CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION:

Grasslands have become more important to human life than they were so in past. This can be attributed to recent increased growth of human and cattle population, which has resulted in a competition for land between the two. Due to intensive cultivation and industrialization, man is taking much of the grassland area for his own use. The increased needs of modern civilization have destroyed even the forests, what to talk of the grasslands!

Increased cattle population and decreased grassland area, in this country, have resulted in a very miserable condition. Majority of our cattle are in a semi-starved state. The grasslands always remain under heavy grazing pressure. This has decreased their nutrient potential and changed their physiognomy. Grasslands are rainfed and poor in protein and fat content and common agriculturist can not afford to provide a balanced diet to the cattle. Droughts also play a significant role in disturbing the cattle-food balance. Every year one or the other state of this country remains under severe drought conditions.
All these factors have affected our cattle wealth in a negative direction and average capacity of milk, meat and wool production has declined tremendously. Now the time has come when proper care must be taken of our existing grasslands to cope up with the situation.

At one time grasslands covered 42% of the total land surface of the world. Since then man's break through in civilization, industrialization and increased food demands have snatched away a very big portion of the grassland area. The result being now only 24% area is occupied by the grasslands. (Shantz, 1954).

In India, grasslands constitute 8.1% of the total land area. These grasslands do not form big uniform pieces, but are generally found on forest margins, on the river flood plains and around the cultivated fields. According to Champion (1936) true grassland climate does not exist in this country and so these are purely temporary communities of seral ranks, maintained under the influence of cutting, grazing and fire. The same views regarding the nature of Indian grasslands were held by Puri (1960) and Whyte (1964).

Year round grazing practices in our country have deteriorated the food quality of the fodder. No good perennial grass species can maintain itself in competition with others if heavily grazed through out the year. Some
time must be allowed for rest and regeneration. According to Whyte (1968) animal is the worst harvesting mechanism ever invented to destroy the grasses. If one is to retain a cover of good perennial grass round the year, the grazing practices must be changed. Hand feeding in dry lots with completely controlled grazing on a restricted acreage, that too, for a limited period, may improve the conditions of grasslands. According to Dabadghao and Sikka (1961) it is an estimated fact that there is a gap between the requirement and present day supply of fodder nutrition to cattle in India. In fact, grazing and fodder resources of India have become inadequate to meet the needs of livestock population (Whyte, 1964). There is an urgent need of undertaking various research programmes, surveys and experimental studies of our grasslands in different parts of the country. Data so obtained will be of great help in proper management and utilization of our resources. The grassland management is in no way of any lesser importance than agriculture, when one faces food problem in an agricultural country like ours.