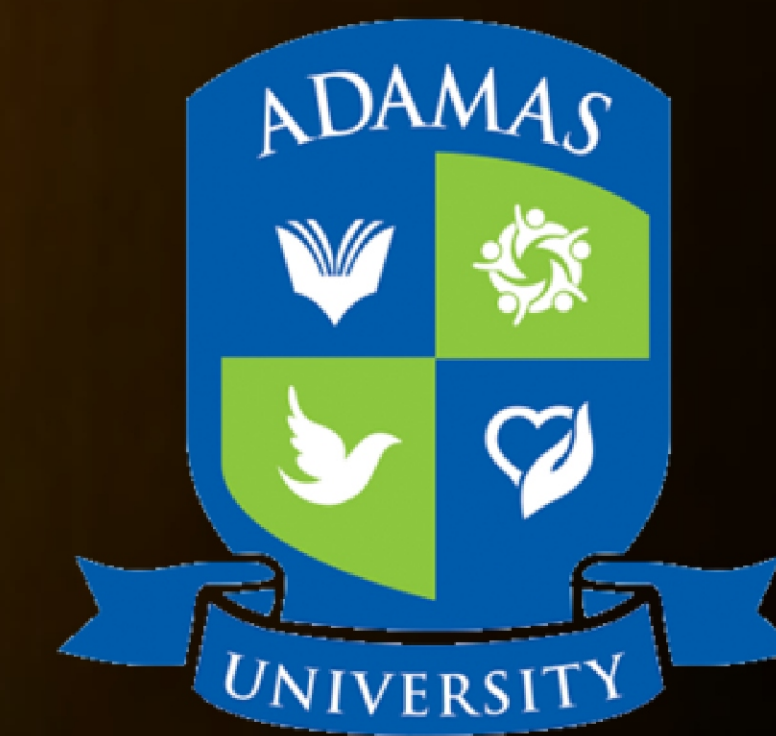




A shift in aim of rearing cattle by the farming communities- a case study in some districts of Gangetic West Bengal (India)



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Introduction

Cattle in India are important livestock raised primarily for milk and the bullocks are also raised for draft. Consumption of beef is allowed in some states of India, West Bengal being one of them (Fig 1). Cattle raised by small and marginal farmers in West Bengal for fattening purpose which is a shift from the traditional purpose of rearing cattle has been reported .

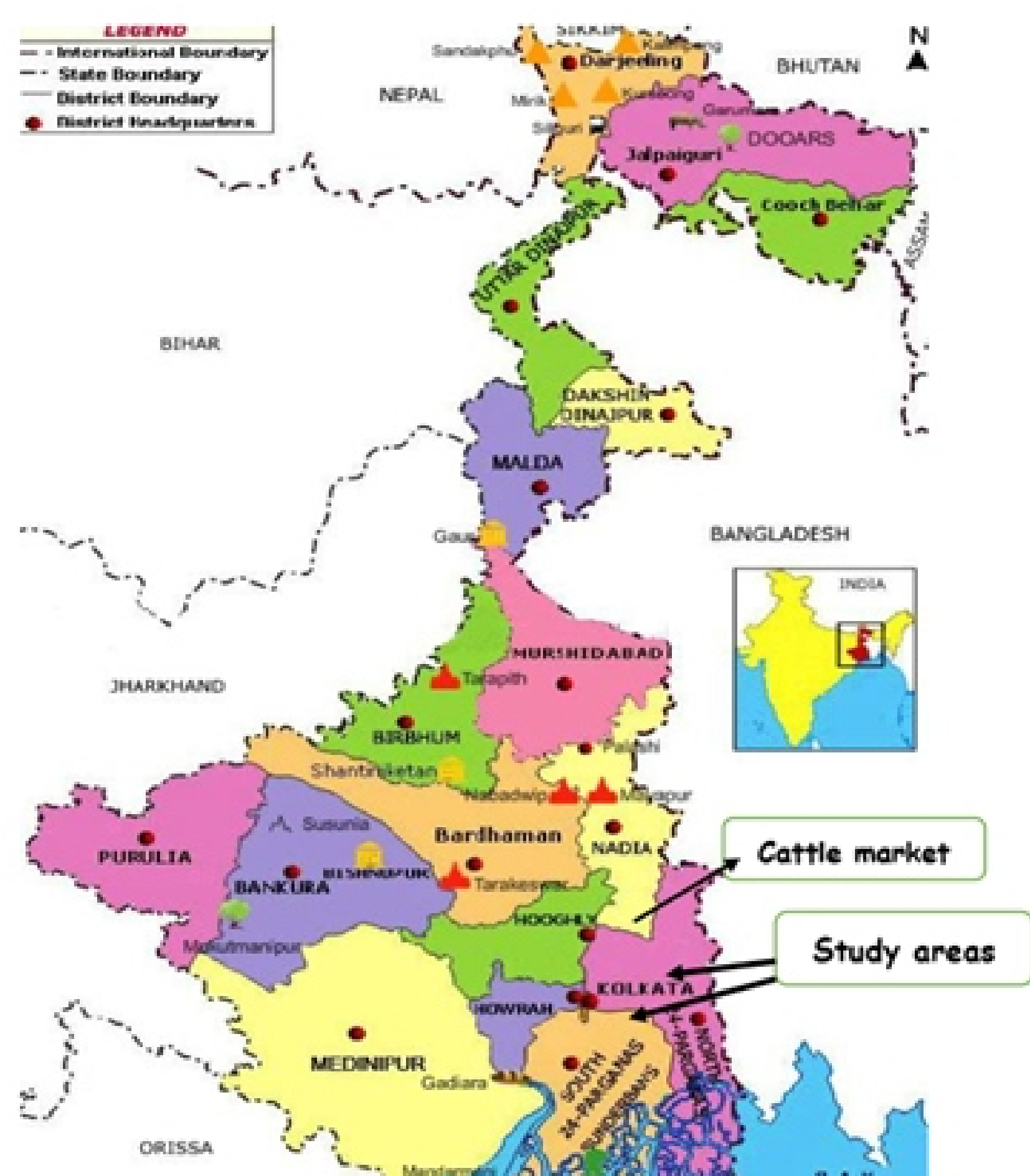


Fig-1: Livestock Market in Dist Nadia (West Bengal, India)

Materials and Methods

The studied locations were selected based on the prevalence of rearing cattle for fattening purposes. The average landholding among the farmers in the region is quite low with a very high population density. A semi-structured questioner was developed, pretested, and modified prior to actual survey (Fig. 2). The data was analysed statistically for qualitative and quantitative parameters using SPSS V-24.



Fig 2 Author along with some respondents

Results

- ✓ The practice of raising cattle for fattening have started since the last ten years.
- ✓ Business men reared more cattle when compared to that of the farmers as they had adequate money to spare (Table 1).
- ✓ The occupation of the respondents also influenced the types of cattle being reared as people exposed to social media were better informed than those who were not informed regarding scientific animal husbandry practices.
- ✓ Farmers sell cattle to the primary traders/ commission agents at the farm gate.
- ✓ Cattle are raised on paddy straw, crop residues and grasses with very few farmers providing concentrates and salt.

| SNo | Topic | | X ² cal |
|-----|--|---|--------------------|
| 1 | Educational qualification s of the respondents | Breed of cattle | 9.17 * |
| | | Numbers of cattle raised at a time | 22.40** |
| | | The housing of the cattle | 21.11** |
| | | Types of feed supplements | 48.00** |
| | | Who takes care of the cattle | 21.11** |
| 2 | Occupation of the respondents | When are the cattle sold? | 13.86* |
| | | Numbers of cattle raised at a time | 18.56* |
| | | Types of feed supplements | 48.00** |
| | | Treatment of the animals | 20.80** |
| | | From where do you get milk for family consumption | 14.40* |
| 3 | Parameters regarding Animal Husbandry | Types of cattle reared | 20.80* |
| | | Housing of the cattle | 19.55** |
| | | Feeding of the cattle | 8.88* |
| | | Types of feed supplements | 37.33** |
| | | Who takes care of the cattle? | 19.55** |
| | | When are the cattle sold? | 13.86* |

* $\chi^2 < 0.05$, ** $\chi^2 < 0.01$

Table 1: Some significant parameters obtained from the present study

- ✓ Most of the cattle from nearby districts (Nadia Murshidabad, Bardhaman) are collected twice a week at Birohi cattle market (Fig . 3), Nadia District.



Fig -3 : Cattle market in Nadia District

- ✓ The zebu cattle (Sahiwal, Haryana and Gir crossbreds) are preferred due to their better adaptability of these cattle in the rural areas of Wes Bengal.
- ✓ The price of the cattle is based on the coat color - white coated animals fetch higher prices (Fig 4). Barren heifers fetch higher price than steers.



Fig 4 : Cattle being transported to the farmers

- ✓ The major market for cattle is during the Muslim festival of Eid al Adha when there is an increase in demand for livestock for sacrifice.
- ✓ The husbandry practices (cleaning, watering etc.) are generally carried out by the women while the price of the cattle are decided by the family head or eldest male member of the household.

The net earning per cattle varied from Rs 10,000-Rs 20,000 (1 USD= Rs 79.8) which can substantially increase if the cattle are provided with proper husbandry and nutrition. The newly emerging trend can help as an alternative source of income.l

Inadequate veterinary facilities, lack of proper nutrition formal credit facilities and training are some of the major hindrances towards further popularization of cattle fattening. Many of the farmers are resorting to the use of injectable anabolic steroids for fattening purposes.

Highlights

- ✓ A shift towards rearing cattle for fattening has been noticed among small holder farmers in West Bengal India
- ✓ Sahiwal, Haryana, Gir crossbreds are preferred by the farmers
- ✓ While coated cattle are preferred and heifers were preferred over steers
- ✓ 2 - 3 cattle are generally raised for fattening, because of lack of formal credit facilities
- ✓ Lack of awareness and training among the farmers result in inadequate body weight gain



Fig 5 : Housing of cattle raised for fattening (Note the coat color)



Fig 6 : Fattening of cattle carried out in open space

Conclusion

- ✓ Educational qualification of the respondents influenced the types of breeds of the cattle being reared, better educated respondents preferred to raise the native breeds as they were better adapted to the agro climate of the region.
- ✓ The net earning per cattle varied from Rs 10,000-Rs 20,000 (1 USD = Rs 79.8) which can substantially increase if the cattle are provided with proper husbandry and nutrition.
- ✓ Livestock extension services and formal credit facilities can further help in improving the livelihood of the cattle rearers

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