

Gir Cow... spotted in Amravati!

It was a mix of both astonishment and delight to find a large herd of about 4,000 pure breed Gir cows in Chirodi, an isolated settlement just beside the state highway near Amravati city. Chirodi is a small hamlet comprising of about 40 households falling in the jurisdiction of the Chandur Railway taluka and is located at about 18 km from Amravati district headquarters.

Vaibhav Jairam Jograna, sarpanch of the village aged 54 donning typical Gujarati attire, and speaking fluent *Marathi* informs though reluctantly that it was about six decades ago that their forefathers had migrated from Limidi in Surendranar district of Gujarat along with their beloved Gir cattle in search of greener

pastures as they had faced severe drought three years in a row resulting in grave shortage of feed and fodder. Initially, three brothers had travelled almost 900 km along with their family, belongings and cattle in search of a suitable location. Finally, they chose to settle down at Chirodi. Their only livelihood is income from sale of milk.



Gir-Gir everywhere!

Vaibhav Ji was little apprehensive in the beginning to share information suspecting that it may reach the Forest Department from whom they often face several hardships and he kept insisting that their Gujarati roots may please be not disclosed, while holding *aadhar card*, *voter id card* and other government documents to support his claim of being a permanent resident of Chirodi. Each family rears a herd of anywhere between 50-400 Gir cows and usually one male bull for breeding purpose. It was revealed during the discussion that the quality of milch-animals has reduced genetically over the years due to in-breeding affecting health of the animals-- horn cancer was very prevalent in the herd. Upon suggestion of a local veterinary doctor

recently, they adopted the practice of swapping of bulls between the families to address this issue which has started showing some positive results.

Karan in his thirties, though much older in appearance; belongs to the generation whose birth place is Chirodi and he is emotionally very attached to his beloved cows. He maintains an impressive heard of 400 cows and two bulls and is definitely gifted with good memory.

This is evident from the fact that he has given interesting names to each of his cows-- *koyal*, *mor*, *dhel*, *muiji*, *kaliyar*, etc. It was fascinating to experience that the moment he called out to a particular cow, it responded and even walked up to him from a distance and started licking his legs, a form of showing affection by the serene magnificent animals. With a glint in his eyes, *Karan* says these magnanimous creatures return double his affection, they can sense what's happening with their owner. If he is upset or ill, they also stop eating or if there is some kind of danger or a fight, they come in between and try to protect their lord. He cares about his herd so



much that he even retains the unproductive cattle till their natural death unlike other cattle owners elsewhere who do not loose time in sending such animals to slaughter house for commercial gains.

Companion for life time: *Karan & Koyal*

In a jiffy his mood swings and gloom descends on his face. He stems our curiosity by saying that he doesn't want his children to be like him, he wants them to be educated and make it big in their life. He is saddened by the fact that his children can't attend schools as during the summers, the whole village migrates to forests as distant as hundreds of kilometres with all their belongings setting up temporary tents there in search of green fodder. What do they do with the milk in the forest? *Karan* says that mobile

technology has come as a blessing for them as contractors keep in touch with them and collect milk from their location. During the rest of the year also, children take the herd out for grazing to distant places, almost walking 10-20 kilometres daily, as they say, stall feeding is too costly to sustain. The average milk production in the village is about 10,000 litres daily which can well double if proper nutrition is made available to the cattle. The milk is mostly sold to private contractors in bulk or loose in the city or to sweetmeat shops. Products such as *khoa*, *ghee*, *paneer*, *etc.* are also sold but more in the summer as the chances of spoilage of milk is more during that time. They get about ₹ 25-28 per litre from the contractors and feel their pure milk should fetch more. They seemed quite keen to be a part of a cooperative society just as it is in their ancestral place in Gujarat. They make it a point to visit their native village during *navratra* once in a year to be connected to, as they say, roots!!