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THE PIONEER OF VETERINARY SCIENCE IN INDIA: WILLIAM MOORCRAFT IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE



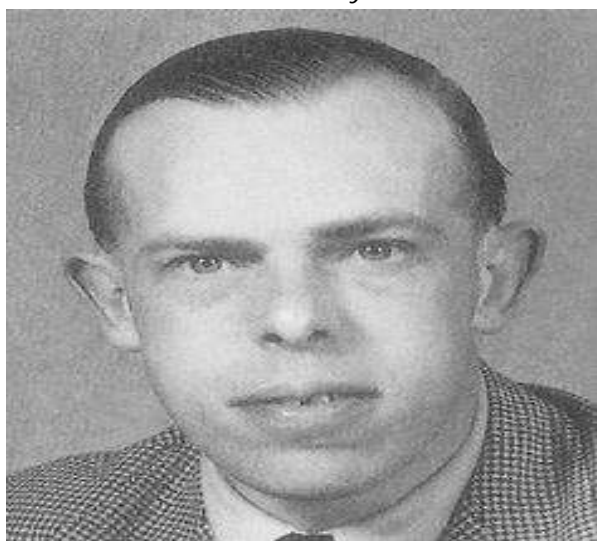
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ABSTRACT

Issues of Veterinary science are linked with the Indian society, economy as well as polity since the time immemorial. It develops gradually through the ages. In India the Veterinary care system was depended on 'Ayurveda' and 'Unani' medical treatment. After the coming of the British the western Veterinary science was launched into this country. One of the significant aims of them was to meet with the demands of military need. However, the institutionalization of the Veterinary science was introduced by the Britishers. And among them, William Moorcraft played a significant contribution in it. The present essay tries to focus how William Moorcraft was successful to institutionalize the Western Veterinary science in India with the help of the natives.

KEYWORDS : *Pioneer of Veterinary Science, William Moorcraft, Indian society, economy.*



INTRODUCTION :

William Moorcraft, was the first Western veterinary surgeon appointed by the East India Company, superintendent of the Bengal stud which was located at Pusa in North Bihar. He landed in Calcutta on 14th November 1808. His salary had been fixed at Rs. 3,000 a year and he was to receive Rs 500 for expenses on the voyage.

Before entering into the profession of veterinary science, Moorcraft planned to become a doctor, but while a pupil at Liverpool Infirmary, at the same time an

unknown disease decimated cattle herds in Lancashire. He was invited to investigate a local outbreak of cattle disease.¹ As his talent impressed very much the landowners of that country, they offered to finance his education.² At that time there was no veterinary college in England and Moorcraft had to go to Lyons in France where Bourgelat had founded a veterinary school. It was the first ever such type of organization in the modern world. He arrived in France in the revolutionary year of 1789 and became the first Englishman to qualify as a veterinary surgeon.³ But his family and friends were opposed to such a step, because the social standing of contemporary Veterinary practitioners was very inferior.⁴

From 1790 to 1791 the surgeon William Moorcraft studied veterinary medicine in Alford. On his return to England, Moorcraft settled in London and acquired a handsome amount of wealth through business. In the spring of 1792, together with John Field, he set up a veterinary practicing centre in Oxford Street. Moorcraft was fully occupied with his practice, though he found time to

collect information concerning the diseases of horses in India, and to produce pamphlet to accompany a medicine storage place which he designed for the use of English East India Company.⁵ In 1795, Moorcroft published a pamphlet regarding the methods of the medical treatment of horses, with special reference to India. Another guide titled as 'A Cursory Account of the Methods of Shoeing Horse's' was also published by him in 1800.⁶ Moorcroft also devised a new method of making horse-shoes.⁷

He introduced scientific methods of feeding, breeding and health management and brought under control the contagious diseases that were rampant, with the result that losses were reduced by the 90 per cent.⁸

From 1795 to 1803, there were references of improvements in the cultivation of the farm land and new grasses like, Dutch clover, guinea grass and Lucerne were grown for the first time in India for fodder.⁹ But there were no grazing fields or foraging areas which basic necessities like animal fodder became difficult to obtain. Apart from this Pusa, geographically distant from any major settlement, was both literally and metaphorically detached from the countryside.¹⁰ After taking charge of the Pusa stud farm, Moorcroft was quick to realize that he could not fulfill this task because the hot and humid climate of the Ganges valley was obviously unsuitable for horse breeding. Therefore he soon transferred his breeding stock to healthier areas with the cooperation of local horse breeders.¹¹ Moorcroft found that the Arab and English blood crossed with the native mares did not prove to be the type of military animal required for the Company's cavalry and artillery. He pointed out that in view of the loss of fertility in brood mares; he needed 3,000 mares and 120 stallions in order to raise 600 army remounts a year from an expected descendants of 1,200 horse a year.¹² In 1811, Moorcroft travelled extensively among the northern sub-continent in search of better breeding stock. The Government had provided financial support to the extent of some £20,000.¹³ He visited Lucknow, the capital of Oudh and Benares (then still part of Maratha territory) for the ideal breeding horses. But he failed to acquire. In Benares, he learned that Bukhara was rumored to have 'the greatest horse market in the world.' The other object of his journey was to create trade relationship between India and Central Asia. In this consequence, he recruited a Persian named Mir Izzat-Allah to draw a Map as well as scouting trip to Bukhara. Besides that he also came to know that fine breeding horses might be found in Tibet.¹⁴

In this journey, Mr. Moorcroft was the first European to cross the Himalaya and make his way to the great plain between the Himalaya and the Kuentun chaina. Moorcroft found there a group of Kashmiri goats, a source of fine wool and he collected the both. The company's stud was instituted for the purpose of improving the indifferent breed of horses indigenous in Hindustan. Their principle motive was to serve their own cavalry in a special way. He wanted to establish a commercial association with the trans-Himalayan districts which should be highly advantageous to Great Britain.¹⁵ He set out on April 21, 1812 and in approximately one and a half years covered Kashmir, Ladakh, the Karakoram, Chinese Turkestan, the Pamir highlands, Transoxiana.¹⁶ Thus he was able to acquire a ample knowledge about the various issues of Veterinary science of Asia. In 1816, Moorcroft was the first veterinarian ever to do such a great contribution to '*Asiatic Researches*'. He composed a long article titled as 'A Journey to Lake Manasarovara in Undes, a province of Little Tibet'. This account recognized Moorcroft's scientific status, beyond the confinement of his professional reputation with the English East India Company. It popularized him both as a heroic explorer and as an ecologist. He was also the pioneer of the cultivation of oats in India.¹⁷

Moorcroft began his second great journey to Bokhara at his own expense, in October 1819. During this trip, he stayed in Lahore for a few weeks and departed after getting Maharaja Ranjit Singh's permission to go to Kashmir and to travel through Peshawar to Afghanistan. He had several interviews

with Maharaja Ranjit Singh. One of the significant themes of their conversation was horses. Moorcroft wrote: "One of the Raja's favorite subjects was his stud. He told me that most of his horses were presented by his tributaries and zamindars, and that he did not infrequently requite the donor of a superior animal with a village or a *jagir*", no wonder therefore that he obtained capital horses for his own use. He reached Bukhara and purchased the horses he wanted.¹⁸ Thus he was successful to run the progress of Veterinary science of our country to a right track.

But we are unlucky because he (William Moorcroft) failed to serve his level best to the Indian Veterinary Science due to his sudden death. There are few views about the cause of his (William Moorcroft) death. According to some scholars, while returning from the second journey he (William Moorcroft) was murdered on 27th August 1825 and his property, including his journals containing a mine of information, was plundered.¹⁹ But scholars like M.S.Randhawa said that on his way to back, he was suffering a fever at Andhko near Balkh in Afghanistan and died a few days afterwards.²⁰ Abbe Huc points out that Moorcroft reached Lhasa in 1826, and lived there twelve years, being assassinated on his way back to India in 1838, although this story of Moorcroft's 'second life' had been explained as unlikely.²¹ According to M.A. Samad and M.U.Ahmad, Moorcroft's death was premature (died under mysterious) death in 1825. He died from fever on the return journey on 27 August 1825.

CONCLUSION:

From the above discussion, it can be said that William Moorcroft established himself as a famous Veterinary Scientist by overcoming great troubles since his early days of life. He came to India and tried whole heartedly for the development of Indian Veterinary science. As a result of this both the Indians as well as the English administrators were highly benefited. He was not only a great explorer, ethnologist and ecologist, but he was a great veterinary surgeon. His achievements enabled the veterinary profession to have a respectable place in the economic development of India. Everything became possible because he (William Moorcroft) was a true Veterinary lover.

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