

**STATEMENTS IN DEFINING THE IMPORTANCE OF COW IN SANSKRIT
LITERATURE**

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ABSTRACT

This article aims at debunking the sanctity of the cow that has gained ground as a political vehicle in contemporary times, and exposing the selective reading of texts employed otherwise to further particular religious leanings. Through the course of this article, a wide array of evidence from religious scriptures, legal texts, archaeological materials, epics, commentaries, edicts, foreign travellers' accounts, debates, statutes and judicial decisions have been resorted to, in order to enable a comprehensive understanding of the trajectory of the cow from sacrificial slaughter to prohibitory injunctions on beef consumption. This article, to begin with, traces the treatment of the cow to the earliest Vedic texts through an academic survey to demystify popular misconceptions regarding religious injunctions against cow slaughter and the inherent sacredness of the cow. It then explores an amalgamation of theories put forth to explicate the transition from cow killing to the present inviolability of the cow. Finally, this article examines the legal and juridical discourse on sanctifying the cow, by tracing Constituent Assembly debates and a series of judgements on cow slaughter under the colonial administration and post-Independence, to conclude that judicial intervention has failed to engage with the religious debate satisfactorily and has made a mockery of constitutional secularism in promoting and normalizing a single dominant caste Hindu narrative.

Keywords: Hinduism, slaughter, saffronization, sacred object, secularism

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The term 'holy' or 'sacred' indicates the connection of a space or object with God, and posits a need to preserve it by virtue of this divine connection. Brahmanical sources beginning from the Rigveda indicate that the Indo-Aryans migrated to India around the middle of the second millennium bce and brought with them pastoralism, nomadism and animal sacrifice. The killing of cattle for ritualistic purposes served the palate of Vedic divinities, including Indra's indulgence in bulls, Agni's dietary preference of the barren cow, oxen and bulls amongst others; a similar diet followed by Soma, all further evidenced by the explicit mention of 21 yajnas in the Gopatha Brahmana.

The Rigveda avers a public horse sacrifice (ashvamedha), the finalé of which was marked by the sacrifice of 21 sterile cows. Furthermore, cow sacrifice in ritualistic arrangements played a crucial role in rajasuya, vajapeya and agnistoma according to the Satapatha Brahmana. Subsequent post-Vedic/pre-Mauryan Brahmanical texts such as the Grhyasutras and Dharmasutras contain sufficient evidence of eating of flesh including beef by way of domestic rites and rituals (such as shulagava, or the ‘sacrifice of the ox on the spit’, simantonnayana, a ceremony performed in the midst of pregnancy and upanayana, the investiture ceremony preceding the commencement of studenthood); ceremonial welcoming of guests (thereby qualifying the term ‘go-ghna’—one for whom a cow is killed—for guests, according to Panini) and funerary rites.

The latter emphasizes on the intimate relation between cow slaughter and the cult of the dead, which entailed the use of cow skin and fat to cover the dead body, and shraddhas such as astaka that expressly required cow killing. The Vedic sage, Yajnavalkya is believed to have explicitly asserted, ‘I, for one eat beef, provided it is tender’. While Keith attempts to derive authority for the cow’s sanctity from Vedic texts, Norman Brown refutes his claims, some of which are relevant to exposing the prevailing misconceptions of the notion of sanctity; Keith’s reference to evil consequences ensuing consumption of a Brahmin’s cow must be construed as penance for consuming a Brahmin’s possession not reflective of an inherent inviolability of the cow as such.

Another prescription cautioning meat eaters with retribution in the next world must be read in alignment with its contextual warning for omitting the use of the Bihati and Usnth meters in morning sacrificial litany, and not as an injunction against cattle slaughter. Furthermore, archaeological evidence of cow/ox bones bearing definite cut marks with signs of charring found in association with stone tools, corroborates the fact of non-ritual killing and cooking of cattle from the Harappan civilization, Chalcolithic age and throughout Painted Grey Ware sites dated first millennium bce at Meerut (eleventh to third century bce), Kurukshetra, Mathura amongst others. D. N. Jha’s narrative explicates the role of ritual substitution against the backdrop of substitution of Vedic Aryan pastoralism with settled agriculture and the increasing agricultural utility rendered by cattle.

The injection of religious sanction to effectuate economic productivity coincides with the advent of Upanishadic thought that brought with it a wave of questions in direct opposition to established practice, and built the foundational blocks of the doctrine of ahimsa. While the Bhagavad Gita does not develop the principles of ahimsa, Buddhism and Jainism, on the other hand, spearheaded the attack on Brahmanism manifested in their aversion to beef and other animal flesh.

Early Buddhism, despite its antagonism to animal sacrifice, rationalized the idea of non-injury to animals in the path to nirvana on grounds of moral inferiority of animals attributable to their promiscuity. Interestingly, interactions between Brahmins and Buddha have been recorded in the

Samyutta Nikaya and Sutta Nipata that display the latter's prescriptions regarding prohibitions on cattle butchery, which is said to have transformed the attitude of Brahmins as well. However, mention of skilled cow-butchers, slaughter-houses for oxen, positing of unseen, unheard, unsuspected meat as the three pure kinds of flesh in Buddhist tradition, and permissible consumption of bear, fish, swine and alligator during illness (Vinaya Pitaka), are in direct conflict with the staunch prohibition.

Jataka stories further analyse the prevalence of beef eating by Bodhisat deer flesh by warriors and venison by a king. The inconsistencies can be reconciled by the pragmatic approach of Buddhism (Sutta Nipata) encapsulated in the doctrine of Middle Path, wherein vegetarianism was not commanded as mandatory. enumerating animals exempt from animal sacrifice and silence on the cow is reflective of the absence of a sanctimonious position acquired by the cow in third century bce. While Kautilya's Arthashastra (second century bce to third century ce), on one hand, makes killing of the calf, bull or milch cow a minor offence, on the other, it recommends the use of cow bones and dung as manure and speaks of some cattle, sunamahisah, fit only for the supply of flesh.

Foreign travellers' accounts too suggest contradictory Buddhist cuisines; Chinese Buddhist Fa-hsien's travelogue on his visit to India indicated abstention from meat consumption by Buddha, the Chinese text, Fan-wang Ching included flesh eating as a light defilement, while Hsüan Tsang admitted to Mahayanist consumption of geese, deer and calves.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Adeney, K., & Saez, L. (2007) Domesticated Indian zebu cattle were present on the western margins of the South Asian subcontinent as early as 6000 B.C. Cattle were important in the agricultural economy of the Harappan civilization of the Indus Valley, but archaeological evidence suggests the bull was also assuming a symbolic or religious role in this culture during the third millennium B.C. There is, however, little to suggest that the cow was viewed as sacred. Following the decline of the Harappan civilization, northwestern India was settled by Aryan-speaking peoples who laid the foundations of modern Indian society. The Aryans were pastoral by nature and the economic importance of cattle to this society is mirrored in the role of cattle in ritual, in the pastoral symbolism of the Vedic literature (the ancient religious literature of Hinduism), and also in the association of the cow with various Vedic deities. Yet, again there is nothing to suggest the cow was viewed as sacred at this time. It is not until the appearance of the *ahimsa* philosophy at the end of the Vedic period, and the acceptance of this belief in the major religious philosophies of the region (Jainism, Buddhism, and later Hinduism), that the concept of the sanctity and inviolability of the cow began to crystallize. The "sacred-cow concept" appears as established doctrine in Hindu literature by the end of the medieval period (ca. fourth century A.D.), although popular practice appears to be at variance with this doctrine. A variety of historical, political, religious and social factors appear to have contributed to the general

acceptance of the sacred cow doctrine by the Hindu population at large. During the 1960s, the “sacred cow” was at the center of a controversy in the social sciences concerning whether the concept was essentially religious in nature or reflected the ecological realities of the cattle economy of the Indian subcontinent. This debate notwithstanding, cattle remain central to the Indian economy, but also play a significant role in the religion and rituals of modern Hinduism, particularly those related to the worship of Krishna. Cattle have also assumed a political role in contemporary India, with anti-cow-slaughter legislation and the protection of the cow being identified with the emerging Hindutva movement. No understanding of South Asian culture can be complete without an awareness of the economic, historical, political and religious dimensions of cattle in the Indian subcontinent.

Alsdorf, L. (2010) In Sanskrit, the word nature means 'prakṛti' referring to the environment of all living beings which is a matter of great importance in the present. Environmental pollution has become a serious problem for the entire planet. Environmentalists have been offering suggestions from time to time to provide environmental conservation measures and to prevent pollution. But the main thing is to alter people's perceptions. There is no solution to this problem unless there is a change in human consumerism. The key to changing this attitude lies in our minds. Understanding and accepting the non-sentient reality of natural forces is necessary for living in harmony with nature. Since the Vedic period, nature has been instrumental in various literary works. Ancient Sanskrit literature, viz., the Vedas, the Rāmāyaṇa, the Mahābhārata, the Purāṇas, and the classical Sanskrit Literature and so on, reflected the interdependence of nature and mankind. Our ancient poets have minutely observed nature and have given an artistic touch to their works when they depict human feelings towards nature. Although their natural consciousness is not always explicit, a deep study of their works reveals their implicit knowledge of depicting harmony with nature. Bhāsa, the earliest Sanskrit dramatist, was a profound lover and keen observer of nature. The thirteen plays of Bhāsa throw light on the flora and fauna that greatly contributed to the wealth of the forest of his period. Natural beauties filled with picturesque features that form part of their essential natural character find a very unique place in Bhāsa's Svapnavāsavadatta and Pratimā. Adopting considerable measures to make people aware of our dependence on nature is the prime concern of the hour. In the present paper, an attempt is made to focus the harmonious relationship between mother nature and human beings as revealed in the Svapnavāsavadattā and the Pratimā dramas of Bhāsa.

Banerjee, P. (2015) At the close of the Vedic period the cow was still an article of food and was appreciated for that reason, as well as for its other economic values. The doctrine of the cow's sanctity does not appear at all in Vedic literature. The general Buddhist and Jain, and later Hindu, doctrine of Ahimsa appears at the end of the Vedic period and at that time enters the stream of Brahmanical religious teaching, but the doctrine of the special sanctity of the cow is not at first associated with it.

The sanctity of the cow is first recorded in the works composed close to the beginning of the Christian era, though the texts of that time treat it equivocally. The doctrine gets a strong position by the time of the completion of the Mahabharata, say at the beginning of the Gupta dynasty, about the 4th Century A D. Its position was made firm doctrinally in Brahmanical circles in the period of composition of the Puranas, and it becomes widely diffused among the Hindu community, gaining ever increasing prestige from then on.

Chigateri, S. (2011) Traditional medical system has always played an important role in the maintenance of health of mankind. Modern medicine has been drawing inputs from these traditional systems since their very beginning. Samskara in Ayurveda, is a process of transformation of inherent attributes of a substance. This is created by dilution, application of heat, cleansing, churning, storing in a specific place, maturing, flavoring, impregnation, preservation, container etc. Ancient scholars considered that Ghrita is able to perform multiple actions if processed accordingly. On the base of this, many Samskaras are employed for Ghrita and subsequently various pharmacological actions are observed. Shatadhouta Ghrita and Sahsradhouta Ghrita are also an outcome of that keen observation. Shatadhouta Ghrita and Sahasradhouta Ghrita are two Ayurvedic preparations, which are prepared by washing cow ghee for hundred and thousand times respectively. They are considered as best alleviators of Pitta Dosha and burning sensation, in the treatments of wound healing. On the basis of detailed literary review, it was understood that, Shatadhouta Ghrita and Sahasradhouta Ghrita should be prepared by pressure washing of Ghrita with water. These preparations are indicated for Dahashamana action. Both of them have the properties as that of oil in water kind of emulsion.

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3.0 STATEMENTS OF THE COW IN DIFFERENT VEDAS AND ETHICS:

Cow – The Universal symbol of Motherhood

Cow is an ideal animal in Deity Bramha's creation. As per spiritual science, the four Purushārthas, namely, Dharma, Artha, Kāma, and Moksha can be acquired by serving the cow. While praising the cow, the principal Deities, namely, Bramha, Vishṇu and Shiva have narrated the following shloka:

त्वं माता सर्व देवानां त्वं च यज्ञस्य कारणम् ।

त्वं तीर्थं सर्वतीर्थानां नमस्तेस्तु सदानधे ।

Meaning: O Destroyer of sins! You are the mother of all Deities. You are the reason for yadnya (sacrificial fire). Among all Tirthas (Holy places), you are the holiest. I pay my obeisance to you.

What do Vēdās say about the cow?

1. As per the Vēdās, cow is considered as a Universal symbol

As per the Atharvavēda, 33 crore Deities reside inside the cow. While describing the Divine form of cow, Bhagawan Shrikrushṇa has said,

धनूनामस्मि कामधुक'

In the ancient Rushikuls (Hermitage of Sages), Cow sēvā (service) was compulsory along with Guru-sēvā (Service unto the Guru).

Slay the Cow slaughterers. – Atharvavēda 1-16-4

यदि नो गां हमि यद्यश्चं यदि पूरुषम् ।

तं त्वा सीसेन विध्यामो यथा नोऽसो अवीरहा ॥

(अथर्ववेद १।१६।)

Meaning: If someone destroys our cows, horses or people, kill him with a bullet of lead.

Gou Karuna Nidhi, Rushi Dayanand Saraswati, Surajmal Tyagi, E- 370, A, Shastri Nagar, Ajmer, Rajsthan ('Aryaniti', 10.2.2011)

इममूर्णायुं वरुणस्य नाभिं त्वचं पशूनां द्विपदां चतुष्पदाम् ।

त्वष्टुं प्रजानां प्रथमं जनित्रमग्रे मा हिंसीः परमे व्योमन् ॥

(यजुर्वेद अ० १२, मन्त्र ४०)

अनुमन्ता विशसिता निहन्ता क्रयविक्रयी संस्कर्ता चोपहर्ता च खादकश्चेति घातकाः

मनुस्मृति ५।५१

Meaning: Those who permit slaying of animals; those who bring animals for slaughter; those who slaughter; those who sell meat; those who purchase meat; those who prepare dish out of it; those who serve that meat and those who eat are all murderers.

Panchagavya – A Divine medicine

गव्यं पवित्रं च रसायनं च पथ्यं च हृद्यं बलबुद्धिकृत् स्यात् ।

आयुःप्रदं रक्तविकारहारी त्रिदोषहृद्रोगविषापहं स्यात् ॥

Meaning: Panchagavya is an extremely pure chemical. It is healthy when included in diet, gives joy to the heart, increases life span, strength and intellectual capability. It is the destroyer of the three doshās (The three defects as per Āyurveda). It also destroys all the impurities and disorders of blood. It can cure cardiac disorders. By consuming it, all physical, mental and psychological problems can be overcome. (Rishi Prasad, October 2009, Prushtha.27)

Importance of Cow Urine and Cow dung

Importance and medical use of Cow urine

Cow urine which has a unique place in Ayurveda, the ancient Indian system of medicine. Commenting on the chemistry of gau mutra, Cow urine is used to produce a whole range of ayurvedic drugs, especially to treat skin diseases like eczema. Besides, gau mutra is a well known disinfectant. Anti-septic property is also the attribute of cow dung or gobar which is mixed with clay to form a plastering medium for mud huts. It is a proven fact that mud huts plastered with gobar keeps insects and reptiles away. This is the reason why people in the countryside still store grain in huge earthen pots plastered with gobar and gau mutra to keep it free from insect manifestations.

In Mahabharat era Nakul was known as the famous cow urine therapist. Indians believe that cow urine enhances holiness and purity when spread in courtyard and home. Makes there is need to refocus, in a creative enterprise, on cow as a source of health, wealth and happiness. Cow urine has wonderful properties. It is used in purification of many strong poisons, sub poisons, metals, and sub metals, ras, maharas, and astrologist stones. Poisonous materials become poison less within 3 to 7 days if purified with it according to the Indian method.

Importance of cow dung

Ancient scripture state that “Suryaketu” nerve on cow’s back absorbs harmful radiations and cleanses atmosphere. Mere presence of cows is a great contribution to environment. India has approximately 30 crore cattle. Using their dung to produce bio gas, we can save 6.0 crore ton of firewood every year. This would arrest deforestation to that extent. African deserts were made fertile using cow dung. We can reduce acid content in water by treating it with cow dung. Hence we can say that cow dung has important role in preserving environment.

When we burn cow dung, it balances atmospheric temperature and kills germs in the air. Cow dung has antiseptic, anti radioactive and anti thermal properties. When we coat the walls and clean the floors of house with cow dung, it protects the dwellers. In 1984, gas leak in Bhopal killed more than 20,000 people. Those living in houses with cow dung coated walls were not affected. Atomic power centres in India and Russia even today use cow dung to shield radiation.

Cow dung fertiliser is important in helping to improve the structure of the soil (aggregation). Animal manure has been used for centuries as a fertiliser in farming, improving the soil structure so that it holds more nutrients and water and becomes more fertile. Animal manure also encourages soil microbial activity which promotes the soil's trace mineral supply, improving plant nutrition. It also contains some nitrogen and other nutrients itself which assist the growth of plants.

4.0 CONCLUSION

This article has attempted to expose the inconsistencies in religious literature, otherwise cited as authoritative to legitimate the sanctity of the cow, similar selective reading of which has been engrained into present-day formal adjudication mechanisms, effectively rigidifying religious doctrines. While it can be argued that Brahmanical texts authored by a small segment of society cannot be representative of the opinions of the citizenry; in a context of a plethora of corroborative evidence, religious texts condemning or adapting to local practices are reflective of popular opinion, which suffices the aim of the article to delink relations between ancient prescriptions and contemporary religious sanctity accorded to the cow. In the absence of evidence to the contrary, the cow was not inherently and inviolably sacred, yet, has acquired notions of sanctity on account of an amalgamation of forces ranging from economic utility, social acculturation and linguistic misconception of symbolism to strategic Brahmanical positioning when faced with popular ideological confrontations from Buddhism and the subsequent emergence of the 'ahimsa' doctrine. It is pertinent to consider a non-uniform approach to the transition in attitudes towards the cow disseminated across time and space, to reiterate the workings of history as a combination of various factors, not operating at the same time in the same place. Moreover, while numerous decisions have been delivered on the sacred cow controversy, only a few have been selectively critiqued in this article to unveil the judicial discourse in landmark judgements at the Apex Court in its contribution to constitutional secularism in India.

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