

Bargur Cattle : Characterization and Management Practices*

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The name, Bargur, stemmed from Bragur hills, the breeding tract of the breed. Bargur cattle are medium sized animals with compact body. They are semi-wild and hardy to handle. This breed is now categorized as endangered (Ganapathi *et al.* 2009). For conservation and improvement of the breed and for formulation of suitable breeding policies for future use, the characterization is essential.

Materials and Methods

The present study on Bargur cattle was carried out in the Bargur hills of Tamil Nadu. The breed characters were studied as per the cattle descriptors of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 1986) and the guidelines given by National Bureau of Animal Genetic Resources, Karnal, A total of 444 animals of both the sexes belonging to different age groups in different hamlets of Bargur Panchayat were studied. The physical measurements like height at withers, body length, chest girth, face length, face width and horn length were taken (Sasimowski, 1987) in males and females of various age groups. Data on reproduction traits of females *viz.*, age at first oestrus and age at first calving were recorded for heifers and cows present in the herd by interviewing the owner.

Results and Discussion

The study revealed that Bargur cattle are distributed in Bargur panchayat (Bargur hills), Anthiyur union, Bhavani taluk in Erode district of Tamil Nadu. Littlewood (1936) also has mentioned Bargur hills as the breeding tract of Bargur cattle.

Bargur calves were generally red with white patches on the body. The extent of white

patches is variable. The coat colour also varies from cherry red to light red. About 10 to 20 per cent of animals with full red colour were also observed. Full red colour without white patches was also not uncommon. Heifers, cows, bulls and bullocks were usually red coloured with white patches.

Hair colour was brown and white. The hairs were short, straight and fine. Skin was red in colour. Fore head was moderately broad. Head was long and tapering towards the muzzle; Muzzle and eye lashes were brown but in 20 to 30 per cent of animals, black muzzle and black eye lashes were noticed. Horns were mostly brown in colour. In majority of adults, the horns took backward, forward and upward direction. Generally, the horns were thin. The ears were short and horizontal. Hump was well developed in bulls and moderately developed in bullocks and poorly developed in cows. Dewlap was short and extended up to the sternum. Naval flap was inconspicuous in cows. Sheath was tucked up to the body. Legs were medium in length. Hooves were brown in colour. Black coloured hooves were also noticed among 20 to 30 per cent of animals. The udder was small and closely attached to the body. The teats were small, cylindrical in shape and well set apart. Teat tips were pointed. Milk veins were not prominent. Tail as with a dark brown switch, which extended well below the hock. In about 10 per cent animals the switch to tail was black in colour. No changes were apparent in the morphology of Bargur cattle as compared with the description given by Littlewood (*loc.cit*) who first described Bargur.

The mean height at withers, body length and chest girth in 0 to 3 months age group were 65.78 ± 0.69 , 58.33 ± 1.36 and 65.73 ± 0.94 cm respectively and increased to 72.95 ± 0.90 , 68.66

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± 1.30 and 73.74 ± 1.26 cm respectively by 4 to 6 months of age. In these age groups, height at withers was more or less equal to chest girth and more than body length. The mean height at withers, body length and chest girth 10-12 month age group were 84.12 ± 1.22 , 81.70 ± 1.31 and 84.92 ± 1.09 cm. The means for the respective traits were 101.52 ± 1.40 , 100.24 ± 1.13 and 103.06 ± 1.31 cm among females in 19 to 36 months age group.

In bulls, the height at withers, body length and chest girth were 119.40 ± 5.53 , 114.20 ± 6.85 and 119.20 ± 14.25 cm respectively. In bullocks, these measurements averaged 126.33 ± 1.67 , 126.29 ± 1.45 and 139.44 ± 2.22 cm respectively. In cows, these measurements were 115.58 ± 1.31 , 114.71 ± 1.15 and 124.32 ± 1.94 cm respectively. There were highly significant ($P < 0.01$) differences in height at withers, body length and chest girth between cows and bullocks. The mean height at withers and chest girth in the present study were lesser than the respectively values reported by Kanakaraj *et al.* (1994). Pattabhiraman (1962) reported height at withers, body length and chest girth as 113, 129 and 156 cm in bulls and 110, 124 and 150 cm in cows respectively. The height at withers measured presently was lesser in bulls and higher in cows. The face length, face width and horn length in the present study were 37.00 ± 0.95 , 15.8 ± 0.95 and 40.67 ± 7.37 cm in bulls; 41.33 ± 0.68 , 18.31 ± 0.34 and 36.70 ± 1.23 cm in bullocks; and 38.59 ± 0.78 ; 15.61 ± 0.24 and 39.81 ± 1.40 cm in cows. The mean values recorded for three principle body measurements in bulls, bullocks and cows of Bargur breed are lower than those reported for Kangayam, Alambadi and Pulikulam, the other draught breeds of Tamilnadu (Pattabhiraman, *loc.cit*). However, compared to Umblachery cattle, Bargur cows are slightly lengthier.

The average age at first estrus and average age at first calving were 30.00 ± 1.36 months and 40.61 ± 1.21 months respectively.

The animals are taken for grazing for a distance of 6-8 km during daytime in the forest.

The enclosures were usually of open-type and made up of locally available bamboo sticks and stones stacked up. Except heavy rainy days when animals could not be taken for grazing, no feed was provided to the animals. The animals from 25-30 households were collected to form a group of 200-400 and sent to deep forest during July-August (after sowing). The temporary sheds and enclosures were constructed in the forest for the stay of herd-men and animals during night time. This cattle camp was called as 'patti' (in local language). Some 3-10 bulls were seen in every group. The animals were taken back again to the villages during the month of January (harvest season) when the straws/stovers and grazing in the harvested fields are available. The cows are bred by natural mating only.

Summary

Bargur cattle are generally red with white patches on the body. The extent of white patches varied among animals. The coat colour also varied from cherry red to light red. Muzzle and eye lashes were mostly brown. In majority of adults, the horn took backward, forward and upward direction. Hooves were brown in colour. In adult bulls, bullocks and cows, height at withers, body length and chest girth were 119, 114 and 119; 126, 126 and 139; 116, 115 and 124 cm respectively.

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