामाजिक अशांति और संसाधनों की कमी के कारण

डिंका समाज को अनेक चुनौतियों का सामना करना पड़ रहा है। पर्यावरणीय दबावों और संसाधनों पर बढ़ती प्रतिस्पर्धा ने गायों के सामाजिक और राजनीतिक महत्व को और अधिक बढ़ा दिया है।

भारत में मालधारी और भील समुदाय भी गायों और मवेशियों को अपने जीवन का महत्वपूर्ण हिस्सा मानते हैं। इस अध्ययन के लिए गुजरात के कच्छ जिले में रहने वाले मालधारी समुदाय तथा मध्य प्रदेश के झाबुआ जिले में रहने वाले भील समुदाय का चयन किया गया। मालधारी समुदाय मुख्य रूप से पशुपालन पर निर्भर है और गुजरात के शुष्क क्षेत्रों में निवास करता है। उनका जीवन पशुपालन, मौसमी प्रवास और प्रकृति के साथ संतुलित संबंधों पर आधारित है। वे पर्यावरण के साथ सामंजस्य बनाकर जीवन जीते हैं और उनके जीवन के लगभग हर महत्वपूर्ण अवसर पर गायों की भूमिका होती है। वर्तमान समय में मालधारी समुदाय ने संगठित डेयरी व्यवसाय को भी अपनाया है, जिससे उनकी आर्थिक स्थिति मजबूत हुई है और आजीविका अधिक स्थायी बनी है।

इसी प्रकार, भील समुदाय के सामाजिक, धार्मिक और आर्थिक जीवन में भी गायों का महत्वपूर्ण स्थान है। कृषि कार्यों में गायों का व्यापक उपयोग किया जाता है तथा धार्मिक विश्वासों और दैनिक जीवन में भी उनकी विशेष भूमिका होती है। भील समुदाय गायों की सुरक्षा और सम्मान से जुड़े अनेक रीति-रिवाजों, परंपराओं और त्योहारों का पालन करता है। उनके धार्मिक अनुष्ठान और उत्सव गायों के प्रति उनके सम्मान और प्रेम को दर्शाते हैं। ये परंपराएँ न केवल उनकी सांस्कृतिक मान्यताओं को व्यक्त करती हैं, बल्कि पर्यावरणीय संतुलन और प्राकृतिक संसाधनों के टिकाऊ उपयोग के प्रति उनकी प्रतिबद्धता को भी प्रदर्शित करती हैं। समुदाय में गायों को सांस्कृतिक, आर्थिक और प्रतीकात्मक दृष्टि से अत्यंत महत्वपूर्ण माना जाता है।

यद्यपि डिंका, मालधारी और भील समुदाय अलगअलग देशों-, भौगोलिक परिस्थितियों और सांस्कृतिक पृष्ठभूमियों से संबंधित हैं, फिर भी इनके बीच एक महत्वपूर्ण समानता दिखाई देती है। तीनों समुदायों के जीवन में गाय केंद्रीय स्थान रखती हैं। यह तथ्य दर्शाता है कि पशुपालक और कृषि आधारित समाजों में गायों का महत्व विश्वभर में स्वीकार किया जाता है। हालांकि, प्रत्येक समुदाय में उनकी भूमिका स्थानीय परिस्थितियों और सांस्कृतिक परंपराओं के अनुसार अलगअलग रूप में दिखाई देती है।-

यह शोध विशेष रूप से इसलिए महत्वपूर्ण है क्योंकि इसे दक्षिण सूडान के ऐसे दुर्गम और संवेदनशील क्षेत्रों में किया गया, जहाँ लोग खुले रूप से स्वचालित हथियार लेकर चलते हैं। वहाँ गायें समाज की मूल संरचना का आधार हैं और लोगों की संपत्ति, सामाजिक प्रतिष्ठा तथा सांस्कृतिक पहचान के प्रमुख प्रतीक माने जाते हैं। शोध के दौरान आने वाली कठिनाइयों को विभिन्न स्रोतों से प्राप्त सहयोग की सहायता से दूर किया गया। इसके अतिरिक्त, दक्षिण सूडान के लोगों द्वारा भारतीयों के प्रति सम्मानपूर्ण दृष्टिकोण ने भी इस शोध को सफलतापूर्वक पूरा करने में महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका निभाई। दोनों देशों के चयनित समुदायों में गायों की समान भूमिका यह संकेत देती है कि नीति निर्माताओं को इनके-सतत विकास और संरक्षण के लिए विशेष रणनीतियाँ तैयार करनी चाहिए।

यह अध्ययन नीतिगत दृष्टि से भी अत्यंत महत्वपूर्ण है। यदि सरकारें और नीति निर्माता-इन समुदायों में गायों के सांस्कृतिक, आर्थिक और पर्यावरणीय महत्व को समझें, तो वे ऐसी नीतियाँ बना सकते हैं जो स्थानीय संस्कृति के अनुरूप होने के साथ साथ आर्थिक रूप से भी-लाभकारी हों। पशु स्वास्थ्य सुधार, दुग्ध उत्पादन वृद्धि और अन्य विकास कार्यक्रमों को लागू करते समय स्थानीय परंपराओं और सांस्कृतिक मूल्यों का सम्मान करना आवश्यक है। विकास योजनाओं को स्थानीय रीति-रिवाजों और सामाजिक संरचनाओं के अनुरूप बनाकर ही उन्हें सफलतापूर्वक लागू किया जा सकता है।

अंततः, यह शोध भविष्य में और अधिक विस्तृत अध्ययनों के लिए मार्ग प्रशस्त करता है। साथ ही, यह वैश्विक स्तर पर संयुक्त राष्ट्र के सतत विकास लक्ष्यों की प्राप्ति में भी महत्वपूर्ण योगदान दे सकता है। यह अध्ययन दर्शाता है कि सांस्कृतिक परंपराओं, आर्थिक विकास और पर्यावरण संरक्षण के बीच संतुलन स्थापित करके जनजातीय समुदायों के लिए एक अधिक सुरक्षित, समृद्ध और टिकाऊ भविष्य सुनिश्चित किया जा सकता है।

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- 1. FAO:** Food and Agriculture Organization
- 2. HOFO:** Head of Field Office
- 3. ILO:** International Labour Organization
- 4. UNMISS:** United Nations Mission in South Sudan
- 5. UNICEF:** United Nations Children's Fund
- 6. UNEP:** United Nations Environment Programme
- 7. UNHDR:** United Nations Human Development Report
- 8. SRSG:** Special Representative of the Secretary-General
- 9. PVTG:** Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group
- 10. UNESCO:** United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
- 11. UNHCR:** United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
- 12. UNDESA:** United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
- 13. UNDRIP:** United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
- 14. UNDP:** United Nations Development Programme
- 15. UNFPA:** United Nations Population Fund
- 16. WFP:** World Food Programme
- 17. WHO:** World Health Organization
- 18. UNGA:** United Nations General Assembly
- 19. UNSC:** United Nations Security Council
- 20. UNPFII:** United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
- 21. IFAD:** International Fund for Agricultural Development
- 22. OHCHR:** Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
- 23. CBD:** Convention on Biological Diversity
- 24. IPCC:** Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
- 25. SDGs:** Sustainable Development Goals