



ISSN (E): 2277-7695
ISSN (P): 2349-8242
NAAS Rating: 5.23
TPI 2023; SP-12(10): 2041-2044
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www.thepharmajournal.com
Received: 25-07-2023
Accepted: 28-08-2023

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An analysis of traditional practices, folkways and mores prevailing among rural backyard poultry farmers of Tamil Nadu state, India

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Abstract

Folkways and mores play a major role in traditional backyard poultry farming. Hence an attempt was made to document the prevailing traditional practices, folkways and mores in backyard poultry farming in the areas where poultry population is high. Tirunelveli, Namakkal, Vellore and Tiruppur districts of Tamil Nadu State were selected for the study based on the highest livestock population. A sample of 240 farmers were interviewed through structured interview schedule to document the traditional practices as well as folkways and mores in backyard poultry farming. Birds as gift during ceremonies and marriages, Reducing broodiness through traditional methods, Bamboo basket housing for poultry birds and sacrificing black/brown cock during annual rituals or festivals were the top four identified traditional practices. The cock which crows (sounds) in the night should be culled / removed from the flock, Crow, pigeons etc., cross from left to right was taken as good omen during journey, it was a good omen to see a crow/peacock/goose seen singly or in couples either at right /left and during marriages of certain communities, poultry birds were given as a gift (especially cocks) for *karivirundhu* (meat feast) were the top four folkways and mores identified.

Keywords: Traditional practices, documentation, folkways, mores, backyard poultry

1. Introduction

Folkways are habit of the individuals and customs of society which arise from efforts to satisfy needs, they are intertwined with goblinism and demonism and primitive notions of luck and so they win traditional authority (Sumner, 2002) [9]. In other words, folkways are the informal, unwritten, and often taken-for-granted norms or customs that guide everyday behavior in a particular social group or culture. Mores are the more deeply held and widely recognized moral values or norms within a society. These norms are considered essential for the well-being and moral fabric of the community. In poultry farming, as in any other industry, there are specific folkways and mores, or customary behaviors and moral values that guide the practices and behavior of individuals within the community. These unwritten rules and ethical guidelines are important for maintaining a successful and sustainable animal husbandry farming operation. Several studies have revealed that numerous traditional practices prevailing among backyard poultry farming, which vary with culture (Vineetha *et al.*, 2023) [10]. Hence, a study was conducted to document the traditional practices, folkways and mores prevailing among backyard poultry farmers of Tamil Nadu.

2. Materials and Methods

There are seven distinct agro climatic zones prevailing in Tamil Nadu *viz.*, the Cauvery Delta, North Eastern, North Western, Southern, Western, High rainfall, and High altitude/hilly zone. Based on the highest livestock population, the top four agro climatic zones—the North Western, Western, Southern, and North Eastern zones—were chosen out of the seven zones. From each selected zone, a district with highest livestock population was selected for the study. The selected districts were Tirunelveli, Namakkal, Vellore and Tiruppur. The blocks were selected based on the suggestions made by the respective district Veterinary Assistant Surgeons. Villages were selected based on the lottery method of random sampling. From each block, two villages were selected and thus a total of 16 villages were selected from eight blocks.

For the analysis, the primary data was used. Samples of 240 farmers were selected. Primary data were personally collected from the respondents through structured interview schedule.

The interview schedule was based on open form questions. The common traditional poultry farming practices, folkways and mores related to animal husbandry were documented and ranked according to their frequency.

The data was usually collected in the farmer's fields, home or in community centers. Simple averages, classification,

tabulation and ranking were used for the analysis of the data.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Traditional poultry farming practices

The common poultry farming traditional practices used by the respondents were tabulated in the Table 1

Table 1: Distribution of respondents on traditional practices in poultry farming

Sl. No.	Traditional Practices in Poultry farming	Frequency	Percentage
1	Birds as gift during ceremonies and marriages	164	68.33
2	Reducing broodiness through traditional methods	128	53.33
3	Bamboo basket housing for poultry birds	112	46.67
4	Sacrificing black/brown cock during annual rituals or festivals	99	41.25
5	Feeding kitchen wastes to backyard poultry	89	37.08
6	Protection of birds from predators using raised fish net housing	76	31.67
7	Leaving the cock at graveyard	67	27.92
8	Habituated egg laying	49	20.42
9	Egg storing methods- mud pots filled with sand/bran/paddy husk/salt/rice	43	17.92
10	Feeding native birds with paddy, broken rice, ragi, cumbu, and cholam	39	16.25

(N=240)

3.1.1 Birds as gift during ceremonies and marriages

Domestic fowls were reared for a prolonged period by the human beings. Somvanshi (2006) [7] reported that the Indus valley people kept the fowl only for sports, and that its breeding for flesh occurred later. That's why, still the villagers were practicing to gift the birds during marriage and ceremonies. In the study area, majority (68.33 percent) of the respondents were practicing this traditional practice.

3.1.2 Reducing broodiness through traditional methods

All the poultry farmers reported that the average egg production per hen per year was fifty. Panda and Nanda (2000) [4] and Mandal *et al.*, (2006) [3] recorded similar findings. After each clutch, the bird will go for broodiness for at least 3 weeks. Hence in order to prevent the hen from broodiness the farmers of study area (53.33 percent) followed the following techniques:

- Dipping in water
- Applying ash
- Applying mud
- Tying the bird under the tree upside down
- Piercing its own feathers on to the beak

3.1.3 Bamboo basket housing for poultry birds

Nearly one-half of the respondents (46.67 percent) used bamboo baskets for housing the birds. Apart from this, the other ways of poultry housing in villages documented include stone built housing, tree housing etc.

3.1.4 Sacrificing black/brown cock during annual rituals or festivals

Each and every village celebrated annual festival for god during the months of July to August (especially months of *Aadi*) on Sundays. During this festival black or brown cock was sacrificed for the goddess.

3.1.5 Feeding kitchen wastes to backyard poultry

The poultry birds were let free in the morning for scavenging in the backyard. These birds were habituated to return to the nest in the evening for night shelter. These birds were fed with kitchen waste such as greens, onions, tomato, garlic and other vegetables. Similar findings were observed by Sujeetha *et al.*, (2023) [8]. The farmers do not provide commercialized

feed as it was too expensive.

3.1.6 Protection of birds from predators using raised fish net housing

The birds were provided with specialized housing in the study area especially in Namakkal and Tiruppur district. The respondents provide a temporary structure of 10 feet height using palm leaves with wooden reapers in-between. The birds would get into this hut during night time and the entrance was closed with the fish net. The birds would be at the top reaper which would eventually prevent the entry of predators as they couldn't reach the top.

3.1.7 Leaving the cock at graveyard

If a death of a person occurred on Sunday, a cock would be tied with the corpse and the cock would be left in the graveyard itself.

3.1.8 Habituated Egg laying

The poultry birds in villages were habituated to reach a basket kept in the loft (*paran*) to lay eggs. In some areas, they provide paddy straw in the artificially made loft like structure to lay eggs. After laying eggs, the hen make a continuous crowing sound for five minutes. The farmers provide broken rice or *ragi* (finger millet) or *cumbu* (pearl millet) as a token of appreciation for laying eggs.

3.1.9 Egg storing methods- mud pots filled with sand/bran/paddyhusk/salt/rice

As most of the backyard poultry was maintained by women, the eggs laid were stored in mud pots filled with sand/bran/paddy husk/salt/rice. Yadav *et al.*, (2017) [11] opined that the eggs were usually stored in a pot containing salt as the farmers are believing that this helps to keep eggs in fresh condition. They collected all the eggs during the laying period and stored. Eggs were provided to their children for better nutrition by 28 percent of the respondents. About one-third of the farmers sold eggs in local shops at the rate of Rs. 5/egg as it was thought that brown shelled eggs were nutritious than white leghorn eggs. Apart from this, 39 percent of the respondents used the brooding hen for incubating eggs naturally.

3.1.10 Feeding native birds with paddy, broken rice, *ragi*, *cumbu* and *cholam*

The native birds were fed with paddy, broken rice, *ragi*, *cumbu* and *cholam* (Maize) according to the availability of the grains daily during morning and evening. Feeding of whole grains has several potential advantages as it provides a form of environmental enrichment for the bird (Picard *et al.*, 2002)^[5]. It encourages muscular development of the gizzard and it reduces feed processing costs (Sandilands and Hocking, 2012; MacLeod, 2013)^[6, 2].

3.2 Poultry farming folkways/mores

The traditional poultry farming farmers were interviewed and

a total number of 10 folkways/mores pertaining to poultry farming was collected and documented in Table 2.

Majority of the respondents (67.92 percent) told that the cock which crows (sounds) in the night should be culled / removed from the flock immediately. This was considered as a bad omen.

When a crow or pigeon flying from left to right while going for a journey, it was taken as good omen during journey. Similarly it was a good omen to see a crow / peacock / goose seen singly or in couples either at right /left. During marriages of certain communities, poultry birds were given as a gift (especially cocks) for *kari virundhu* (meat feast).

Table 2: Distribution of respondents on poultry farming folkways/mores

(N=240)			
Sl. No.	Poultry farming Folkways/Mores	Frequency	Percentage
1	The cock which crows (sounds) in the night should be culled / removed from the flock.	163	67.92
2	Crow, pigeons etc., cross from left to right, it was taken as good omen during journey.	141	58.75
3	It was a good omen to see a crow / peacock / goose seen singly or in couples either at right /left.	97	40.42
4	During marriages of certain communities, poultry birds were given as a gift (especially cocks) for <i>kari virundhu</i> (meat feast).	83	34.58
5	During night, eggs from one house will not be given to others.	74	30.83
6	The cock which makes sound in the early morning wakes up people.	68	28.33
7	Eggs are used for mantras / tantras	47	19.58
8	In death ceremonies, the idaiyans of Coimbatore tied a cock to a sacrificial post for which rice is offered.	45	18.75
9	Usually a cock / hen is left in the temple as vote of thanks to god by the deities.	43	17.92
10	During festival such as <i>kali</i> festival / <i>Amman</i> festival in the month of <i>Aadi</i> , birds sacrifice were common.	22	9.17

During night, eggs from one house would not be given to others even on loan basis. They considered departing eggs from their home during night would lead to loss in farming. The cock which makes sound in the early morning wakes up people. The same cock would be slaughtered to offer as feast if they got any surprise guests to their home.

The poultry eggs were widely used for *mantras* and *tantras* by the black magicians. In death ceremonies, the respondents of Tiruppur district tied a cock to a sacrificial post for which rice is offered. One end of a thread is tied to the post, and the other end to a new cloth. The thread is watched till it shakes, and then broken. The cock is then killed.

Usually a cock / hen was left in the temple as vote of thanks to god by the deities. During the *kali* or *Amman* festival in the month of *Aadi* (August month), birds sacrifice were common among the study area.

Each worshipper brings a cock to the priest, who holds it over grains of rice, which have been sprinkled before the goddess. If the bird pecks at the rice, good luck is ensured for the coming year, whilst, if per chance the bird pecks three times, the offerer of that particular bird can scarcely contain himself for joy. If the bird declines to touch the grains, ill-luck is sure to visit the owner's house during the ensuing year.

4. Conclusion

Folkways and mores are helpful in creating self satisfaction among rural communities in several ways by applying locally adapted practices (Ansari *et al.*, 2021)^[1]. Folkways and mores often represent a repository of traditional and cultural knowledge within a community. Documenting those will help to preserve this knowledge for future generations. This knowledge can include time-tested practices, ethical values and insights into effective backyard poultry farming methods. Documented folkways and mores serve as valuable educational resources for new and aspiring backyard poultry farmers. They can learn from the documented practices and

values, which can help them, get started in the industry with a solid foundation. In conclusion, documenting traditional practices, folkways and mores in backyard poultry farming is essential for preserving knowledge, promoting consistency, ensuring compliance with regulations and upholding ethical standards. It helps to create a foundation for education, quality assurance, and community building within the backyard poultry farming industry.

5. Acknowledgement

The authors are thankful to the rural folks for sharing the information on the traditional practices, folkways and mores followed in the study area of Tamil Nadu, India. The authors wish to express their profound gratitude to the Tamil Nadu Veterinary and Animal Sciences University for conducting this study as part of the corresponding author's Ph.D., thesis.

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