

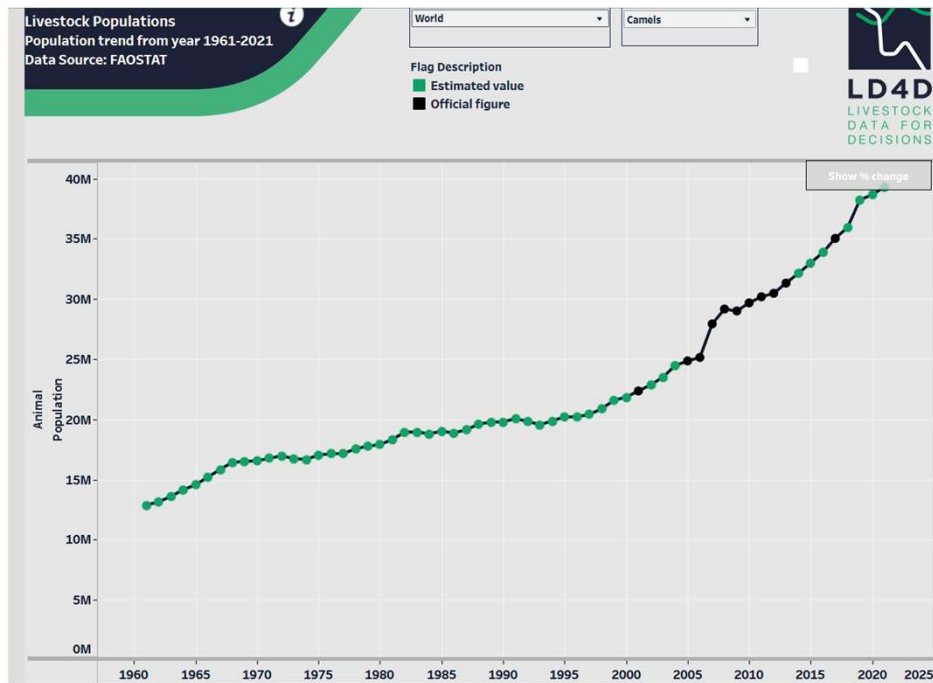
The Current Status of the Camel in India in a Global Context

Dr. Ilse Köhler-Rollefson

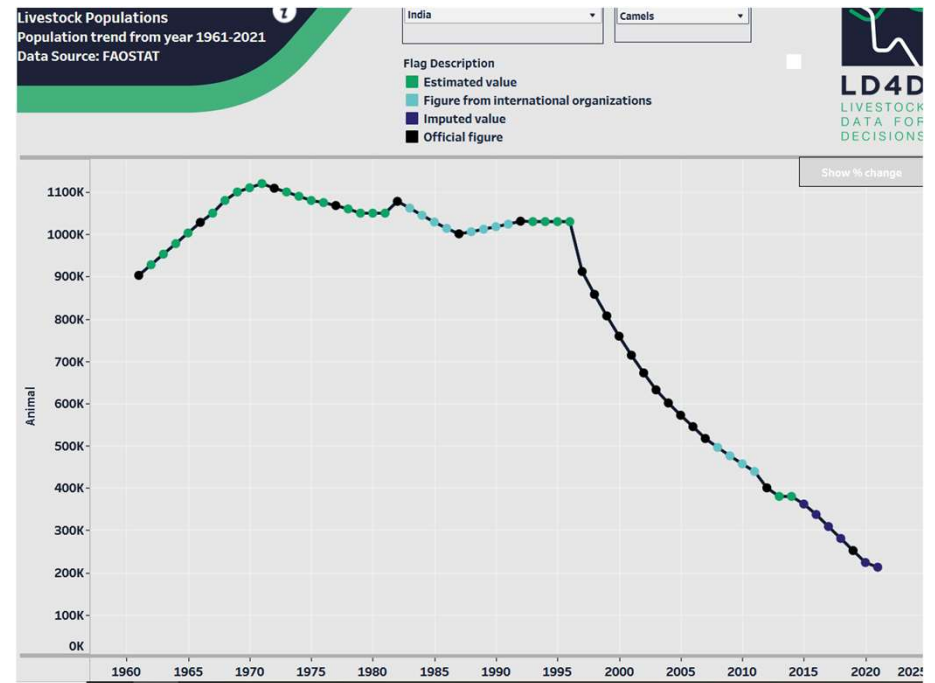


Camel population trends globally and in India

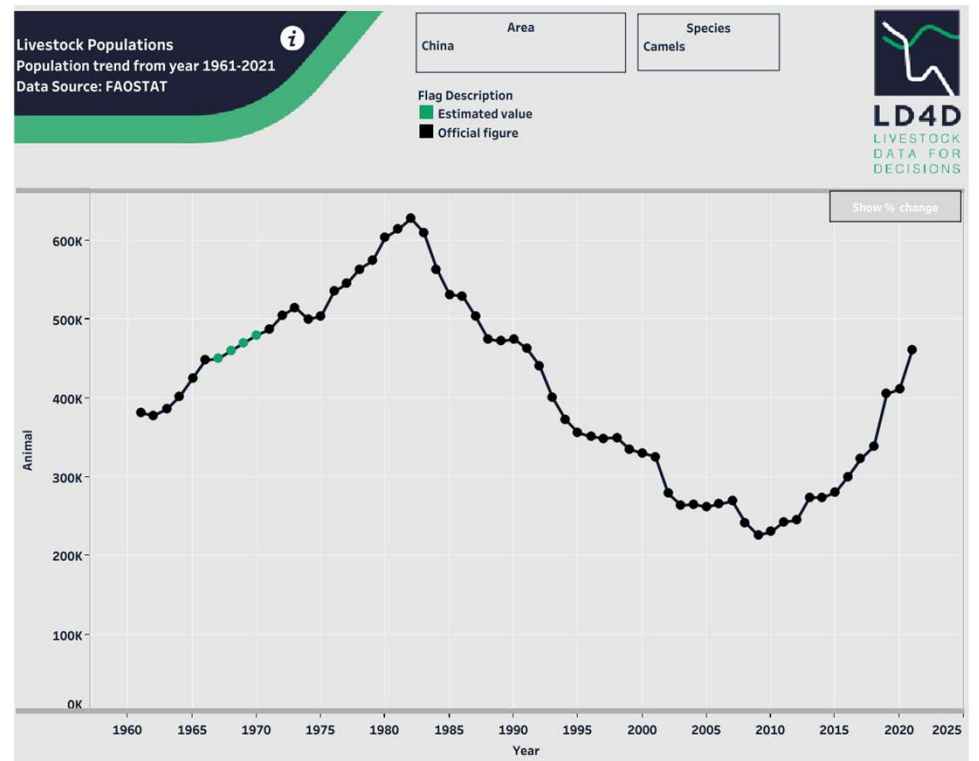
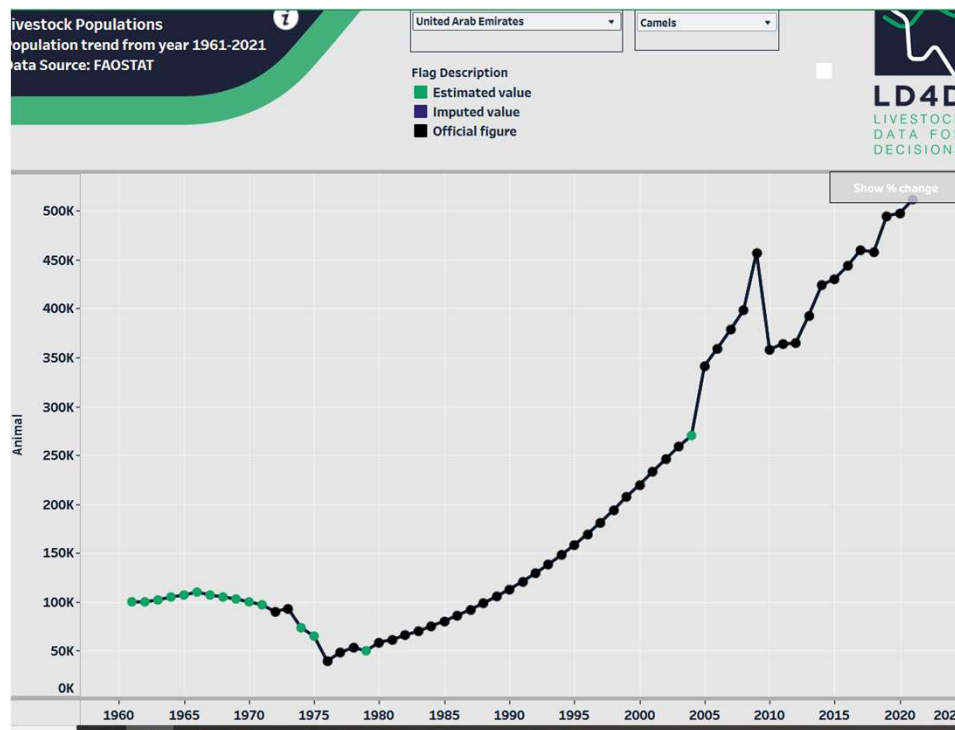
Global



India



Camel population trends in UAE and China



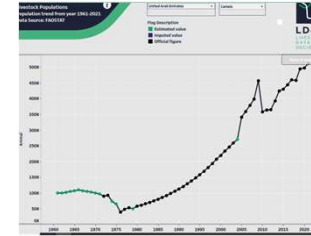
United Arab Emirates

Investment in racing camel industry

Large scale import of top-class scientists

Import of dairy camels from Pakistan, Sudan and elsewhere

Beauty camel competitions



Camel racing, a social practice and a festive heritage associated with camels, inscribed in UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2020

China

- Recognition as cultural heritage
- Support for free-ranging systems.....camels can be tracked remotely.
- Products marketed as 'green' and 'ecological'



So, what should
we do in India?



Factors leading to decline of camels in India

Disappearance of customary grazing areas.
Due to development (irrigation, green energy, wildlife protection).

Cultural taboo and law against use of camels for meat.....what to do with the male camels?

No culture of drinking camel milk



What are
our
strengths?

1. A unique and caring camel culture

The first Raika is believed to have been created by Hindu God Shiva to manage the first camels – that had been created by Goddess Parvati from clay and that God Shiva has breathed life into.

Therefore, they feel responsible for the welfare of camels (and other livestock, incl. cattle, sheep and goats)



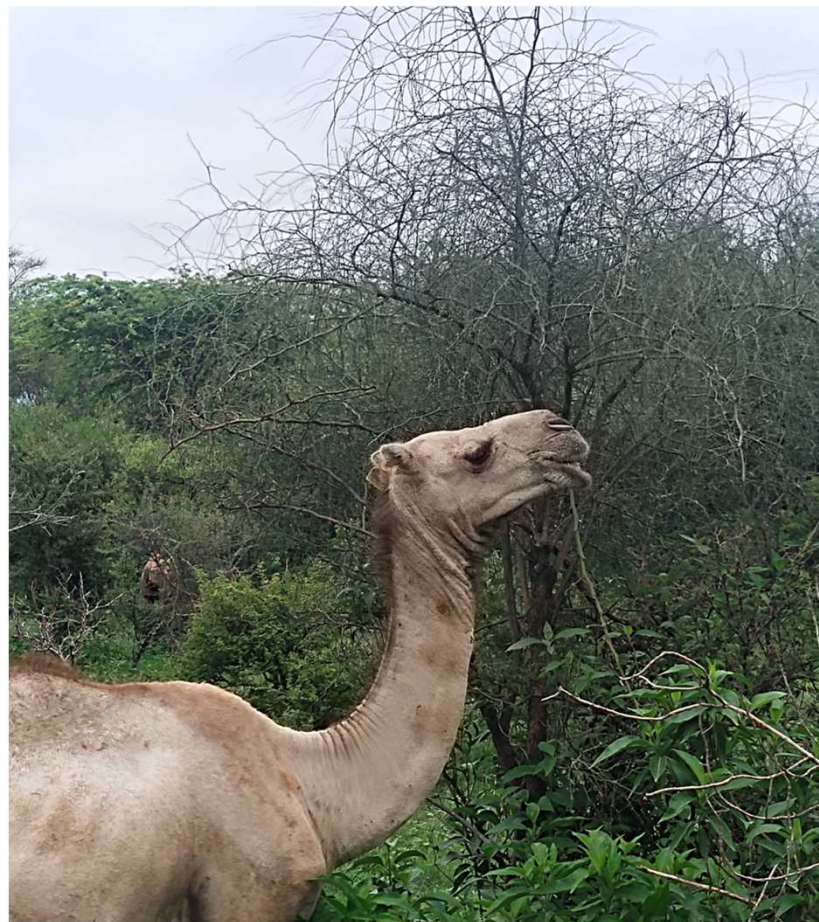
Photo by Joana Roque de Pinho

2. A **herding** system
based on biodiverse
desert trees and
shrubs



According to traditional knowledge, camels forage on ,36' species – all known for their therapeutic qualities, as documented in the Ayurveda, India's ancient medical system.

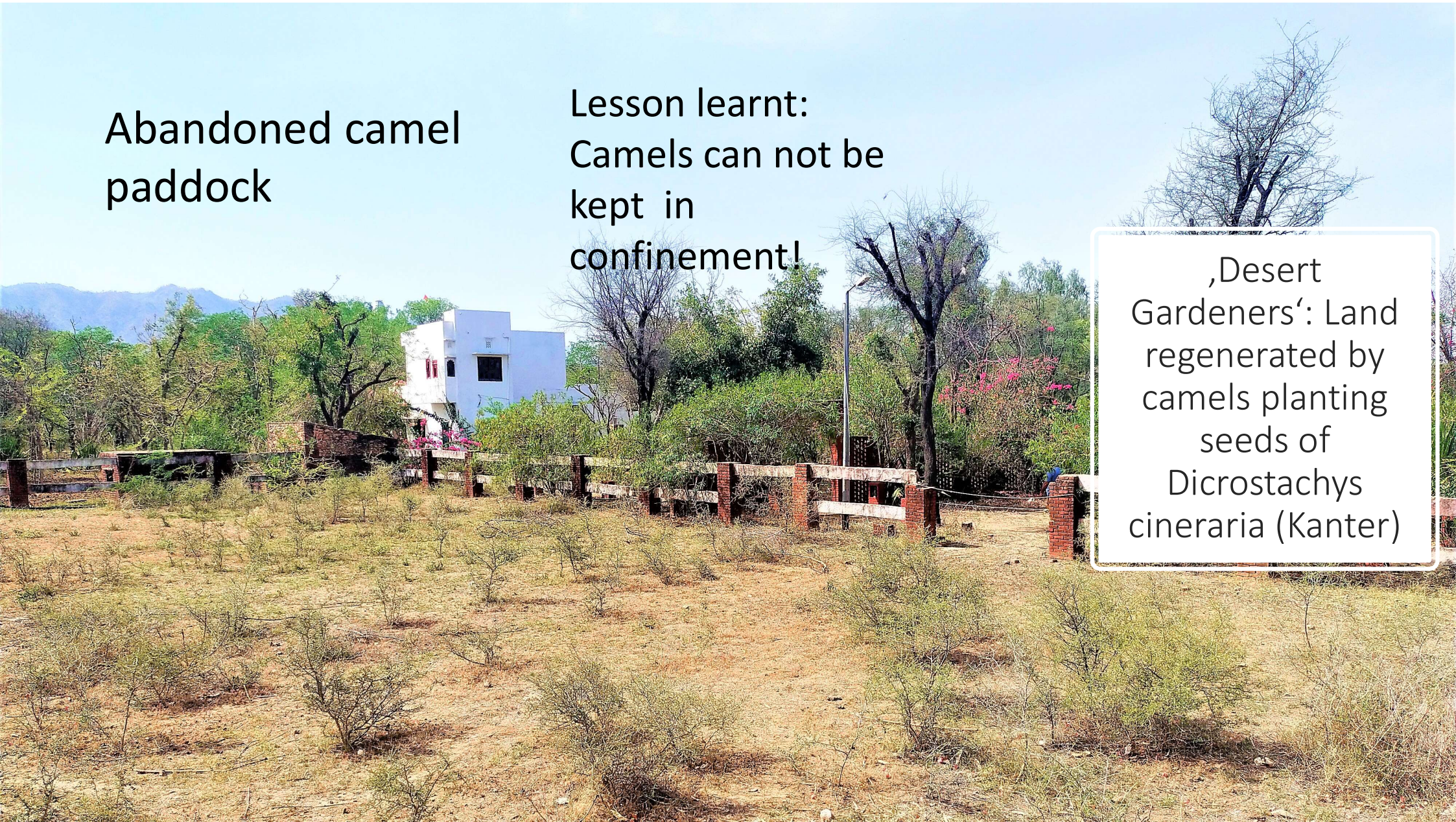




Abandoned camel paddock

Lesson learnt:
Camels can not be
kept in
confinement!

,Desert
Gardeners': Land
regenerated by
camels planting
seeds of
Dicrostachys
cineraria (Kanter)



Multitude of
eco-friendly
products,
developed by
Camel
Charisma in
their Camel
Conservation
Centre



Gift of the Desert



The Most Natural and Ecological Way of Food Production – powered only by solar energy, biodiversity and an intimate human-animal relationship!

- No fertilizers
- No chemicals
- No fossil fuels

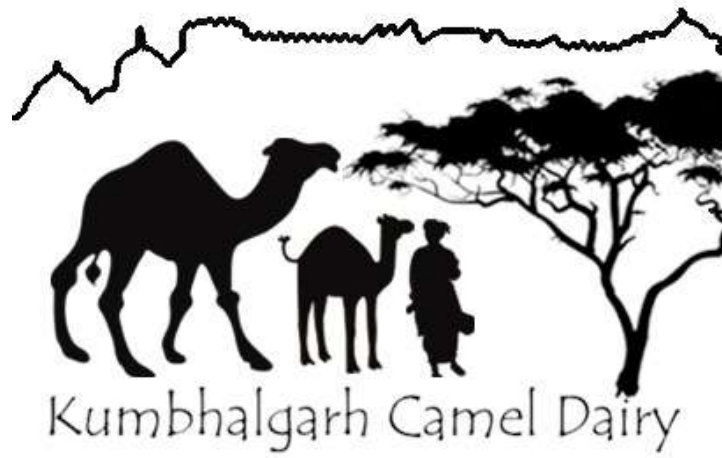
Camels distil the goodness of desert plants and synthesize it into directly human edible food

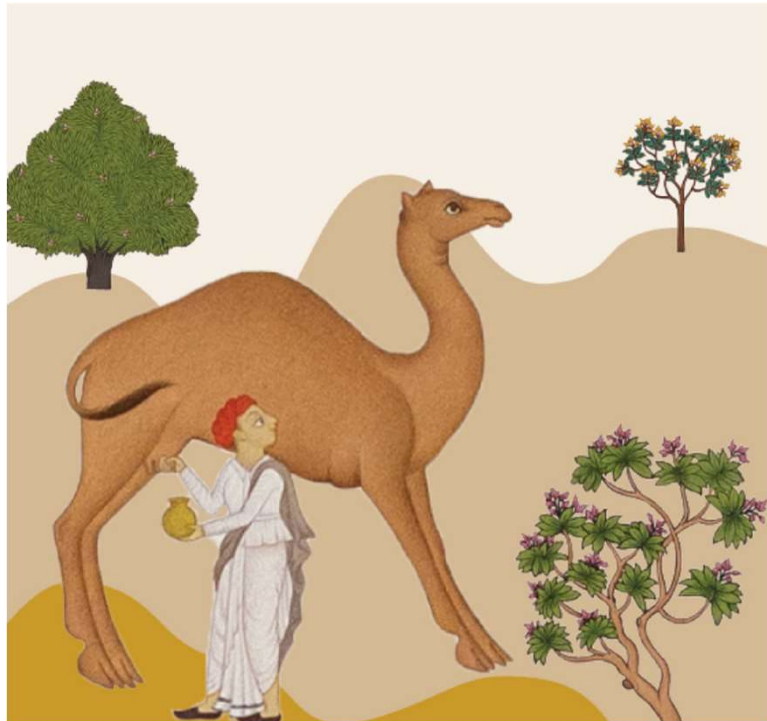




Camel Milk

- Naturally low fat
- Good for lactose-intolerant people
- High in Vitamin C and iron content, preventing anaemia and stunting.
- Alleviates diabetes and autism, major problems among urban Indians.
- Strengthens immune-system due to high content of lactoferrin.
- Consumer interest heightened since Covid





Included in the *Ark of Taste*



Slow Food Foundation
for Biodiversity

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Raika Camel Milk

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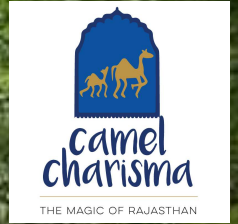
The Raikas are a specialized caste of pastoralists from northwestern India, particularly the arid and semi-arid parts of Rajasthan. Although they also raise goats, cattle, sheep, and water buffalo, the most important animal for Raika cultural identity is the camel (*Camelus dromedarius*). Traditionally, the Raikas gained much of their income from the sale of male camels as draft animals; camels (the “ships of the desert,” as they are often called) are essential for transporting people and goods in arid regions. Unlike all other camel pastoralists in the world, the Raikas have a strict taboo against killing camels and eating their meat. They also do not traditionally sell camel milk, which is considered a gift from God: If there is a surplus of milk, it should be given away for free, and selling it is sometimes equated with selling children.

According to Raika traditional knowledge, camels feed on 36 different plants (mostly trees and shrubs), which affect milk yield and flavor. The majority of these plants are known for their medicinal properties, many of which are likely retained in the milk of camels that feed on them. The Raikas use camel milk to treat various diseases, including tuberculosis. It is consumed fresh or used to make tea, and can also be turned into *kheer* (rice pudding). Raikas traditionally drink camel milk from a folded *aak* leaf; *aak* (*Calotropis procera*) produces a milky resin and, sometimes, the tip of the leaf is broken so that this resin will mix with the camel milk, improving its health effects. Raika herdsmen may subsist on camel milk for weeks at a time during long



Territory

State India



Cruelty-free Camel Milk

Photo Credit: Ashima Naraian





Godwar Camel Cheese Festival



From the breakfast buffet at Kaner Retreat

Medicine




Nourishment







Conclusion:

Camel milk could address major public health issues:

- With its very high iron content it could be the ideal natural remedy for treating **anaemia** – prevalent among almost all women and many children
- Camel milk could be used as supportive treatment for **TB**
- Possible value for cancer treatment requires medical monitoring



Recommendations for the future of camels in India and their well-being

- Realize that camels thrive only in mobile systems and that confinement makes them unwell.
 - Camel conservation is not possible without desert eco-system conservation - - we need protected grazing areas – which can also serve as biodiversity hotspots!
 - No
 - Our camel culture is a unique treasure and should be inscribed into the UNESCO List of Intangible World Heritage
 - Capitalize on the unique qualities of our cruelty-free camel milk – it is the **champagne of camel milk** and must be promoted as such!
 - As commercial demand for camel milk is currently too low for economic viability
 - public support, either by government or philanthropists, is essential to distribute camel milk to people with nutritional deficiencies!
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Long-term opportunity

- Daily collection of 35,000 l camel milk in Rajasthan thru a network of micro-dairies
- Provide sustainable livelihoods to 2000 rural families
- Provide a nutritional source of high value protein, iron, Vitamin C to 70,000-100,000 people per day
- Insure Rajasthan against climate change !



Camel Culture: Rajasthan's unique asset

Let's get it inscribed in the UNESCO list of Intangible Heritage!

