



The RSS and its "Beef" Politics
--*Brinda Karat*

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--*Inderjit Singh*

The Cow in Ancient India
--*Dr. Sheo Dutt*

Introduction

The CPI(M) is bringing out a series of six booklets entitled RSS Against India.

The booklets contain essays written by eminent intellectuals, political leaders and activists which have been grouped together to bring out different aspects of the retrograde and divisive role the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) has played throughout its history and continues to do at present.

They include (1) The RSS role in India's freedom movement and its communal role in independent India (2) the RSS concept of Hindu Rashtra and its approach to caste, gender and adivasis (3) The "beef" politics of the RSS (4) the RSS understanding of neo-liberal economic policies and of the working classes (5) the RSS distortion of Science and History (6) speeches of General Secretary Sitaram Yechury and Polit Bureau member Md. Salim in the Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha respectively during the debate in Parliament in November 2015, on "Constitution Day" and on "Growing Intolerance."

Several of the essays in these booklets quote from the published writings of RSS founders particularly from the writings of M.S.Golwalkar, the second Sarsanghchalak of the RSS. It may be asked what relevance do these writings have to an analysis of contemporary activities of the RSS. These are texts which remain the fountainhead of RSS ideology, and continue to determine its world view and practice. Three quarters of a century may have passed since Golwalkar's *We—or our Nationhood Defined* and a *Bunch of Thoughts* were written, but their toxic concepts have been articulated by RSS Chiefs throughout

this period including the present RSS Chief, Mohan Bhagwat's statement that Hindustan is for Hindus. In all these years not in a single statement, writing or text in any of the publications of the RSS or its political wing the BJP has there been even a semblance of a distancing, leave alone a rejection, of any of the formulations made by RSS founders. On the contrary, the present Prime Minister has written a biographical profile of Golwalkar in his book "Jyotipunj" describing Golwalkar as one of his inspirations. Therefore the quotations used in the booklets to illustrate RSS ideology, some repeated, are relevant to an understanding of the "core" of this organization, which has been inspired by videshi fascists--Hitler's Nazis and Mussolini's Blackshirts.

The question may also be raised that are these exposures of the RSS at all necessary and do they not inadvertently enhance its importance? The RSS, as many of the essays in these booklets show, appeals to the lowest denominator in human behavior in inciting violence against "the other." In doing so it seeks to exploit religious feelings and utilises traditions and beliefs based on social and gender inequalities that still influence a substantial section of our people. Hindutva as preached by the RSS is a political concept coined by V.D.Savarkar, far from the world of ordinary Hindu believers. Those fighting against the utilization of religion for political ends need to be conscious of the dimensions of the battle.

Religion as a political tool is used by fundamentalist forces of various hues and in the name of various religious faiths. The role of Muslim fundamentalist forces who are increasing their reach among sections of Muslim youth are a matter of deep concern and they need to be isolated and fought back.

These forces are encouraged by majoritarian Hindu fundamentalists who falsely claim to represent the nation. These apparently opposing forces strengthen each other and divert attention from the basic problems of the people.

With the advent of the BJP Government led by Narendra Modi at the centre, the RSS not only has free access to the levers of power, which it also in large measure enjoyed during Atal Behari Vajpayee's time, but it actually is in a position of control in this Government. When a roll call

of Ministers is taken for the presentation of a report card to RSS leaders, it is clear who is calling the shots. It is therefore necessary to expose the RSS, its links to the Government and the extra constitutional power it wields today.

Further, Narendra Modi was a pracharak, a full time worker of the RSS owing total allegiance to its ideology, its theories and practice. For a pracharak to become the Prime Minister of India is a big step forward in the RSS project. Gujarat 2002 was a result as well as an experiment of the Hindu rashtra project under his leadership in which he was fully backed by the RSS. In 2013-2014, when differences arose in the BJP as to who should lead the party's bid for power in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, it was the RSS which not only backed Modi's candidature but directly intervened to silence the opposition of L.K.Advani and other senior leaders. The Prime Minister's refusal to take any action against those who are his colleagues in the RSS and are now in positions of power in the BJP in spite of their repeated communally provocative actions and statements is a reflection of his loyalty to the RSS. For India's Prime Minister it is RSS first.

It is thus necessary to provide the facts, the deeds and the analysis of what the RSS actually represents. We hope this series will be useful in the struggle to safeguard and strengthen the principles of secularism, democracy and equality.

On behalf of the central publications team we express our gratitude to the authors of these essays, and to the comrades and friends of the Party who helped bring out this series. We also thank the cartoonists for permission to use their work.

Brinda Karat

Polit Bureau Member

The RSS and its "Beef " Politics

Brinda Karat

I The Murder of Md. Akhlaq

Md. Akhlaq was a peace loving resident of the village of Bisadha in Dadri. After the celebrations for Eid, on the night of September 29, 2015 he was beaten to death in his own home by a gang of men from his village reportedly led by local BJP leaders. His son Danish, who tried to save him, was grievously injured and after two surgeries is now afflicted with a loss of memory. The women in the house were targets of brutal sexual harassment. The criminals searched Akhlaq's house with their hands stained with his blood and triumphantly took out a chunk of meat from his refrigerator announcing that it was beef. "Beef" they cried as justification for his brutal killing.

After the murder his daughter Sajida said " and when it is found that it is goat mutton, will it bring my father back."

The police under the Samajwadi party State Government, who had ignored the toxic campaign against cow slaughter that had been going on in the area by rightwing communal organisations, was more concerned in sending the meat for a forensic test than in arresting the

accused. The meat turned out to be goat meat. But the way the issue was posed in the tenor of the statements issued by RSS and BJP leaders was that if it was beef the murder was justified. The RSS official mouthpiece *Organiser* published a front page article that the vedas sanctioned the killing of anyone who slaughtered a cow. Not all of the accused have been arrested.

The Member of Parliament representing the area, Mahesh Sharma, is a Minister of State in the Modi Government. Sharma went to the village a few days later and assured families of the men arrested that he would get them justice. He described the murder as an "accident." The Prime Minister did not contradict him. It took him ten days to even refer to the Dadri murder and that too only obliquely. He could not find it within himself to condemn the atrocity.

It would be wrong to consider these incidents as an "aberration." The act of murder of a Muslim accused of cow slaughter through a manufactured rumour, is to send a message to the community. The message resonates through the history of anti-Muslim violence engineered by the RSS. It is a message delivered by the man the present Prime Minister considers his "guruji." Golwalkar had said, "The foreign races in Hindusthan must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence Hindu religion, must entertain no idea but those of the glorification of the Hindu race and culture, i.e. of the Hindu nation and must lose their separate existence to merge in the Hindu race, or may stay in the country, wholly subordinated to the Hindu Nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment — not even citizen's rights". — Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar (*We-or Our Nationhood Defined*)

In 2015 the RSS stands by this warped and perverted interpretation of Hindu religion and culture in its every word and deed. It is this that needs to be exposed, resisted and defeated.

II

The Reality of the Anti Cow Slaughter Campaign

The BJP advertisement of the cow being lovingly embraced by a young woman splashed across newspapers timed for the last phase of the Bihar elections in a region which has a substantial Muslim vote, shows the importance given to this issue as an instrument for communal polarization by the Sangh Parivar. Although the general campaign against cow slaughter targets Muslims, it is Hindus who will be most adversely affected if the Hindutva brigade has its way with a total ban on cattle slaughter.

Farmers

Farmers, mainly Hindus, sell unproductive cattle to contractors. A blanket ban on slaughter means the farmer will have to pay for their upkeep which, at current prices, would amount to around Rs. 100 a day or Rs. 36,500 a year. Can farmers in the grip of an acute agrarian crisis afford this expense? Will the government give them a cattle subsidy? According to the cattle census, already there are 53 lakh stray cattle abandoned by their owners.

If all these animals were to be “protected,” as demanded by the Hindutva brigade apart from the thousands of hectares of land required, the expense to the Central Government would be around 20,000 crores of rupees a year. This is more than the entire amount spent on the tribal sub-plan, more than the entire amount spent for children under the anganwadis, and more than all the schemes for pensions for senior citizens. So the Hindutva brigade wants resources which should be spent for the needs of the poor to go for the protection of unproductive cattle.

However, the hypocrisy of the “gau mata bachao” campaign is also exposed by the callousness displayed when these starving animals eat toxic waste. The plight of gaushalas is deteriorating with the number of cattle they are expected to feed going up as a result of the virtual collapse of the cattle market.

Leather Industry

Along with farmers, the entire chain of the leather industry will be affected with a drastic fall in supply of raw material. This has been an industry which according to the Council of Leather Exports, has seen a cumulative annual growth rate of 8.2 per cent from 2006 to 2011 when its annual turnover was 7.5 billion dollars. The main advantage for the industry has been “the abundance of raw materials” namely good quality cow/bull hide. 21 per cent of the world cattle and buffalo population is in India. However, thanks to the irrational campaign of the Sangh Parivar, this industry is now being starved of the hide. The main products manufactured in India are shoes, bags, belts, saddlery, and to a lesser extent leather furniture. India has been in competition with China in the world market supplying mainly to Europe. There has been a sharp decline in exports. Although the main reason might be a sluggish world market, the slowdown in manufacturing for the domestic market is a reflection of the problems being faced by the industry of supplies in raw materials.

The industry provides employment to 2.5 million people. The majority of them are scheduled castes. An estimated eight lakh Dalits earn a living through flaying the skin of dead cattle. This activity is within the law. But with the vigilante actions by the Hindutva brigade and the multiplication of rumour mongering there is a growing fear among flayers who are vulnerable targets. Similarly contractors, truck drivers, traders and others connected with the industry are equally affected. A tannery owner in Kanpur said, “Now flaying or handling cow hide is like having a tiger skin, which is totally illegal. Nobody wants to touch the skin of a dead cow, they are too scared.” The terror campaign, backed by the connivance of those in power, is hitting the livelihood of lakhs of people and the industry as a whole. In the biggest hide market of the region catering to the leather industry, Pesh Bagh Chamra Mandi in Kanpur, there used to be a daily traffic of around 150 trucks of cattle hide. This has come down to just 3-4 trucks a day.

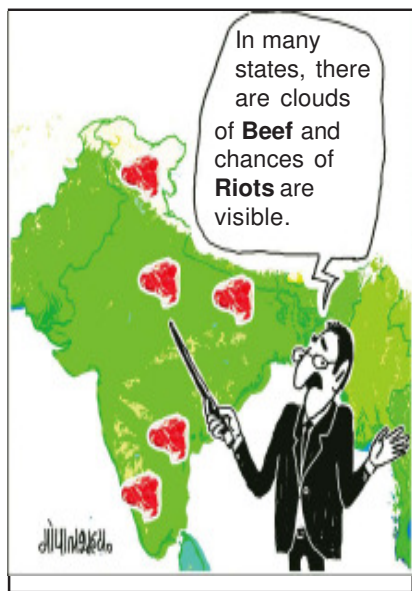
Tanneries and small and medium-sized leather manufacturing units, which again employ mainly Dalits, are laying off workers because of the crunch in supplies. While lakhs of workers in the domestic hide

industry stand to lose their livelihood, the government has allowed the import of cow/bull hide with zero per cent duty. Videshi is in, desi is out in this version of 'Make in India'.

Consumption of "beef"

The meat industry is also badly affected including butchers and meat exporters. Again both Hindus and Muslims are losing their livelihood.

It is an utter lie to propagate that it is primarily Muslims who consume beef. Lalu Prashad Yadav may have thought it politically prudent to withdraw his statement that Hindus eat beef, but he was speaking the truth. More than Muslims, there are communities among Dalits, Adivasis and OBCs in different States who eat beef. The National Commission on Cattle set up by the Vajpayee Government in 2002 to promote a ban on cow slaughter also reluctantly admitted (para 167) that " extreme poverty and customary practices in the coastal areas and among some sections of scheduled tribes, scheduled castes and other backward castes also make them beef eaters." According to NSSO estimates, over 5.2 crore people in the country, mainly Dalits and tribals and the poor from different communities, eat beef/buffalo meat,



Clearly the issue of beef consumption also has a class and caste dimension, which the RSS deliberately conceals. Its campaign imposes an unacceptable food code on the country. At the same time, it directly affects a source of relatively cheaper source of protein nutrition for the poor.

The Hindutva brigade deliberately falsifies the export of buffalo meat, which is entirely legal by projecting it as the flesh of cows, illegally slaughtered. The

argument led by Narendra Modi of the so-called pink revolution, the bizarre description of "rampant slaughter of cows" is utterly false. The 2012 cattle census shows that there has been an increase in the number of cows in India by 6.2 per cent compared to the previous census in 2007 whereas the numbers of sheep, goats and pigs declined. This hardly points to rampant slaughter of cows. In fact the main consumption is of buffalo meat, also described as beef in many States and not cow meat. It is buffalo meat that is the main export. But truth becomes an easy victim when it does not serve the purpose of arousing passions the way the RSS wants.

Legal Framework

The hate campaign is accompanied by the argument that all this is happening because India does not have a legal framework. This again is a lie. According to the website of the Department of Animal Husbandry, except for States of the north-east, all other States have anti-cow slaughter laws in some form or the other. But the RSS led Sangh Parivar is not satisfied with these laws. Why is this so?

There are many States which differentiate between useful cattle and useless cattle in their laws. Once a cow or bull or bullock has crossed a certain age and can neither produce milk nor be useful in any agricultural work, such cattle can be slaughtered provided the concerned authority gives a "fit for slaughter" certificate. Such States, according to the information from the official website which permit slaughter of "useless cattle" on the basis of a "fit for slaughter" certificate, include Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Goa, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal. The procedures and standards for slaughter differ, such as what the age of the animal should be, which vary from 10 years in Kerala to 15 years in Madhya Pradesh. In some States such as Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Kerala, dry cows can also be slaughtered.

Such laws are not peculiar to India. It may surprise readers to know that some provinces in Pakistan, such as the Punjab also have strict regulations against the slaughter of milch animals and draught animals including cows, bulls and camels. Iran also has regulations. Socialist

Cuba has laws against slaughter of milch cows and draught animals including buffalos. The context in Cuba has been the economic blockade imposed by the Americans. Since the Cuban Government gives free milk to all children below the age of seven and yoghurt to all children between seven and school leaving age, it was found that slaughter of cows and buffalos for consumption of beef was harming this project. However in Cuba also, cattle which no longer serve a economic purpose are “ fit to slaughter.”

III Ambedkar’s Compromise Formula

In India, the Hindutva forces had another agenda. Their argument was that if Pakistan bans pork on religious grounds because it is impermissible according to the Koran to eat pork, then why should not India ban cow slaughter and possession and consumption of beef. In other words the attempt is to turn India into a Hindu Pakistan. This is reflected in the RSS demand to replace the present State laws with a national law for a blanket ban on slaughter of all cattle and to link it with a ban on beef consumption. Its efforts in this direction have their roots in the debates in the constituent assembly when Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar led the opposition to the demand made for a national ban on cow slaughter.

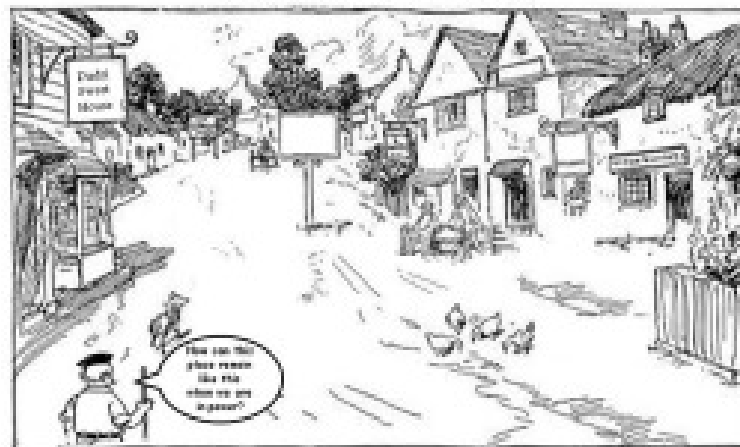
Ambedkar’s scathing criticism of the caste system and the Brahminical order contained an analysis of the grounds of untouchability practiced against Dalits. One of the grounds identified by Ambedkar was that Dalits ate the meat of dead cattle including cows and therefore were considered “impure” by the upper castes. He believed that the demand for a ban on cow slaughter was a way of introducing Hindutva of the upper castes into what was to be a secular constitution.

There was a strong demand by several members of the constituent assembly for a constitutionally backed national ban on cow slaughter. There was an equally strong opinion against it. Ambedkar worked out the compromise which is reflected in the constitution by the inclusion of Article 48 in the Directive Principles rather than in the text of the Constitution.

This is how Pandit Thakur Das Bhargava, a member of the constituent assembly and one of the strongest advocates of a national ban on cow slaughter, described it: “While moving this amendment, I have no hesitation in stating that for people like me and those that do not agree with the point of view of Dr. Ambedkar and others, this entails, in a way, a sort of sacrifice. Seth Govind Das had sent one such amendment to be included in the Fundamental Rights and other members also had sent similar amendments. To my mind, it would have been much better if this could have been incorporated in the Fundamental Rights, but some of my Assembly friends differed and it is the desire of Dr. Ambedkar that this matter, instead of being included in Fundamental Rights, should be incorporated in the Directive Principles. As a matter of fact, it is the agreed opinion of the Assembly that this problem should be solved in such a manner that the objective is gained without using any sort of coercion. I have purposely adopted this course, as to my mind, the amendment fulfills our object and is midway between the Directive Principles and the Fundamental Rights... I do not want that, due to its inclusion in the Fundamental Rights, non-Hindus should complain that they have been forced to accept a certain thing against their will.”

In fact it was not “ non-Hindus” but a large section of secular Hindus who had opposed such a national ban on cow slaughter.

Dadri: A Place of Communal Harmony



Only Till RSS Discovered It

Article 48 states “The State shall endeavor to organize agriculture and animal husbandry on modern and scientific lines and shall in particular take steps for preserving and improving the breeds and prohibiting slaughter of cows and calves and other milch and draught cattle.”

Ambedkar’s compromise succeeded in keeping out the religious connotations. The Directive Principles, significantly do not mention the issue of “beef consumption” at all. It is this that the RSS is challenging and trying to reverse.

RSS BJP Efforts

Delhi under the BJP Government led by Madan Lal Khurana in 1994 was the first to actually criminalise the possession of beef. It was also the first to shift the onus of proof to the accused in the 1994 legislation. It was this draconian law which was used for the raid on Kerala Bhavan in the Capital recently to inspect whether the meat being cooked in the kitchen was cow meat. It was found to be buffalo meat. In 2005, Gujarat under Modi also legislated a blanket ban on all slaughter and against possession of beef.

After the advent of the Modi Government and the consequent empowering of the Hindutva forces, several BJP led State Governments such as Rajasthan, Haryana, Maharashtra, Jharkhand have banned possession and consumption of beef through amendments or new legislations. The aggression is led by the top leaders of the RSS and the BJP. All over the country RSS has intensified its campaign on this issue on the demand for a national law against cattle slaughter.

The Hindutva right wing wants to reverse the Ambedkar formula, change the legal provisions and extend it to a total ban removing the “fit for slaughter” provisions and also to link it with a ban on the consumption of beef. There is no need for a national law. And any moves in this direction by the Modi Government, including bringing the issue into the concurrent list, should be strongly opposed. This is not just a fight to defend minorities, not just a fight to protect the livelihoods of farmers, Dalits and the poor, it is also part of the fight to prevent India from being turned into a ‘Hindu Rashtra’.

RSS and the "desi" Cow

Inderjit Singh

THE RSS and dozens of its so-called socio-cultural outfits have become very aggressive in unleashing violence during recent months since the BJP assumed power on its own under the leadership of Narendra Modi. In spite of false tall promises and acute anti-incumbency against the UPA-2 government, the BJP had got a mere 31 percent of the vote share. Such a narrow and fragile political base has further eroded in the wake of mounting discontent among various sections of masses, especially the peasantry reeling under unprecedented agrarian crisis thanks to the more aggressive pursuit of neo-liberal policy framework. It is in this broad context that desperate BJP has let loose its *Hindutva* outfits to rake up all kinds of divisive and emotive issues related to religion or caste and cow is one among many. The cow still continues to be a symbol of worship in many regions of North Indian states regardless of the caste and even religious faith. BJP has been exploiting the sentiments attached with the cow in the past in order to polarise the people on communal lines and also to target the Muslim minority community and even the dalits from time to time especially before elections.

The recent cold blooded murder of Mohd Akhlaq in Bishada village of Dadri (UP) is one such classical instance of a planned conspiracy. Rumours of presence of beef in his house were spread. Two more gruesome murders have been committed in Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir by alleging cow slaughter. The chief minister of

Haryana has publically made a highly outrageous statement saying that Muslims can stay in this country only if they stop eating beef. This is a clear infringement of the very oath he had taken while assuming office a year ago. So all these incidents and the debate around cow slaughter or beef eating must be seen as how agenda of 'development' is being sought to be replaced with cow. These should also be seen as part of the larger context of the atmosphere of hate and intolerance being spread systematically and with arrogance. The situation, therefore, warrants an objective analysis of the whole issue of cow and cattle in today's context.

The Hindi speaking region is often called the cow belt because of its importance in the economy. The farm sector is dependent on bullocks as draught animal for ploughing and transportation and the cow is a source of dairy products besides producing bullocks. Hence, the cow has always been of central importance for farming, the main livelihood of the peasantry. Bovine rearing and breeding (both cattle and buffalo) has been and continues to be an important occupation of rural as well as sections of urban masses. So, cattle in general and cow as birth-giver to bullocks in particular, continued to be accorded a kind of worshipped status as *Gau Mata*. A very popular and sacred slogan among rural children had been *Gau Mata ki Jai*. The impact of Arya Samaj movement in these parts of the country in the context of cow worship may also have been a factor. A person swearing in the name of his real mother or Cow or bullocks was not usually disbelieved. The birth of a male calf was a sign of fortune while that of a female calf a curse. On the other hand the reverse was true in case of buffalo. But over the years the whole scenario took a drastic change.

With very fast mechanization of the farm sector especially in the wake of 'Green Revolution', tractors and other implements replaced the use of bullocks a massive scale and these days use of bullocks as draught animal has become almost an uncommon sight in the countryside. The cow has been replaced by buffalo and bullocks by tractors. Male buffalos (*bhainsa or jhota*) have fast replaced bulls even for transportation or ploughing purpose.

Murra breed of Haryana buffalo is a most famous breed in terms of yield of milk. This is taken to even South Indian states and has become

over the decades a crucial occupation of livelihood for a large segment of population in many parts of the country when the peasantry was faced with unviable situation in farming. *Murra Bhainsa* recently fetching a price of Rs. 6 crore and yet not being sold by a farmer in Karnal district is one example of buffalos' priority over cow.

During a period of four decades the population of cows in Haryana has declined sharply from 40.9 per cent of the total bovines in 1966 to a mere 14 per cent in 2007. While on the other hand, that of the buffalos has increased from 50.7 per cent to 79.0 per cent during the same period. Reason being that buffalo is more economic in terms of milk yield. The average milk yield per cow is 2.9 kg while that of a buffalo is 4.6 kg with much more fat content.

Secondly, the indigenous (Desi) cows which had been a traditional cattle has been further replaced by either the cross breed, the famous Sahiwal or the Jersey or the Holstein Friesian. So the left out Desi cows remain further marginalised as domestic animal yet continue to breed by Desi Bulls. It is actually this population of the cows that are main part of the stray cattle and become a big menace as threat for crops in the villages and for general people in the urban areas being a big cause of road accidents. Interestingly, it is this cow which is most neglected and yet 'worshipped' too. These cows are camped in large number of *Gau shalas* (cow shelters) which have become a flourishing business for some vested interests. People donate very generously to gaushala committees and during recent decades even State Governments too give very liberal grants to those run by registered bodies. Here the managers would readily accept stray cows only if a handsome amount of money is offered in lieu of keeping the animal. But if it is a milch cow it is retained while if dry it is sure to be let loose again by the management often during night hours.

In spite of the marginalization of its utility, the population of these stray cows and bulls continue to grow causing very serious problem for the common people. Several commuters lose their lives or get seriously injured in road accidents caused by stray cattle squatting on roads causing frequent accidents. The bulls in rural areas not only damage crops but also violently harm the valuable pregnant buffalos resulting in abortions.

There are reports of clashes taking place between residents of one village with the neighbouring villages over movement of stray cattle from one village to another as no one is the owner. Curiously, on this point there is a conflict of interest between farmers whose crops are threatened by stray cattle on the one hand and the so called *Gaubhakats* and their communal politics on the other.

With lakhs of neglected cattle there is bound to be a higher mortality rate among the stray cattle for multiple reasons of disease, hunger, cold or accidents. Such dead or injured cows are often made a communal issue for targeting minority community or dalits.

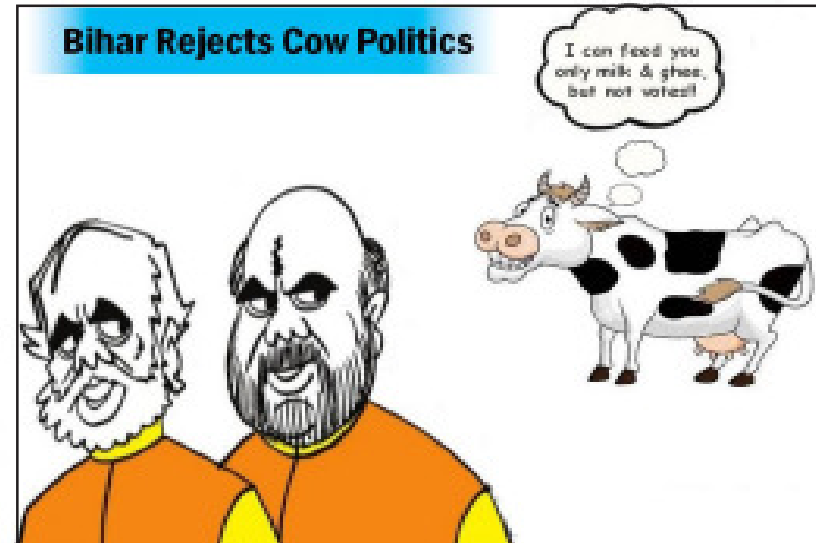
Cattle fairs have long ago been stopped without any valid reason. So any one transporting cattle becomes target of communal out fits existing in various names and masquerading as Gau-Bhakts who allege that these were being transported for slaughter. Even the police acts in active collusion with these elements among whom there are extortionist gangs too. The infamous Dulina episode is still fresh in the memory when five innocent dalit youth were lynched by a communally motivated mob after snatching them from the police custody in 2002 near Jhajjar town of Haryana.

All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) has been agitating in various states for a curb on stray cattle. Farmers have been demanding that these cattle be controlled by improving their breed, restoring the cattle fares, keeping stray cattle in gaushalas, curbing the communal elements etc. But with the BJP coming to power at the Centre, the Haryana cow has been made an issue to be politically exploited more aggressively.

The Haryana assembly has enacted a legislation Haryana Gauvansh Sanrakshan and Samvardhan Act on March 16, 2015 which among other measures of so called protection also stipulates imprisonment on causing harm or slaughtering a cattle. It also provides for NGOs who could be given village common lands for setting up Gaushalas apart from getting liberal grants from the government. Following this, vested interests with RSS connections and political patronage have become active for grabbing the village common lands in the name of the cow. Let it be recalled that village common lands have a one-third statutory

share of scheduled caste households for cultivation or allotment as house sites for the landless.

A few month ago an official seminar was held on the plight of Gau Vansha at Rohtak Maharishi Dayanand University where the Minister of Agriculture O.P. Dhankhar was prominently present and lot of so called religious Babas and swamis adorned the dias. One of the major policy announcement made by the Minister was that 50 per cent subsidy to be granted to those setting up a dairy of Desi Cows. How ridiculous and senseless it is. But there is hardly any logic when it is a matter of exploiting the sentiments of people. The cross- breed may well give much more milk than the Desi cow but it does not qualify to be given recognition as Gau-Mata like the stray lot of Desi or indigenous ones.



The Cow in Ancient India

Dr. Sheo Dutt

The brutal killing of an innocent Muslim, Mohd. Akhlaq in Bishara village, Dadri by the Hindutva brigade on the alleged grounds of consuming beef has shocked all secular and democratic people and deeply wounded our plural culture. This has been followed by a spate of such attacks using cow slaughter as a pretext to create communal divisions and violence against the minorities.

Spokespersons of the RSS-BJP including ministers in the Central Government have brazenly sought to justify these attacks on one or the other manufactured grounds. The most important among these is their claim that the Vedas prohibited beef eating and laid down capital punishment for it. They assert that there was no beef eating in India till the advent of Islam. This claim is entirely false.

Different scholars like Prof. R.S. Sharma, Prof. Romila Thapar and the stalwart Indologist, Rajendra Lal Mitra who was also an important figure of the Bengal Renaissance in the 19th century, have written about the prevalence of this food habit in ancient India. P.V. Kane in his monumental work *The History of Dharmashastras (Vol. II)* and Prof. D.N. Jha in his book *Myth of the Holy Cow* have provided ample proof about sacrifice of cows and beef eating in ancient India.

There is overwhelming textual and archaeological evidence to show that a large number of cattle including cows and oxen were slaughtered in *Kuru-Panchala* (encompassing Western UP, Delhi and parts of Haryana) and other areas in the Vedic Period. Various types of cattle including cows were prescribed in later Vedic texts for sacrifice to different gods, for example, a bull or *vrisabha* was sacrificed to *Indra* (*principal Vedic deity and God of war, rain and thunderstorms*), a dappled cow to the *Maruts* (*storm deities*) and a copper coloured cow to the *Ashwins* (*gods of beauty, health and directions*). A cow was also slaughtered for *Mitra* (*assistant to Indra in war*) and *Varuna* (*water god*).

According to the *Shatapatha Brahmana*, a leading Brahminical text in the later Vedic period, cow's flesh is the best kind of food (*SBr; X.7.1.3*). The *Taittiriya Samhita* states that in a funeral ceremony (*Sradh*) a cow is slaughtered and its members (organs) were cut into pieces and given to passersby at a crossroad. The *Sadvimsha Brahamana* refers to the *anustarani* cow (or a cow that is still giving milk) which is placed next to the limbs of every dead person in order to take him across the *Vaitarni River* (*Sadv, Br; 1.7.1*). This is echoed in *Taittiriya Samhita* which suggests that in the funeral ceremony the corpse should be garnished with the cow, limb-by-limb to protect against the flames.

Other later Vedic texts also state that cattle including cows were slaughtered on numerous occasions in public rites. In *Ashwamedha sacrifice* (a horse sacrifice that could only be conducted by a king for purposes of acquiring territory, power, progeny etc.), as many as six hundred animals of various types, including cows are, said to have been killed.

The *Maitarayani Samhita* refers to the killing of cows in *angyadehya* (fire-laying) ceremony which preceded all public rituals (*MS, I.8.9*). The same text states that in the *sulagava* or sacrifice of an ox on the spit, many oxen were slaughtered. The *Shatapatha Brahmana* clearly declares that cows that were given in *Dakshina* on occasions of public rites were sacrificed. It says thus, "and whosoever gives a thousand or more cows to the priests, he will slaughter all these; indeed, everything is obtained, everything conquered by him- who gives thousand or more" (*SBr; IV.5.1, 11-12*). The same text further states that three

cows were slaughtered. The flesh of the first was offered to *Mitra* and *Varuna*, the second to all the gods and the third to *Brihaspati* (teacher or 'Guru' of the gods).

The *Sadvimsha Brahmana* speaks of groups of cows consisting of nine one-eyed, nine lame, nine paralyzed and nine with defective horns which were given as *Dakshina* to the priests. It states clearly that these were slaughtered by the priests (*Shad Br, III.8.22-24*).

According to the *Shatapatha Brahmana* the flesh of a large ox must be cooked and consumed by a *Rajanya* or a *Brahmana* in the guest offering ceremony (*SBr, III.4.1.2*). This text refers to slaughtering of cows and oxen many times. The same text states that the famed Rishi Yajnavalkya argued that he would certainly consume flesh of the cow as it makes the body fat (*SBr, III.1.2.21*).

According to the *Maitrayani Samhita*, the cow is the best animal to be sacrificed at the sacrificial altars in all public rituals (*MS, I.8.9-10*). The *Taittiriya Samhita* refers to the killing of calves in the *Agnishtoma* ceremony. The *Gopatha Brahmana* directs that the sacrificer must distribute the organs of a slaughtered cow to the officiating priests (*GBr, III.18*). The same text refers elsewhere, to the offering of flesh of cow on the *Agnihotri* ceremony.

Several terms in the Atharvaveda and the Kaushika Sutra refer to the slaughter of a large number of animals including cows and oxen (for details see Rajchhatra Mishra, in Hindi, *Atharva Veda mein Sanskritik Tattva*, Allahabad, 1968, pp 88-89).

Vedic texts refer to many terms such as *govikarta* (a cow slaughterer), *gavyaccha* (one who kills a cow), *gosava* (a cow sacrifice) and *goyajna* (again a cow sacrifice). This leaves no room for any doubt that cows were slaughtered on many occasions and were meant to be consumed as food. Most of the Vedic texts consider the flesh of certain animals including cows to be pleasing to the deities. Beef has been prescribed as a delicacy for a distinguished guest who is known as *goghna* or slaughterer of cows. The Hindutva brigade has been crying foul regarding the meaning of the word *goghna*. Panini's *Ashtadhyayi*, considered as the most authentic Sanskrit grammar text, clearly explains

the term *goghna* to mean one who is the killer of the cow (*Asth, III.4.73*).

The Vedic practice of sacrificing cows and eating beef is affirmed by archaeological excavations as well. Excavations at Hastinapura (Meerut Distt.), Allapur (Badaun Distt), Sanghol (Ludhiana Distt), Hulas (Saharanpur Distt), Atranjikhhera (Etah District) etc. have revealed a large number of bones of cows and bullocks with deep cut marks which clearly suggest that the Vedic people slaughtered these animals for food and that beef was the staple diet. These bones have been discovered from the famous painted grey ware pottery cultures, decisively equated with later Vedic period (when most of the Vedic texts were composed).

Pali texts of the post-Vedic period provide further evidence of sacrifice and eating of cows in the period spanning 6th to 4th centuries B.C. Thus the *Majjhima Nikaya* speaks of skilled cow butchers. (*MN, III.153*). The *Suttanipata* refers to, "Thousands of cows meant for killing in a sacrifice." (*Stp, VII.1.154*). Elsewhere, another Pali text, states that, "The king Ikshavaku performed a sacrifice in which he slaughtered several hundred cows... The king caught the cows by their horns and then killed them" (*Brahamana Dhammika Sutta I.4.25*).

The above constitutes irrefutable evidence about the slaughter of cows for sacrifice and eating in ancient India. It exposes the RSS-BJP as cynical charlatans who have no qualms in falsifying history to serve their communal ends.

It was several centuries later, in the last phase of the Vedic period that cow slaughter gradually came to be disapproved of. The basic reason for this was the shift from pastoral activities to settled agriculture around the 7th century BC. The availability of iron tools, including iron tipped ploughs encouraged this shift. This in turn enhanced the value of bullocks and cows as intrinsic components of agrarian operations. Hence the slaughtering cattle on a large scale for ritual and consumption purposes was no longer viable. This change finds reflection in some Brahmanical, Buddhist and Jaina texts of the time. Thus, the Satapatha Brahmana (part 1, chapter 1-3, 6-7) argues for offering of rice and

barely in place of flesh of cows in sacrificial rituals. This is the first reference to shifting of pastoral activities to more settled agrarian life. According to the Brahmandhammika Sutta of the Suttanipata (Buddhist text of 4th cent. B.C. – Varanasi edition, chapter 12, page 74), the Buddha teaches that cattle should be protected. Referring to ideal brahmanas of ancient times he state that, “they performed a sacrifice in which cattle were present, but were not slaughtered. Like mother, father, brother or other close relatives, cattle are our great friends, and because of them plants grow.” The cattle and particularly cows are givers of food, strength, beauty and happiness.” The Buddha further says that because they realized it nbow all the brahamanas don’t kill cows. The Jaina text Utrradhyana Sutta (chapter IV 17.15-19) about 5th century BC) states that, “The slaughter of animals is prescribed in all the Vedas and it is a sinful act.” All these injunctions, religious or otherwise, were based on economic necessities of the time. Despite them, cow slaughter and consumption of beef never ceased.



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RSS Against India

3



The RSS and its "Beef" Politics

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