

(Draft for private circulation)

Towards Banning of Cow-Slaughter in India

A NOTE

According to Indian belief, India, from the beginning of time, is a land of the sacred. Here all life including insects, ants, all animals and plants, big or small, each and everyone has a sanctity of his or her own and the soul of each living being migrates from one life-form to another life-form till the individual soul, after countless births and rebirths gets absorbed into the ultimate cosmic or divine form. In India even those, often tend to believe in this theory of transmigration from one life to another, who have over recent centuries been converted to other faiths like Islam or Christianity. Of all beings the cow, in India, is treated as the most sacred and sanctified. This sense of the unique sacredness of the cow is expressed in the works of ancient Indian Rishis (like in the Vedas, etc.) as well as in later literature and folklore.

Since about 1860 AD British and European scholarship started a new interpretation of the Vedas to impress upon the westernised in India that the ancient Vedas, etc., also advocated, celebrated, and feasted on the flesh of the cow, or bullock, on special occasions. This mid 19th century western view, despite its considerable scholarly effort to degrade the status of the cow in the view of the Indians, has however made little impact on the Indian mind.

Notwithstanding the daily endless slaughter of the cow for cow flesh, by the British for some 150 years, and the cow's widespread neglect during the British rule and the increasingly emaciated state of the cow today, the cow remains sacred and holy to the generality of the Indian people. Ever since the British first started the systematic, daily, large scale, organised, and factory-modelled slaughter of cattle in India, for providing cow-flesh to British officers and soldiers and for the other British and other Europeans who increasingly began to live in various parts of India from about AD1750 onwards, the people of India had been anxiously waiting for a complete stoppage to the extensive and increasing killing of the cow and its progeny

and continued by the post-independence governments of India, for one reason or other, even after 1947. For the past 150 years, Indians have been trying through various movements, to restore the *paramparic* sense of sacredness and the inviolate stature of the cow in the Indian society.

II

The most massive and recent protest against cow slaughter was by lakhs of *Sanyasis* and *sadhus* in Delhi in November 1966, but to practically no lasting effects. After the 1966 Delhi protest, *dharnas*, fasts, etc, the government of India did set up a high power committee in 1967 to suggest ways and means for the complete stoppage of the slaughter of the cow. But the committee fell apart in its very first meeting and it seems it did not ever meet again. A few years later Acharya Vinoba Bhave undertook a fast to effect a complete ban on the slaughter of the cow. Promises were made to him by the then Prime Ministers that they will bring about such a ban soon. But nothing happened though 25 years have passed since then. The setting up of the present National Commission on Cattle may be seen as a step by the present government to move in the direction of imposing such a ban to fulfil the expectations of the Indian people, and the promises made, the latest of which was to Sri Jayendra Saraswati Swamigal, the Sankaracharya of Kanchi Kamakotipeetam.

The Commission is to examine the various laws and enactments which relate to the cow, to its welfare and to the objective that its non-killing becomes as effective as the law now provides, the problems which arise in the application of various law and rules, to the present state of the 20-30 Indian cow breeds and to find ways and means of restoring their purity and health and wellbeing and to look into the economic contribution of the cow through calves, milk, cow-dung, cow-urine and other minute but more wide spread contribution to Indian society and economy. And the final, but somewhat unstated aim is to soon bring about the complete stoppage of the ill-treatment and slaughter of the cow and its progeny.

But the commission needs to appreciate that its appointment, in the first place, is a manifestation of the yearning of the Indian people for the past 150 years to restore the *paramparic* sense of sacredness and the inviolate stature of the cow in the Indian society. We need to not only understand the expectations, of the people of India, from the commission, but respect their

sentiments as well. After independence the continuing low status of the cow in Indian public life, has been caused by two major factors. One is the misperception of the westernised amongst us that this is a sensitive issue between the Hindu and the Muslim communities. That it is not so is brought out by facts mentioned briefly later on in this note. In fact during the debates in the Constituent Assembly (1946-1949), the Muslim members offered to support an outright ban on cow slaughter. The second factor seems to be that the elite of India have become so westernised in their outlook that they feel embarrassed to recognise the widely held perception about the sacredness of the cow and all life forms by the vast majority. All such *paramparic* perceptions, according to them are a sign of backwardness. It also could be that they are afraid of the consequences of founding and basing of institutions and systems on such beliefs. These two factors seem to be behind all policies of the Government of India since independence.

Therefore if the commission is to be effective and earnest to the aspirations of the people of India, it needs to go into numerous other problems especially those connected with the ancient as well as more recent background of the question of cow-slaughter in India, as well as the position of Indian agriculture and cattle wealth around AD 1800, and the process and the numerous British policies and acts which have led them into their 200 years old continuing decline. It also needs to examine carefully the history of molestation and killing of the cow which is stated to have started with the eruption of Islamic conquerors into India.

III

Though Islam started entering parts of India by the 8th century AD, Islam's widespread impact on large parts of northern and western India largely began about 1200 AD. From about 1200 AD to 1700 AD Islamic rulers, mostly hailing from western and central Asia began to dominate the polity of the north and western part of India. During these five centuries, a substantial number of the rural Indian people, especially in the Punjab and the Bengal, also got converted to Islam.

Before they came to India, the food habits of the west and central Asian Islamic immigrants was largely the eating of some type of bread with the flesh of sheep, goat and camel. On festive and religious occasions (especially on the feast of Bakr-Id which happened once a year) Islamic

tradition had prescribed the sacrifice, killing and eating of a sheep, or a goat, and when there were seven or more to share the feast, then a camel could be sacrificed. The question of the sacrifice of the cow was not there as the land where Islam arose did not have many cows.

When Islam settled into India it continued to sacrifice the sheep, the goat, the camel on the Bakr-Id and such occasions. At times, however, it took to sacrificing the cow instead of the camel. As there naturally was some animosity between the Indian people and the Islamic conquerors, the latter at times, to humiliate and insult local sentiments, began to kill the cow, largely to impress the conquered of the conqueror's power. But it seems that at the same time, due to political necessity and the need to reduce the hostility of the conquered to Islamic dominance, many of the Islamic kings at various times also forbade the killing of the cow in the areas they ruled. Not much work however has so far been done on the frequency of cow killing during this 500 years (1200AD-1700AD) of Islamic dominance. A modern estimate (c. 1950) by Lala Hardev Sahay of Haryana, a well known advocate of banning all cow slaughter, suggests that the maximum number of cows killed *in any single year*, during Islamic dominance, would not ordinarily have exceeded 20,000 cows (Biography 1995, pp 105). In contrast according to Mahatma Gandhi, 30,000 cows were slaughtered *daily (1 crore 10 lacs annually)* by the British around 1917 (CWMG:14, page 80).

It seems that a large number of the Indian converts to Islam did not ever take to the killing or eating of cow flesh. Therefore, as the dominance of Islam disappeared around 1700, so did the killing of the cow. It can reasonably be assumed that there was very little killing of the cow after about 1700 AD. Strangely however, the impression, originating perhaps around the mid 19th century, has continued till date, that the slaughter of the cow at present, or in the past 200 years, is a continuation from the days of Islamic dominance. Moreover there is no effort to make a distinction between the killing of the cow for political or for sacrificial reasons, during some 500 years of Islamic dominance. Even as learned and thoughtful as the judges of the Supreme Court of India are, when giving their judgements on the present day slaughter of what are termed as useless cattle, do not seem to have made much effort to find out the reasons for such large scale killing of the cow and other cattle during the last two centuries till now, and whether this has anything to do with the sacrificial or political killing done during some 500 years of Islamic dominance.

IV

For some 2000 years Europe has been a major consumer of the flesh of the cow. Naturally therefore the killing of the cow by Europeans, especially the British, started soon after they began to establish themselves in various parts of India in the early 18th century. To begin with the number of cows killed would not have been too noticeable. But by the end of the 18th century such killing would have assumed larger proportions, and large number of slaughter houses on the European pattern would have been set up in various parts of India by the Commissariat wing of the three British armies (of Bengal, Madras and Bombay presidencies). To do such killing large number of slaughterers had to be found. As the vast majority of the Hindus would have declined the job, some of the converted Indian Christians and such Muslims who were accustomed to being butchers were persuaded and cajoled to adopt the profession of cow-slaughterers.

The number of British officers and soldiers were around 20,000 at c. 1800 AD. In 1856 AD this number is stated to have been around 45,000. This number of British army officers and soldiers increased by the end of 1858, i.e. after the mutiny, to over one lakh and stayed at that during 1858-1910, and of the British and other Europeans to around 3 to 5 lakhs between 1800-1900. As the major part of this increased army personnel was posted in northern India, consequently the killing of the cow and the consumption of cow flesh by the British in northern India would have multiplied four fold or more. Such a sudden increase in cow slaughter, along with the increased impressment of strong bullocks for the transport of the increased army, which had been going on for over a century wherever the British army moved, greatly alarmed the people of the northern India.

Numerous massive protests against this cow-killing have no doubt taken place since 1850, especially the one starting around 1870 by the Namdhari Sikhs (popularly known as the Kukas). A few years later Swami Dayananda Saraswati gave the call for the stoppage of cow-slaughter by the British, and suggested the formation of Go-samvardhani Sabhas. These culminated in becoming a massive India-wide protest form 1880 onwards till 1893. Practically, everybody, in Northern and Central India was a part of this movement and crores of people, including large number of Muslims, participated in it in all possible ways. Many of the *Sanyasis* from South India spread it all over the country. The movement was finally crushed by the British through the instigation of major riots between the Musalmans and the Hindus.

V

We must thank Queen Victoria of Great Britain to have broadcast the truth about the widespread killing of the cow in India, by the British, in her letter to her Indian Viceroy. During the anti kine-killing movement of 1880-1894 Queen Victoria referred to the subject thus on December 8, 1893, “Though the Muhammadans’ cow killing is made the *pretext* for the agitation, it is *in fact*, directed against us, who kill far more cows for our army, etc, than the Muhammadans”. Not only most Indians, Hindus, Muslims and Christians saw this clearly at the time, but a large number of high British officers knew, and talked amongst themselves, about the fact that the anti kine-killing agitation was actually against the widespread killing of the cow to supply daily cow flesh to the over 1,00,000 British soldiers and the officers of the British army in India, and the several lakh British and Europeans living in India to assist in the running of the British imperial system.

These facts need to be examined by the commission and the impression dispelled that the matter of cow slaughter has anything to do with the Muslim sensitivity. A study which is required, and which one hopes could be completed during the term of the present Commission, is about the role of Islam in India, both as rulers and as subjects, since AD 1200, in relation to the cow. Various unrelated statements are current about the relationship. The major statement which has been much current, possibly through British instigation in the 19th and early 20th century has been that the Muslims are the main killer of the cow. In contrast it is also widely stated that several of the major Muslim rulers of Delhi, and other places, strictly forbade the killing of the cow and its progeny, during their reigns or for fairly long periods. No work seems to have been done on the regions, or total period of time where and when such prohibitions were actually enforced. On closer examination we may be surprised to find only a small section amongst the Muslims and a still smaller number amongst those currently termed scheduled-caste Hindus partaking of cow flesh.

VI

Around 1946, and till a few years later, the Animal Husbandry Departments of the Governments in India could be considered as considerate and loving to the animals especially towards the cow and its progeny. But by 1950, a substantial section of the powerful in India had not only lost any interest

they had in the subject of cow-care, instead they began to be tempted by the material and commercial advantages of continuing the slaughter of cows.

During 1947-48 a committee of the Animal Husbandry Department of the Government of India chaired by Sardar Datar Singh also urged upon the country to put a total ban on the slaughter of the cow, in two stages, but within a period of two years. This recommendation was taken up by most of the states of India, and within a few years laws were enacted in most states **banning the slaughter of all cattle below the age of 15.** The committee constituted in Uttar Pradesh in 1948 included prominent persons from all communities, it had the Nawab of Chattari, and Justice Maharaj Singh (a judge of the UP High Court and also a Christian) among its members. But the interest and work of these committees was substantially marred by the Government of India telling them, in 1950, that cow slaughter should not be stopped as the export of hides bring India foreign exchange, and that the leather of a slaughtered animal was far more valuable than that of a fallen animal.

VII

In 1954 a Government of India committee, established to suggest ways to stop cow slaughter came up with the observation that as India had little fodder and cattle-feed, it could only maintain 40 out of the 100 cattle India had. It recommended that the rest, 60, should be culled. This view was officially expressed by the Expert Committee on the prevention of Slaughter of Cattle in India, its report was submitted in January 1955.

In the same year (1954), replying to a debate in the Lok Sabha on a non-official Bill demanding the total banning of the slaughter of the cow and its progeny, the then Prime Minister of India told the Lok Sabha that if the Bill under consideration was passed he would have to consider resigning from the Prime Ministership. This threat of the then Prime Minister led to the withdrawal of the Bill, a Bill which had been debated in the Lok Sabha for some two years and on the adoption of which there seemed to be general agreement in the House.

From henceforth along with the learned judgements of the Supreme Court the Government in Delhi became an advocate of larger slaughter of cows as well as other animals for this purpose and that, and in recent decades has started handing out grants and loans for setting up of huge modern slaughter houses.

The Report of the High-power committee of 1954, advocating the elimination of around 60 percent of India's cattle wealth was followed by similar other reports in the following decades. The National Commission on Agriculture – 1976, some twenty years later amongst others, suggested that:

“The buffalo should be developed not only for enhancement of milk production but also *for making it a source of production of quality meat*

“A deliberate and energetic drive should be made to develop for export trade in buffalo meat.

“Modernisation of slaughter houses should be undertaken immediately.

“Massive programmes for improving the reproductive and productive efficiencies of cattle and buffaloes should be undertaken. Low producing stock should be progressively eliminated so that the limited feed and fodder resources are available for proper feeding of high producing animals.”

In July 1995, the Government of India claimed before the Supreme Court that: “It is obvious that the central government as a whole is encouraging scientific and sustainable development of livestock resources and their efficient utilization which inter-alia includes production of quality meat for export as well as for domestic market. This is being done with a view of increasing the national wealth as well as better returns to the farmer.”

VIII

This shows how far, within three years of the British quitting India, those who were in the position of making policies had deviated from the traditional belief held by Indian from ancient times, and even today, by the majority of our people. The Commission may therefore, look into the relationship of the cow with the Indian society through history. It may look into the ancient, the days of the great *rishis*, then into the long period of Indian history reaching to the days of Harshavardhana and in fact upto about AD 1200; then into the Islamic intervention and the condition of the cow then; then into the beginning of the European imposition on India and the setting up of hundreds of slaughter houses; then the departure of the British from about 1946 but of our carrying on more or less in the British ways, even worse, in the past 55 years. world.

We have also gone for large scale mixing up of Indian cows and foreign cows etc., with the result that most of our cattle are becoming non-descript.

We now not only export hides and leather, but we are proud of increasing the scale of export of all varieties of meat to the outside world. Such export of the huge amount of meat of innocent animals is a heinous crime not only **against them but as well against our tradition and civilsization.** Till we completely stop this export there does not seem to be any way at all to even begin stopping cow-slaughter, or to regain our suppressed and down-trodden civilisation and also our *parampara* to flourish again.

IX

What our ancestors have told us about their instinct and experience, and perhaps on the basis of some limited ancient texts, and oft-quoted oral sayings, the more reflective and scholarly amongst us may today just have a glimpse of through modern scientific learning. About 150 years ago there were about 350 varieties of flowers in the Valley of Flowers, in the Himalayas. Now only some 50-100 are left. The decline seems to be because of the enforced stoppage, according to modern understanding, of grazing in the area. The question of the cow, agriculture, our beliefs, *swabhava* etc.. are all interrelated. We need to look into all these aspects if we need to be effective. Based on such linkages and relationships, based on which perhaps an Indian indigenous theory could be constructed on plants, animals, environment, *swabhava*, etc.. India requires an in depth history of the Indian cow and its relation with life and society around it, from ancient times to the present. Perhaps the Commission can initiate the preparation of such a study and its publication.

From about AD 1770 in places like Surat, Malwa, Patna etc. through the introduction of new cash crops cultivated on plantation basis, the British and other Europeans tried to introduce new methods and species amidst Indian agriculture, cattle rearing and the like. What they did then was according to their own understanding and needs, and not necessarily to disrupt India to begin with. These experiments increased, multiplied, some cancelled the others, and by about 1860, the shape of Indian agriculture and life and breeding of cattle began to change at least in the British-managed plantations specialising in opium, cotton, indigo, sugar-care, tea, coffee.

In the same way irrigation practices began to be deeply affected soon after 1800. In the Bengal and Bihar area there began to be much British unhappiness with floods in the great rivers of India, which brought rich silt from the Himalayas which was welcomed according to the indigenous knowledge and there were ways of coping with the floods but these began to be treated as calamities. Perhaps the commission needs to look into the numerous causes of the wide-spread impoverishment and bio-degradation we have faced especially since 1800; go in detail into the background of our agriculture and cattle keeping and the disruptions and alterations these have faced in the past 200 years; and *gather detailed data on each district of India* as regards i) forests, ii) pastures, iii) village grazing lands, iv) cultivated lands of various kinds indicating those which were irrigated and the source of irrigation and v) the extent of area sown under different major crops in periods stretching if possible, from about 1850 onwards say for the years 1850,1890,1940,1970 and 1995. Similarly we need to know the details of cattle in each period and also the number and type of other domestic animals. Next we need the number of cattle slaughtered in each period (if possible the number of cows, bullocks, male calves, female calves and bulls). Since about 1950 or may be from about 1920 or 1930 we need to know the number of animals (cattle separately) for export as meat from each of these districts. Similarly we need to have details of traction used in ploughing etc. specially since about 1940 when we would have started going for tractors and other power-driven mechanical means.

X

Finally if total prohibition of cow slaughter has to be enforced by a particular date what major changes would have to be made in the cropping pattern and the crops which are grown, the changes in fertilising the land, major variations in irrigation and allied matters to make Indian agriculture more healthy and prosperous as it was till about 1800.

There are also a large number, perhaps a few thousand pamphlets, posters etc. relating to the anti-kine-killing movements especially after 1860. Such material, to the extent possible, should be located and made part of the literature on Indian agriculture and the cow.

