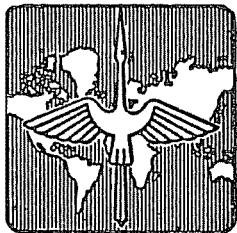


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**Cows and Cow-slaughter  
in India:  
religious, political and social aspects**

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Working Paper. The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Institute of Social Studies.

India is a land of sacred cows. They are abundant in the fields; are present with gods in every temple; figure prominently in Parliament and Assemblies; are the deciding factor in elections, and are the subject of judgement in the highest court of India. The sacredness has attained such heights that social scientists from all over the world have made attempts; to find an approach to the study of sacred cows. Cultural ecologists (Harris 1966) and economists (Raj 1969, Heston 1971) have argued intensely in favour of the appropriateness of their respective approach to the problem. I attempt here to add yet another approach, which I call a sociological approach.

The objective of this paper is to demonstrate the cultural meaning of cow, which is held in great reverence by Hindus, and to show that these values of sacredness are more heavily influenced by the socio-political system than by the economic system. The metaphysical ideas centering around cow worship in India are part of the wider central value system of Hindus, which seeks to establish a relationship between man and divine. These central values of Hindu society reinforce motivational commitment to cow worship. The concept of the sacredness of cow and the religious action of cow protection are deeply ingrained in the thoughts, feelings and aspirations of Hindus, so much so that they became instrumental in the launching of a freedom struggle. In the present democratic and secular political system of India, these values have helped Hindu political parties to capture power, and have created serious obstacles to a reinterpretation of religion so as to allow the emergence of secular values for the efficient utilisation of the

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largest cattle wealth of India.

To understand the cultural meaning of the cow for Hindus, we should first examine the formal doctrine of the sacredness of cow to which Hindus subscribe and later see how this doctrine is reflected in people's personalities and how their religious commitment shapes and influences their social and political behaviour. In this approach maximum effort will be made to let ancient texts, religious and political leaders, and people in general, speak for themselves, through quotations wherever possible.

## I

Ancient Hindu literature shows that the taking of animals for food was forbidden in traditional India, except in conformity with vedic rites and sacrifices. We shall demonstrate how great importance was attached to the cow but that, at the same time, cow sacrifice to certain deities and beef-eating at certain ceremonies, was made obligatory. The Rig-Veda amply proves the importance of the cow and in many places equates cows with God. The Brahata Prasara Samhita reveals clearly that cows are held in great veneration. It emphasises that cruelty to cows and bulls is threatened with the prospect of going to hell and of suffering misery after death. Kindness to animals, on the other hand, helps a man to reach heaven. This ancient text also details methods of rearing cows and bullocks. It states, for example, that a cow should not be milked while carrying a calf, or before 10 days after delivery of the calf, during disease and weakness; and one should not turn a straying cow with a stick. Deviance is sanctioned by threats of hell, and compliance by promise of prosperity and heaven after death. The rule against cruelty to cows is even more drastic: 'Whoever hurts, or causes another to hurt, steals, or causes to steal, a cow should be slain'. According to another

ancient text, Apastamba, 'one should not void excrements facing cows or stretching out one's feet towards them'. The Agni-Puran stresses the sacredness of cow and assures salvation to anyone who praises or makes a gift of cow or rescues her life from the butcher (Gangopadhyaya 1933: 134). The ancient literature, using a rich vocabulary to cover every important phase of cow's existence, further demonstrates its importance and veneration. This veneration of the cow in ancient India is also shown by the worship of the bull as Lord Shiva's vehicle and by Lord Krishna's palace in cow-place (Walker 1968: 121).

Ancient Hindu literature, however, also demonstrates that cow-sacrifice was essential on certain religious occasions and that beef-eating was obligatory at certain times. According to various descriptions given in the Vedas, beef was eaten by priests on important sacrificial and ceremonial occasions (Bowes 1978: 27). Manu makes beef-eating obligatory on certain occasions and says that he who does not eat beef on such occasions becomes an animal in his next 21 reincarnations. In the vedas, a guest is called goghana, i.e. one for whom a cow was killed, and no ceremony for welcoming the guest was complete without offering him beef. The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad recommends that if a man desires a son who will be learned in the Vedas, he should prepare a pilau of beef, rice and ghee (clarified butter) and both he and his wife should partake of it before intercourse (ibid: 278). A verse in Dharam Shashtra says, 'The cows and bulls are sacred animals and therefore should be eaten' (Bose 1945: 37). Mahabharata speaks of the custom in the epic days when cooks served heroes with the meat of buffalo. It also states that in the palace of King Ratnadeva, two thousand animals were killed every day and served to Brahmans (Giri 1947: 122). Aitarya Brahman amply demonstrates the Aryan custom of

sacrificing oxen to the gods. Among them, Indra (god of water) had a great fondness for beef. The sacrifice of an animal on a day of full moon took the form of milk for Indra. Several other vedic sacrifices demanded the slaughter of bulls, after which a piece of the flesh was eaten by the sacrificer. During the obsequial ceremony, a cow was slain and dismembered, and its internal organs laid on the body of the diseased (Walker 1968: 472). The ancient Aryans held the opinion that the sacred fire is fond of animal food, and that sacrificed animals purged of sin in incantation of hymns, go to heaven. Thus, there were two contradictory forces at work in ancient India. From ancient Vedic times there had been vigorous attempts to prohibit cow slaughter; at the same time, animal sacrifices to certain deities and eating their flesh on certain occasions formed an important part of life in ancient India. Nevertheless, the cow was held sacred, and only the meat of sacrificed animals was permitted on particular ceremonial occasions.

On the basis of ancient Indian texts, Western scholars of Hinduism have offered an explanation for the reverence of cows in India. According to Holwell,

after the rebellion of devtas in heaven, Brahma ordered Vishnu to create a universe with fifteen baboons for the residence of rebellious devtas. Vishnu said, I will form bodies for each of the delinquent devtas, which shall be a space for their prison and habitation, in the confines of which they shall be subject to natural evils in proportion to the degree of their guilt. And it shall be that when the rebellious devtas shall have accompanied and passed through the eighty seven transmigrations they shall from my abundant favour animate a new form, and thou shall call it ghoij [cow].

And it shall be that when the mortal body of ghoij shall by a natural decay become inanimate the delinquent devtah shall, from my abundant favour animate the mhurd [man] and in this form, I will enlarge their intellectual powers, even as when I first erected them free; and in this form



shall be their chief state of the trial and probation. The ghoij shall be by the delinquent devtah, deemed sacred and holy, for it shall yield them a new and more delectable food and ease them a part of labour to which I have doomed them. And they shall not eat the flesh of ghoij, nor of the flesh of the mortal bodies, which I shall prepare for their habitation, whether it creepth on murto [land], or swimmeth in Jhoale [water] or flyth in oustman [sky], for their food shall be the milk of the ghoij and the fruits of murto (1970: 87).

This shows that the main cause of the great reverence for the cow among the Hindus is because, in metempsychosis rotation, the cow holds the rank immediately preceding the human form. When a ghoij suffers death by accident or violence or through neglect of the owner, it is a token of God's wrath against the wickedness of the spirit of the proprietor. The cow, being the animate form preceding human birth, may not be killed, and if a cow dies through neglect or deliberation, the man has to go all the way back and reincarnate through 87 forms before reaching the position of man again.

On the basis of ancient sacred texts, it can be inferred that the institution of the sacredness of the cow was devised to maximise immediate material rewards. The high veneration of cow, the co-existence of beef-eating practices and animal sacrifice on certain occasions, and the instrumental role of cow in the achievement of salvation, can be causally linked to substantiate this interpretation. Nomadic Aryan tribes were highly pastoral people, and reared large numbers of cattle for subsistence needs. Beef was a delicious food, but simultaneously breeding on a large scale was necessary to maintain stocks of cattle for subsistence needs. On the other hand, nomadic Aryan tribes had limited capacity to maintain a given cattle stock, and constant culling of useless cattle in relation to breeding capacity was extremely necessary. Thus, in order to achieve a bal-

ance between maintenance capacity and the need for beef, an institutionalised method of saving was required in the form of resisting the temptation for beef. The emphasis on milk as a normal diet, the high veneration for cows, the belief in the transmigration of the soul, and the instrumental role of the cow in achieving the objective of salvation, the restriction of animal sacrifice and beef-eating only on ceremonial occasions and for important guests, became the institutionalised method for achieving this balance. Milk as a normal diet must have made available food for everyday requirements; high veneration of the cow must have reduced temptation; the promise of heaven after death must have acted as an incentive for the Aryan people to save cows in the interest of receiving rewards in heaven after death; the restriction of animal sacrifice and of beef-eating on certain occasions must have been the method by which to cull useless cattle and to make available a certain amount of delicious beef. The divine interdiction or linking of cow-protection with the strong belief in the transmigration of the soul and its instrumental role in achieving salvation, must have been done to make the system work effectively. The later social movements of Jains and Buddhists, however, campaigned vigorously against the Brahmin practice of animal sacrifice, while no movement occurred either against the belief of transmigration of the soul or against the belief that the cow helps in the achievement of salvation.

The Hindu reformist movements such as the Brahmo Samaj movement initiated by Ram Mohan Roy, and the Arya Samaj movement initiated by Swamy Dayan, reinforced the belief in the transmigration of the soul and veneration for the cow. Questioned as to how far the Arya Samaj differed from orthodox Hinduism, Lala Lajpat Rai, a prominent leader of Arya Samaj, replied, 'The doctrine of reincarnation is believed in and the cow is venerated by the

Aryans. Heaven and Hell, in the Hindu or usual sense, are not believed in by the Arya Samaj' (Oman 1972: 177).

## II

In modern India, cows are still held in great reverence and beef-eating is repugnant to Hindus. They have become so inviolable that in big cities they wander unmolested through the busiest traffic (Ross 1966: 22). Even a bull that gores a man to death may not be touched. In the industrial town of Bareilly, a bull gored a clerk. Among several men surrounding the bull was a policeman with gun, who had been called by onlookers, but who did not dare to harm the bull. The traffic had to be stopped and resumed only after some labourers had managed to rope the bull, tie its feet, and fasten it to a tree by the roadside (Lal 1967: 28-29). The veneration of the cow in India has increased so much that all that comes out from a cow is sacred. The water it ejects (go mutra) is holy water. According to Walker, drinking of cow-urine is common among devout women before and after delivery (1968: 131). Cow-dung cleans the filthiest place and frees it from pollution, while the ashes produced by burning it clean all material things (Monier-Williams 1951: 22). Dust found in the hoof-mark of a cow, go pada (cow-print), is a very powerful component of indigenous medicines. In the antimostem ceremonies, the dying man's hand is tied to the tail of a cow so that it might lead him to heaven. If a child's horoscope forebodes evil, he is symbolically born again by being passed under the belly of a cow.

The strength of Hindu belief regarding the sacredness of the cow can be seen in Haridwar, a pilgrim centre for Hindus, where relatives of the deceased come from all over the country to offer Pitra-dan (a ritual intended to mark the liberation of the soul for inclusion in the galaxy of

ancestors). At Kusha Ghat (the bank of the sacred Ganges where this ritual is performed), numerous cattle dealers sell cows of all ages to suit the financial capability of the people who perform the ritual. After bathing in the sacred river, people purchase cows from the cattle dealers and donate them to the Brahmin priests. The belief is that the spirit of the departed soul will receive the gift of the cow and, by holding its tail, will be led across the river Baitarni, full of mud, fire and stinking water, to reach heaven for inclusion in the galaxy of ancestors. Instead of donating a cow, the poor people generally paid between Rs.0.50 to Rs.10.00 to the priest in lieu of purchasing a cow from the cattle dealer to donate to the priest. The cows donated to the Brahmins stay with them and cannot be resold. The male calves donated in this manner become objects of public worship. These calves are branded with a design representing Shiva's special weapon, trishul. They enjoy perfect liberty and are never tied up in a shed. Dubois has observed (1906: 638) that after their death, no Pariah would dare eat their flesh and their bodies were buried with much pomp and ceremony.

In addition, many temples and cow-homes maintain donated cows and their milk is converted into delicious sweets for distribution among devotees. Big temples such as Shree Nath and Sapt Rishi, have a total of 85 cows, of which 52 have been received as donations from Hindu devotees. There are many other goushalas (cow-homes) where cows are very well fed and fodder crops are grown exclusively for them.

I have interviewed a number of sadhus about beef-eating practices in ancient India. It is interesting to note that none of the sadhus and priests in Haridwar would admit that ancient Aryans were beef-eaters and that even Vedas made it obligatory to eat beef on certain religious occasions. When I asked why a cow should be worshipped when Vedas recommend beef-eating on certain occasions, they replied, 'the cow is

our mother and is innocent. She gives us milk and butter. Her male calves till the land and give us food. Feeding the cow gives merit to the Hindu and if someone donates a cow, it can lead him to heaven'. Another sadhu replied, 'every religion has an objective and a grammar or code of conduct for the achievement of that objective. Hinduism has the objective of achieving salvation and has the grammar of cow protection. A Hindu has to follow the grammar of his religion if he wants to gain salvation'.

Thus, the veneration of the cow gains strong support from the central belief that the soul migrates from one body to another, a process that ends only when a man achieves salvation. The primary target for a Hindu in terms of religion is his salvation. The cow occupies a central place in the strong belief of transmigration of soul and the achievement of salvation. The cow is the animate form that precedes human birth; if a cow is killed, one has to go all the way back and to pass through 87 animate forms before one enters the animate form of the human body. Secondly, according to Hindu belief, when a soul goes to heaven for salvation, it has to cross a river known as Baitarni, which is full of mud, urine, fire, etc. If a man has donated a cow or has been very kind to cows on earth, he can cross this river by holding on to a cow's tail. The primary objective of a Hindu is thus incomplete without the worship of the cow. In addition, the presence of all the deities in a cow, and the position of the cow as companion of the human incarnations of Vishnu and Krishna, has made its sanctity inviolable.

### III

In rural India, the sacredness of the cow has assumed new dimensions. Many new customs and beliefs have emerged in villages which have further reinforced the sacredness of

the cow. In the belief that bulls are the vehicles of Lord Shiva, the villagers do not yoke them on Monday which is believed to be the day of Lord Shiva. The villagers rest the bullocks and give them special food on this day. Cows are closely associated with Lord Krishna, and on the second day of the Diwali festival, cattle are worshipped collectively. Historical legend says that, on this day, Lord Krishna provided shelter for the cow herds who were terrorstricken at the sudden and ferocious downpour of rain which lasted a week long (Ghurye 1962: 166). On Mondays, therefore, cattle are bathed in the morning and then decorated. In some parts of the country, the decorated cattle are carried in procession with great pomp and show. Cattle worship is a sort of group event on this day. In Chhattisgarh, Babb has observed that at the conclusion of this festival, the cattle of the village were worshipped in a dramatic fashion: A large heap of cow-dung is placed in an open field, and a herd of cattle is driven over it at full speed. The dung, having been touched by the feet (a relatively polluted part of the body) of bovine divinity, is now taken in handfuls by the men of the village and applied to each other's foreheads (relatively, the purest part of the body) (Babb 1970: 300).

The villagers' belief that cow-care gives merit has resulted in the custom of offering cooked bread to cows on certain religious occasions. Darling has observed that in Gurgaon, offerings of food were made to cows on the first day of each month. Daily offerings were made by only very few, mostly the old (1929: 183). During Kanagat (days of ancestor worship), food is offered to the cows to help the ancestors receive it.

The sacredness of the cow in village India is so strong that it has affected attitudes towards the castration of bulls and artificial insemination. The villagers have many scrub bulls which have been released for religious

reasons after a death or as supplication to supernatural powers. These bulls are regarded as sacred and nobody dares to kill or hurt them. Even farmers desirous of owning good cattle fear the sin of castrating scrub bulls. One farmer said: 'who does not want improved cattle? But what are we to do with these scrub bulls? You cannot castrate them. Who would go in for the sin of castrating a sacred bull?' (Dub 1958: 216). When artificial insemination centres were started in the villages, many people worried about the propriety of mechanical interference with the body of a cow and viewed the denial of satisfaction of the cow's normal bodily cravings as a sin (Mayer 1937: 257). Sacred values have also affected people's attitudes towards the sale of useless cattle. They believe that cows and bullocks should die a natural death. Darling has observed that no one sold useless cows to the butchers, and the poor households, rather than selling them to cattle dealers for the slaughter house, preferred to send them to goushala (cow-home) or let them loose to die (1929: 110). In Gurgaon, he observed that where public opinion was strong, sales took place after dark; next morning, the absence of a cow would be put down to a thief who could not be traced, or it was said that the cow had been taken on a journey but it was sold to an agent who waited in the forest (Ibidem: 17). In general, people sell calves to cattle breeders and hesitate to sell to Muslims whom they suspect will slaughter them.

These sacred values are sanctioned by bitter criticism, ex-communication and fear of heavy losses caused by supernatural powers. Ishwaran describes how a farmer lost his good bullock when he yoked it on Monday, the animal in question having slipped near the mosque and injuring itself. This was regarded as punishment for the farmer's violation of the rule that a bullock ought not to be yoked on Monday. In the same household, a bullock and a cow had died a month

earlier, The farmer offered special worship to the Bull God; finally, the bull was believed to have recovered after it had been bathed and made to go round the mosque five times (1968: 113). In Jullander villages, Darling observed the punishment of ex-communication for castrating sacred bulls. One man who joined the Veterinary Department for the castration of bulls related that he was boycotted by the community for ten years, and that he was only able to marry off his daughter when at last he found another Hindu with a son of suitable age, in the same position as himself (Darling 1929: 183). In Hoshiarpur, the same author found that anyone who sold useless cattle would be forbidden to share hukka-pani (group smoking) and that if possible, the animal would be bought back by the village.

Within the village social system, which is organised on the basis of caste, the avoidance of beef-eating has provided a source of social mobility and helped in the assimilation of diverse cultural and ethnic groups within the Hindu system. In the rural society, animal protein has an inverse relationship with one's status: the consumption of a particular item of food determines status and position in the caste hierarchy (Arora 1968: 24). High castes are generally vegetarian and people from low castes eat all kinds of meat. Pork is inferior to mutton and pork eaters are usually considered inferior to mutton eaters. The beef-eaters are the worst of all (Srinivas 1961: 247). Recent village studies have shown a tendency among low caste Hindus to abandon their habit of eating carrion in order to rise in the caste hierarchy. Cohn found out in Madhopur that, at least two generations ago Chamars began to outlaw eating of beef. Previously Chamars had been thought degraded because of the eating of carrion. Although some Thakurs (high caste) suspect that Chamar women eat beef, Chamars



maintain that beef-eaters would be outcaste (1955: 71-72). Similar tendencies among the Chamars in Maharashtra were observed by Orenstein. In 1954, the representatives of the low-caste Chamars, who have traditionally permitted the eating of carrion beef, claimed not to do so, and other villagers accepted their claim. Some members of the Harijan caste publicly denied eating beef (Orenstein 1965: 147). In Malabar, Adriyan Mayer noted that Tiyas and Pulayas became vegetarian in imitation of habits of higher castes (1952: 43). Mahars and other untouchables gave up eating beef, including that of dead cattle, after their conversion to Buddhism. The fact that sanskritisation does not help the untouchables to move up in the caste hierarchy does not make it less popular. All over India movements are discernible among untouchables to discard the consumption of beef and domestic pork. The marginal and depressed castes are abandoning the habit of eating beef, and in some cases have already done so in order to move up in the caste hierarchy.

Recent anthropological studies have observed that the tribes which have been assimilated within Hindu system or have been influenced by Hindu values, have abandoned their traditional practice of cow-sacrifice and beef-eating. Among the Gonds and Bhumias in Jabalpur, the sacredness of the cow is accepted (Fuchs 1960: 65). Among the Rabhas in West Bengal, cow veneration is so high that even if a cow is killed by accident, a man has to perform various purification rites (Das & Rabha 1967: 58). In Nepal, the Newars hold cows in the greatest veneration. Besides daily worship, cows receive special religious attention on certain days (Nepali 1965: 326). The Dublas of Gujarat, although they still worship their own gods and deities, have also begun to worship the cow (Shah 1958: 34). In the Munda tribe in Bihar, the people who have been Hindu-ised have started to worship the cows,

whereas others eat beef with relish (Sachhidanand 1968: 191). The Saora tribe in Orrisa is slowly coming into touch with Hinduism. Cow-sacrifice among the Saoras is rapidly disappearing under Hindu pressure, and now only occurs under the express instructions of a Shaman (Elwin 1955: 191).

The cows and bullocks also provide many economic and other benefits. The milk not only provides a source of nutrition but helps poorer farmers to earn extra cash income. The dung provided by cattle has many uses, not only as fertiliser. Its slow-burning qualities make it important for the preparation of ghee, and it is also used in the hubble-bubble pipe (hukka) around which male social gatherings centre (Marriot 1952: 265). The ownership of bullocks not only provides a source of traction and transport, but is a strong qualification to get land to till; this is particularly important at the present time when pressure on land is increasing. The ownership of cattle also gets the owner a greater proportion of shared crops (Beteille 1965: 120). The death of plough cattle so badly upsets the small farmer's economy that during the harvesting season he cannot borrow from other peasants and has to part with unproductive savings in the form of jewellery and sometimes even land (Bailey 1957: 74). Within the service sector, cattle represent the only source of income for the oil-crushers. Cattle ownership also considerably strengthens a man's social prestige in the village. The process of socialisation of an individual is closely connected with the rearing of the young of animals (Chauhan 1967: 163).

#### IV

Hindu belief in the sanctity of the cow has been reinforced by many political movements which have attempted to mobilise Hindu opinion by reviving the Vedic culture of ancient India. These political movements have sometimes been so violent that

the mere killing of a cow has caused riots, resulting in heavy loss of human life and property. The organised political movement against cow-slaughter in India began in 1881 with the starting of Go Krishyadi-Rakshini-Sabha (Cow and Agriculture Protection Committee) by Swamy Dayanand; sporadic cases of violence had occurred since 1793 when the Hindus organised themselves in small groups to rescue cows from Muslims. Although Swamy Dayanand offered the economic argument that a cow with her calves and heifers benefitted a great many against the few who benefitted from the flesh, the purpose of establishing the committee and demanding a ban on cow-slaughter was to build Hindu solidarity for the protection of cows (Dayanand 1881: IV). Each member of the committee was called gorakshak (cow-protector) and was required to protect cows. The committee collected lakhs of signatures, including those of several ruling princes, and submitted them to the British Parliament, petitioning a permanent ban on cow-slaughter (Nath 1970: 72). After a ruling of the High Court in 1886 that the cow was not an object within the meaning of section 295 of the Indian Penal Code and that Muslims who slaughtered them could not be held to have violated the legal provisions against incitement to religious violence, several cow-protection societies were formed such as Prayag Mukhya Gorakshini Sabha, Allahbad Goraksha Samiti, Beni Madho's Gorakshini Sabha and Allahbad People's Association (Bayly 1975: 111-113). This was because after the above mentioned judgement Muslims openly slaughtered cows under police guard and Hindus had no option but to mobilise Hindu unity to protect the cattle. Several other organisations such as Hindu Mahasabha in 1906 and Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh in 1925, came up which further mobilised Hindu opinion against the slaughter of cows.

The cow-protection societies and Hindu organisa-

tions collected funds from all over the country and distributed free cow-protection literature among the Hindus. The new Hindu organisations simultaneously launched a shudhi (purification) movement which was concerned with (i) conversion to Hinduism of persons belonging to other religions, (ii) reconversion of former Hindus who had adopted other religions, and (iii) raising the status of depressed castes. The most important conditions for shudhi were to abstain from beef-eating and belief in the sacredness of the cow. In addition to the above, committees were set up at the mohalla (neighbourhood) level to mobilise Hindus for the protection of cows.

The leaders of these cow-protection societies made provocative speeches to arouse Hindu sentiment. At a meeting in the Town Hall of Calcutta on 1st September 1888, Sriman Swamy said: 'Gentlemen, the mother cow appeals to you to protect her, to save her from the butcher's knife. I hear her appeal in the gurgling voice of her dying groans, and in her agony, she exclaims, "Ah my sons if you have the misfortune to lose your mother, I support you in your infancy, nourish you in your boyhood, give you energy and strengthen you in your manhood and cheer you in old age. Is it human for you to see me slaughtered? Is this the gratitude you return? Oh judgement, thou are fled to British beasts and men have lost their reason".' In a speech in 1893, Bal Gangadhar Tilak said: 'The cow ... is taken daily to the slaughter house and is butchered mercilessly by the unbelievers. How can I bear this heart-rending spectacle? Have all our leaders become like helpless figures on the chess board?' (Parvate 1958: 33). The president of Prayag Mukhya Gorakshini Sabha (cow-protection Society) in a speech in 1894 said: '88,157 head of cattle are slaughtered in the British Empire every day'. All these speeches and the distribution of literature made Hindus

highly sensitive to the issue of cow-protection.

The Muslims, traditionally beef-eaters and with a religious practice of slaughtering cows on Bakr-Id, took the Hindu movement as being meant to weaken them. The Cow and Agriculture Protection Society of Swamy Dayanand was considered to be a political body of Hindus, with anti-Muslim aims (Aziz 1967: 80). The Muslims considered it as imposing Hindu values on them on the one hand, and that they were being deprived of an inexpensive source of nutrition on the other (Mathur 1972: 3). Consequently the Muslims organised themselves to oppose the Hindu movement of cow-protection. They formed a tanzim organisation and initiated a tabligh movement which was a kind of reinforcement of faith campaign. The formation of the Muslim League in 1906 gave further support to the Muslims in opposing Hindus and asserting their religious rights. They also used the press to organise Muslim solidarity. The Allahabad Muslim Journal published an article impressing on Muslims the importance of ritual cow-slaughter on Bakr-Id. Beck's article, 'Musalmanon ka Roshan Mustaqbil' stated openly that the Hindu cow-slaughter movement was against Muslims. He wrote, 'The past years have witnessed the growth of agitation in this country. One, the Indian National Congress and the other movement against cow-slaughter. The former is against the British and the latter is against the Muslims' (Mehta & Patwardhan 1942: 59-60). The Muslim organisations and their propaganda against the Hindu movement of cow-slaughter helped to mobilise Muslim opinion, and those who were socially aloof from Hindus and were influenced by religious education reacted sharply. In many places, the weavers (a turbulent section of the Muslim community) collected in mosques in a gesture of solidarity against the Hindu cow-protection movement and pledged to perform cow-sacrifice on religious occasions.

The tension between the two communities became so tense that it led to many communal riots, resulting in heavy loss of life and property. In 1916, a mob of 7,000 - 10,000 Hindus endeavoured to prevent a cow-sacrifice on the occasion of Bakr-Id in Patna, in spite of the presence of the district magistrate and armed police. Several Muslims were killed in the riot. Two years later, the trouble again started on the performance of cow-sacrifice in Shahabad and Gaya districts. Several villages were looted and anarchy prevailed for a fortnight. Communal riots in India rose steeply after 1920. There were 11 in 1923, 18 in 1924 and 16 in 1925. Two of these were particularly violent. The cause of a serious riot in Delhi was that on the morning of Bakr-Id, local authorities proclaimed a special route for the cows destined for slaughter. The Hindu district was closed off, an order that was resented by the Muslims who tried to take a cow by the prohibited road. Serious rioting broke out; the military came in and some 12 Hindus were killed, 100 injured, and a Hindu temple was desecrated. The Bakr-Id sacrifice of cows also resulted in serious riots in Multan, Bihar, Bengal and Uttar Pradesh. Again in 1927, the Bakr-Id sacrifice of cow caused a riot at Dinapur in Patna and many people were killed or injured.

The outburst of religious sentiment among the Hindus against cow-slaughter and the Muslims also affected economic relationships between the two communities. Hindus engaged in economic or tenancy arrangements with Muslims broke them for religious reasons (Bayly 1975: 112). A number of government employees, subordinate officials, railway police in the towns and Patvaris (village officials) in the countryside, took part in the agitations against cow-slaughter at the risk of their jobs. The unity among Hindus to achieve their objective

was so strong that both liberal Hindu and Muslim leaders made appeals only to Muslims to stop cow-slaughter in order to reduce communal tension between the two communities. In a public speech before Muslims, Mahatma Gandhi said, 'I may not open the goraksha question here. The test of friendship is assistance in adversity and, that, too, unconditional assistance. Unconditional cooperation means, the protection of cow.' While giving a vote of thanks, Maulana Abdul Bari said, 'We should stop cow killing immediately. In voluntarily stopping cow killing we shall not violate the canons of our religion' (1949: 352). Agha Khan, another Muslim liberal leader pointed out, 'Our religion does not make it necessary to slaughter cows for religious sacrifices.' In a speech to the Muslim All Parties Conference, he said, 'In the home of Islam-Arabia there was no custom of cow sacrifice. The prophet Ibrahim did not slaughter cow for sacrifice and Kashmiri Muslims did not consider animal sacrifice as a part of religious observance' (Karandikar 1968: 182-183). The situation was so tense that no Hindu leader at any stage had the courage to state that the Vedas permitted beef-eating and animal sacrifice on certain occasions, and that Hindus should permit Muslims to sacrifice cows on their religious occasions.

The British government, on the other hand, was seriously concerned with the law and order problems arising from the communal riots. The government was aware of the fact that the whole anti-cow-slaughter movement was politically motivated against the British, but the issue was so sensitive that it could not take strong action either against the leaders of the cow-protection societies or against the inciting literature circulated by them. Lord Landsdowne, in a private minute, remarked, 'I doubt whether since the mutiny, any movement containing in it a greater amount of potential mischief has engaged

the attention of the government of India. The magnitude of the danger arises from this that the agitation has supplied the whole of the disloyal elements with a popular backing which they could not have obtained from any other source. I am afraid, the movement has become so dangerous now that a common ground has been found upon which the educated Hindus and the ignorant masses can combine' (Narain 1976: 45). Montgomery, on the other hand, charged the leaders of the societies of communalism and politics, and remarked that they had nothing to do with the achievement of the aim of cow-protection societies (Ram Gopal 1958: 89). If the British government tried to limit the movement and especially the circulation of printed matter, the Hindus might consider the government as being pro-Muslim. On the other hand, inflammatory literature heightened tension and led to communal riots. In view of this situation, the government decided to ban the most virulent literature on cow protection and during 1910-14, initiated 355 cases against the Press (Barrier 1976: 60-61). Thus, during the pre-Independence period, the anti-cow-slaughter movement wore an altruistic look of nationalism which helped to increase the sense of nationalism among Hindus in all parts of the country.

After Independence, the new constitution declared India to be a secular state. The citizens were guaranteed full freedom to profess and practise any religion, subject to reasonable restrictions. However, the sensitive issue of cow-protection continued to create serious obstacles, hindering the government in following the principles of secularism. The government considered the question of cow-protection from the economic angle, quite apart from religious considerations. In the Constituent Assembly, two Bills regarding cow-protection were moved independently by Congress members Thakur Das Bhargava



and Govind Das. The difference between their proposals was that the former wanted to ban the slaughter of useful animals while the latter wanted to ban the slaughter of all types of cattle. With respect to cows, however, both agreed that slaughter should be banned irrespective of the usefulness (Shah 1967: 70). Mr Bhargava's proposal was accepted and the drafting committee included Article 48 of the Indian Constitution in the directive principles of state policy. This states that, 'The state shall endeavour to organise agriculture and animal husbandry on modern and scientific lines and shall, in particular, take steps for preserving and improving the breeds, and prohibiting the slaughter of cows and calves and other milch and draught cattle.' In pursuance of this provision, the legislatures of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh enacted laws banning the slaughter of cattle. The states of Kerala, West Bengal and Nagaland did not follow the directive principles and did not enact laws banning the slaughter of cows. Other states enacted laws for partially banning cow-slaughter. The two Congress members, however, were dissatisfied with the insertion of this article in the directive principles and wanted Parliament to ban cow-slaughter in the whole nation. In 1955 Mr Bhargava introduced the Indian Cattle Preservation Bill in the Parliament and gave a long speech in its favour. Although his arguments were based on economic considerations, they also carried religious implications. He said, 'From the Vedas to Binoba Bhave, all the great men have strongly advocated that cow is not for slaughtering and is unslayable' (Lok Sabha Debates 1955: 4140; author's translation). The other member, Govind Das, expressed his inability to follow the Chief Whip in the rejection of the Bill. He said, 'This is a question of my conscience and from 1926, I have been bringing this question before the Parliament for debate. If government experts feel that

the economic progress is through the slaughter of cows, we also have experts who can show the opposite' (Ibidem: 4152; author's translation).

Jawahar Lal Nehru, the then Prime Minister, was highly irritated by the religious considerations over cow slaughter in the Parliament and always stressed the economic reasoning. In the debate over this Bill he said, 'I wish to make it perfectly clear that the government are opposed to the Bill. I can't accept that animals are more important than cows. I do not agree and I am prepared to resign from the Prime Ministership but I will not give in to this kind of ....' (he was interrupted). He again said, 'I want to be perfectly clear that this kind of agitation in India is futile, silly, ridiculous and .... U.P. government is wholly wrong and in my opinion they are taking a wrong step' (Ibidem: 4151). At a public meeting, he commented, 'the present Parliament was not bound by the decisions of the last Parliament in regard to the Hindu code. The demand for the ban on cow-slaughter was based on sentiment. The question was whether India was a political or religious nation. Any step to be taken should naturally reflect these considerations' (Gupta 1965: 242).

The Hindu community, on the other hand, in the genuine tradition of pre-Independence period, used force to rescue cows from Muslims, despite the legislative measures taken by some state governments in prohibiting cow-slaughter. Even while the Constitution was being drafted, communal riots occurred at Saharanpur in 1949 because a tonga carried beef through a Hindu locality. In the same year, riots occurred in Azamgarh district as a result of the slaughter of three cows. A few days later, they occurred in Akola when a Muslim household slaughtered a cow.

After the finalisation of government policy on this

subject and the enactment of laws, the Hindu continued to rescue cows in all parts of the country. In Ghaziabad in Uttar Pradesh, in 1954, the slaughter of a stolen cow was responsible for a violent riot in which a dozen people were injured and considerable damage was done to property. The six persons alleged to be involved in slaughtering the cow were arrested by the police. In 1958, at Dhulia in Maharashtra, a riot occurred two days after it was known that a cow had been slaughtered by Muslims for a marriage feast, despite adequate precautionary measures taken by district authorities and a decision by local leaders not to organise a strike. In 1959, at Muzzafarpur in Bihar, trouble started after the news was circulated that a cow had been slaughtered: nine people were killed and several injured. At Palanpur in Gujarat in 1963, the discovery of animal bones in the precincts of a place of worship led to a general strike and to closure of all business and other normal activity (Ghurye 1968: 335).

Even the Supreme Court judgement, on the case filed by dissatisfied Muslim butchers against the enactment of laws banning cow-slaughter, was influenced significantly by Hindu religious sentiments. The plea of the Muslim butchers was that these laws unconstitutionally restricted the Muslims' right to freedom of religion, Muslims are not given equal protection by law, and Muslim traders did not have the right to carry on their traditional occupation in bones and hides. The Supreme Court ruled that the total ban on the slaughter of female buffaloes, breeding bulls or working bullocks was valid, and that when they cease to work they may be slaughtered. In the case of cows, however, the Court ruled that they cannot be slaughtered at all, irrespective of their usefulness. In their judgement on the slaughter of cows, the judges noted that cows are sacred to Hindus and that

the mere killing of cows had led to communal riots in the past; even since Independence the anti-cow-slaughter movement had been intensified. In the opinion of the judges, 'it has to be taken into consideration though only as one of many elements in arriving at a judicial verdict as to the reasonableness of restrictions' (Supreme Court Journal 1958: 731). In the case of the Muslim religious practice of sacrificing cows on Bakr-Id, the Court noted that the Hidaya (Muslim religious text) gives them a choice of goat, cow or camel for sacrifice, and hence the ban on cow-slaughter does not interfere with their fundamental right to practise religion. The judgement deprived Muslims of one of the options because of Hindu reverence of the cow and their will to impose this value on other communities.

Two points deserve serious attention. Firstly, the Court used the criterion of usefulness for a ban on the slaughter of female buffaloes, bullocks and other categories of cattle; but why was not the same criterion applied to the slaughter of cows? (Smith 1963: 488). The retired Chief Justice P.B. Gajendragadkar, who was also a party to the decision on the above case, later admitted the force of Smith's comment on the discrimination between cows and other categories of milch cattle for slaughter (1971: 129). Secondly, to take away an alternative is an interference with the religious freedom of a community. On this aspect of the decision, Derrett commented, 'The distinction between belief and practice is probably not so interesting here as the recognition that the admitted presence of alternatives deprives the practice contended for of its urgency when conflicting religious interest had to be resolved in the search for the welfare of the nation' (1968: 472).

The Hindu community was not satisfied, however, by the laws enacted by the state governments and the judge-

ment given by the Supreme Court regarding the ban on cow-slaughter. Their political parties such as the Bhartiya Jana Sangh, Ram Rajya Parishad, and All-India Hindu Mahasabha, made a political issue of demanding a constitutional ban on the slaughter of cows and their progeny in accordance with Hindu religious sentiments. To make the cow-protection movement more effective, they involved many Hindu cultural organisations such as Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS), Aryasamaj, the Jain community, Bharat Sadhu Samaj, and many others. At first, after Independence, the movement was slow and only the RSS and its political offshoot, Jana Sangh, were active in pursuing the demand. In 1952, the RSS mobilised public opinion by collecting signatures to a mass petition requesting the President to impose a ban on cow-slaughter. It also issued pamphlets and distributed them among audiences at public meetings addressed by Jawahar Lal Nehru, and formed a separate committee, Akhil Bhartiya Gohatya Nirodh Samiti (All-India Cow protection committee), under the presidentship of Prabhu Datt Brahmchari, an ascetic and rival of Jawahar Lal Nehru in the elections. The Jana Sangh, a political offshoot of the RSS, in its election manifestos for all general elections, pledged to bring about a total ban on cow-slaughter. It was only in 1966 that all these groups organised themselves more effectively to pursue the demand. They jointly formed the sarvadaliya Goraksha Mahabhiyan Samiti (All-Party committee for the cow protection movement), with a supreme council made up of representatives of each group and an executive committee to decide on the programme for pressing central government to ban cow-slaughter.

The Committee took vigorous steps in this direction. In September 1966 it staged a demonstration before Parliament and supported its demand by a protest in Parliament, which could only be stopped by the Speaker's adjournment

of the House. Again on 7 November 1966, the committee staged a demonstration which was probably the largest in history. Marchers were estimated to total 125,000. Sadhus from all over India, members of the Hindu cultural organisations, and supporters of these parties, took part. The day ended tragically, as the police were forced to open fire on the demonstrators. Dusk-to-dawn curfew was imposed. A number of speakers addressed the crowd outside Parliament House and one important leader said 'Don't let anyone enter or come out of the House'. The climax of the demonstration was the trapping of the Congress President who, after hearing the noise, slipped into the MPs club. The Congress President's cook sustained serious injury. By the time the day was over, seven people had been killed and considerable damage had been done by the mob to motor vehicles and to government and private buildings. Most of the committee leaders were arrested and some were detained in jail for a long time. The Home Minister, Gulzari Lal Nanda, had to resign. The action of the committee continued, however. Two members of the committee who wielded considerable influence over Hindus went on a fast-unto-death for a ban on cow-slaughter.

The Hindu political parties, on the other hand, exploited the issue of cow-slaughter successfully in the fourth general elections held in 1967 by issuing provocative leaflets and speeches in the election campaign. One of the many posters issued in Delhi showed a Congressman leading a pair of bullocks (election symbol of Congress) to the slaughter-house, where several heads of butchered cattle were displayed. In Madhya Pradesh, one poster said, 'A hotel has been constructed in Delhi called Ashoka Hotel. It was built to prepare Pandit Nehru's food. For this purpose, a cow in a very advanced stage of pregnancy was brought to the hotel and five people

jumped upon it. The ejected calf was then cooked for the Prime Minister's meals. He also took calf's tongue for his breakfast' (Pylee 1967: 175). Another poster read, 'the Congress Party should answer: (i) why 30,000 cows are slaughtered every day, (ii) in this religious country why beef is served in Ashoka Hotel [government hotel] in Delhi, and (iii) even when cow slaughter was banned by Muslim rulers why has the Congress government launched a programme of building new slaughter-houses at the cost of Rs. 8 crores' (Ibidem: 176). In Calcutta, together with the goddess, were depicted a number of barefooted, bare-bodied and bearded Muslims dressed in lungis and cap, dragging a cow to a slaughter-house. Congress leaders, including Maulana Azad, stood and watched the scene, saying, 'no matter what happens, we want votes' (Mujahid 1970: 97).

The party leaders also made provocative speeches in the election campaign, arousing Hindu sentiments in order to catch their votes. One Jana Sangh leader in the Sadar constituency of Delhi said, 'The heifers are taken to the slaughter-house where they are beaten mercilessly. Then a bath with boiling water is given to make their blood hot. The heifers then are placed in a queue and are slaughtered. The beef is then packed in tins and supplied to foreign embassies.' The election symbol of the ruling Congress party in the fifth general elections was also a cow and calf, which was strongly resented by the Jana Sangh Party. In an election speech, a leader of the party said, 'if a cow in India is to be slaughtered, a mark of the cross is put on her. I tell you, if you put a cross against the symbol of cow on the ballot paper, you, then are slaughtering the cow.' The RSS chief appealed to the people to vote for the party 'which stands for a total ban on the slaughter of cow species and not for those who have directly or indirectly

been allowing this national disgrace to taint the fair face of our holy land' (Golwalkar: 1967).

The issue of cow-slaughter gave a tremendous help to Jana Sangh in the fourth general elections. The party's strength in Parliament increased from 14 to 35 and in six State Assemblies of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Punjab and Haryana, its numerical strength increased from 116 to 245. Moreover, the party was able to capture power in Delhi.

The movement against cow-slaughter remained more or less subdued for almost 12 years but in 1979 it again came up vigorously in Indian politics. The Bhoodan leader, Acharya Vinoba Bhave, threatened to fast unto death in a demand for a complete ban on cow-slaughter in the states of Kerala and West Bengal which had not enacted legislation banning cow-slaughter in accordance with the directives of Central Government. Cow-protection societies all over the country held joint meetings and decided to support Vinoba Bhave in demanding the ban. Hindu cultural organisations such as Sarvajanik Arya Pratinidhi Sabha and sarvodaya workers and the temples joined in supporting the demand. Cow-protection societies pasted posters in abundance in Delhi and other cities asking government to ban cow-slaughter in the two states. Four teams of sarvodaya workers travelled to West Bengal and Kerala and to New Delhi on foot to press the governments of the two states and the Central Government to amend the Constitution to ban cow-slaughter all over the country. These teams of sarvodaya workers organised village-level cow-protection societies in the villages of West Bengal and collected huge funds for their cause. In Kerala, they started satyagraha outside the slaughterhouses. The Sarvajanik Arya Pratinidhi Sabha, in combination with cow-protection societies, religious leaders and sarvodaya workers, organised public meetings. Leaders of the Sabha



and religious leaders spoke in favour of the demand. One religious leader said, 'We have left samsara [material world] and we have no material interests in this demand. It is only in pursuance of our religious duties that we are fighting for cow-protection. We will continue to fight for cow-protection during our lifetime. Remove all personal differences and be one in the name of the cow and work for cow-protection.' Another leader of a cow-protection society said, 'Lakhs of cows are slaughtered in Kerala and West Bengal. We have organised picketing outside the railway stations to rescue cows destined for slaughter in these states.' The Hindu temples organised meetings in their respective areas on cow-protection and one religious leader said, 'human beings are strong in this world while cows are strong in the next world. If you kill a cow in this world the cow will take revenge in the next world.' One Jain temple in Delhi wrote a song in favour of cow-protection and also gave its telephone number, telling people to call if they saw any cow in danger. Political leaders and eminent people in the country made independent attempts to press the government to ban cow-slaughter. Ramji Singh, a member of the ruling Janata party, presented a private resolution in Parliament asking the government to ban cow-slaughter; despite protests, this was passed by 42 to 8 votes. The former Union Home Minister, Gulzari Lal Nanda, sat on a day's fast on the banks of the sacred Kurukshetra tank; the former Delhi Metropolitan Council Chairman sat on a day's fast outside Mahatma Gandhi's Samadhi in Delhi. In addition, fasts were organised all over the country in support of the demand. Almost 150 social workers in Delhi, 50 representatives of Arya Samaj and Sanatan Dharam in Chandigarh, 100 members of cow-protection committees in Madhya Pradesh, 50 people in Patna, 50 in Madras and 40 in Madurai, undertook a day's fast. A group of eminent Hindi writers appealed to the

state governments to ban cow-slaughter so that the life of Vinoba Bhave could be saved. J.P. Narain, the great sarvodaya leader, also appealed to the governments of Kerala and West Bengal to ban cow-slaughter. Mrs Indira Gandhi requested congressmen all over the country to observe a token fast in support of the demand.

The movement was strongly opposed by Muslims and Christians and their representatives in Parliament. About 150 people openly cooked and consumed beef in a crowded street of Kerala as a protest against Vinoba Bhave's fast. The president of the Kerala lepers association announced that he would fast against Vinoba Bhave's demand and, before doing so, he would consume beef. In another district of Kerala, about 30 people openly cooked beef in protest against the demand for a ban on cow-slaughter. An MP from Kerala and the leader of CPI in Parliament opposed Vinoba Bhave's demand. In a public statement, he said, 'If cow-slaughter was banned in these two states, it might spark off communal troubles in these states which had been completely free of religious tension.' Two Muslim congress (I) leaders, a finance minister in Karnatka and the other an MP, announced their decision to defy the call of Mrs Indira Gandhi to observe a token fast in sympathy with Vinoba Bhave. Similarly, other Members of Parliament from these states strongly opposed Ramji Singh's resolution in Parliament and also voted against it.

The position of the government in dealing with the demand for a constitutional ban on cow-slaughter has always been an embarrassing one. The British Government could only ban the most virulent literature on cow-protection. The then ruling Congress government also evaded the issue, saying that ban on cow-slaughter was a state subject; secondly, it emphasised the economic rather than the religious aspect. Even the RSS and the Jana Sangh most closely associated with the anti cow-slaughter movement could not

work for the enactment of central legislation for banning cow-slaughter after coming to power, nor could they openly support the demand made by Vinoba Bhave in 1979. The MPs of erstwhile Jana Sangh in the ruling Janata Government, and RSS leaders who had organised violent demonstrations in 1966 and had remained in jail for a considerable period of time for demanding a ban on cow-slaughter, faced an embarrassing situation. They could not openly condemn the demand because they had initiated the entire cow-protection movement and they had successfully exploited the issue in the elections. On the other hand, they could not openly support the demand because this would be against the principles of secularism, and to give up this principle would affect the image of the Janata party to which they now belonged, and also that of the country in the Muslim world. This is particularly important as one of the leaders of erstwhile Jana Sangh had extensively toured (as Minister of External Affairs) Muslim countries to establish good relations with them. It would also mean losing the votes of Muslims and other beef-eating minorities. Mrs Gandhi, who had openly rejected the demand for a ban on cow-slaughter in 1966 and had always advocated the principle of secularism, could not resist the temptation of using Vinoba's fast as a political weapon against the Janata government. When the question of supporting the constitutional amendment for a complete ban on cow-slaughter came before Parliament, however, she backed out completely.

Most of the political parties face a dilemma. They wish to appear secular so that they do not alienate the Muslims and Christians. At the same time they do not like to take the risk of alienating the vast masses of Hindus by opposing the demand for ban on cow-slaughter. They thus politically evade the issue. Government's evasive tactics are obvious from the strategy it employed in

dealing with the demand. In 1966, it had appointed a committee consisting of retired judges and others to look into the question of a ban on cow-slaughter, and persuaded the Jagadguru Shankrasharya to give up his fast. In 1979, the government first set up a committee consisting of various central ministers and leaders of the opposition parties to persuade Vinoba Bhave to give up the decision to go on a fast-unto-death. In a written note, the committee members requested, 'it is our feeling that if you put off your fast for a reasonable period of time which in our view should not be less than one year, we have every hope of being able to prevail upon the two state governments to fall in line with rest of the country.' This move failed. The government then suggested to Vinoba Bhave that the state governments should enact legislation banning the inter-state movement of cattle, but this move again failed.

Thirdly, the ruling party, without compromising its position in terms of secular principles, indirectly helped in the passing of a private member's resolution which could be forwarded to the governments of the two states, requesting them to ban cow-slaughter. The government did not issue a Central Whip for passing the resolution because, if it had done so, it would have indicated the government's stand on the issue. The private member's resolution, with the tacit support of the ruling party, did not affect government's constitutional position that a ban on cow-slaughter was a state subject, but the government could send the resolution to the state governments requesting them, on behalf of the House, to ban cow-slaughter. This is apparent from the informal discussions held by Prime Minister Morarji Desai with his Cabinet colleagues, where it was decided that, 'the resolution should be forwarded to the Kerala and West Bengal governments, who should be told to take note of the sentiments

of the House. On its part, the government was committed to the constitutional directive' (Hindustan Times, 13 April 1979). Finally, as the condition of fasting Vinoba Bhave grew worse, the government assured the Bhoodan leader that it would amend the constitution if other opposition parties supported the government. The Bhoodan leader broke his fast after this assurance. The government, however, knew that opposition Congress parties cannot support this amendment for fear of losing Muslim votes and that, without their support, the amendment could not be made because its numerical strength was weak in the Rajya Sabha (Upper House). As was to be expected, the opposition parties in Congress have backed out of their promised support for the amendment, and the government has again tactfully avoided this sensitive issue until the next movement that might take place in the future.

Even if the government or the Congress Party takes a clear stand on the issue, the support of members of the parties in Parliament is not automatic: on this issue they are guided more by the religious composition of the voters in their constituencies than by the Central Whip issued by the party leaders in Parliament. In 1955, two members of the then ruling Congress Party defied the Party Whip to vote against the bill on prevention of cow-slaughter. In 1966, the then Home Minister Gulzari Lal Nanda had to resign because of his sympathy with the demand for a ban on cow-slaughter. In 1979 Janata Party MPs coming from West Bengal and Kerala openly opposed the Prime Minister's decision to introduce the bill on cow-protection and decided to vote against the Party Whip. Some members of the opposition Congress party strongly opposed the Whip issued by the leaders in support of the demand.

In general, the tendency of MPs is to avoid participation in the discussion on cow-slaughter in Parliament

and in the voting on this issue. Commenting on the presence of only 42 out of 543 members of Parliament in the Lok Sabha at the time of voting on Ramji Singh's resolution seeking a ban on cow-slaughter, a former Jana Sangh MP said, in a public speech on cow-protection, 'While I was arguing with the Minister of Food and Agriculture for a ban on cow-slaughter all my friends and members of other parties in the Parliament ran to the coffee house in the central hall and avoided giving their views on the protection of cows in the country for fear of loss of Muslim votes'. MPs who had a popular base among Hindus, however, openly demanded the ban while the Muslims who enjoyed the support of Muslim voters openly opposed the issue in Parliament. Ramji Singh, the mover of the resolution, in an attempt to win appreciation from Hindus, said, 'I have received telegrams of congratulation from my friends in the constituency for moving this resolution. I have also received telegrams from Muslim voters of my constituency that Muslim votes are gone for you forever but I am firm on this issue.'

The government's embarrassing position was evident from its inability to deal firmly with the demand for a complete ban on cow-slaughter, primarily due to the fact that traditional values regarding the sacredness of the cow are very strong among Hindus. The communal riots in the post-independence period, the violent demonstrations outside Parliament, and the spectacular success of the Jana Sangh in the fourth general elections, substantiate the fact that traditional values have not been replaced by secular values, despite industrialisation and urbanisation. Opinions are highly diverse even among educated people, and one cannot firmly say that with increased education these values will disappear. Among those who wrote letters to editors regarding a ban on cow-slaughter, many Hindus supported the demand on religious and ethical

grounds against Muslim writers who considered the demand as the one involving the imposition of Hindu values on the beef-eating minorities. Even those who offered economic reasons for opposing the demand were angrily attacked by the people who justified the demand on religious and moral grounds, as shown by the following excerpts.

P. Kodanda Rao wrote: 'There has already been competition between men and cattle for the available food and the maintenance of useless cattle results in underfeeding of the useful ones. Should India expect foreign countries, however friendly, to tax themselves to feed not only the people of India but also its uneconomic cows?' An outraged reply to this was: 'Mr Kodanda Rao suggests the killing of old cows because it is uneconomic to maintain them. By the same token, how would it be if one suggests that all old, useless and unemployed people whose pension will not pay for their upkeep, also be liquidated?' (Whyte 1968: 123). Some Hindu writers held that the demand was justified on religious grounds: 'When any other meat would serve the purpose, no normal person can object to the interdiction of cow slaughter specially when there are millions who feel unhappy over it. For twenty years, the Hindus have been waiting for this concession.' (The Statesman: January 11, 1967). In a letter on Vinoba Bhave's fast for a ban on cow-slaughter, a Hindu wrote, 'the cow is a sacred animal for Hindus. In Independent India, the beef-eating communities must change their dietary habits in order to respect the sentiments of a large number of Hindus.' Patil from Bombay pointed out the humanitarian aspect of the demand saying 'the demand for a ban on cow-slaughter stems from a humanitarian understanding, a desire to widen the scope of human ethics (The Times of India, December 18, 1966). On the other hand, Muslim writers opposed the imposition of Hindu religious values. One retorted: 'if Muslims are not allowed to eat beef, it does

little harm to them physically, but psychologically, they will fall victims to a damaging inferiority complex. The cow is regarded go mata [mother] by Hindus but religion does not ask its followers to force its principles on others' (The Statesman, February 15, 1967). Another Muslim wrote, 'the cow is sacred for Hindus but this sacredness cannot be imposed on other communities. Pigs are despised by all Muslims but Muslims have never forced Hindus to stop eating the flesh of pigs.'

I have interviewed sadhus in Haridwar about the role of religious people entering politics to demand a ban on cow-slaughter. The opinion among the sadhus on this issue also lacked consensus. One said: 'our duty is to advise the king on the protection of religion but we should not enter politics and agitate for a ban on the slaughter of cows.' Yet another sadhu said emphatically: 'The cow is sacred and must be protected. The crisis which the Congress government is facing now is because of cow-killing.' This shows that even among educated people and sadhus, many people support the demand for a ban on cow slaughter and insist that Muslims and other minority communities should change their dietary practices in accordance with Hindu religious ideology. Among the uneducated and common people a combination of pragmatism and sentiment towards the cow prevails.

#### CONCLUSIONS

Two questions are important. How did a cultural pattern of sacredness of the cow, typically suitable for pastoral or peasant economies, persist in an urban environment? Why was the cow preferred to other modes of integration for launching a freedom movement or to capture power in the secular democratic political system of the post-Independence period? Any explanation in terms of economic



determinism to this cultural pattern is inadequate for answering these questions. The persistence of the sacredness of the cow in urban areas, the communal riots in the cities for its protection, the noisy demonstrations by political parties, their winning of elections through exploiting the cow-slaughter issue, and the general feelings of Hindus against cow-slaughter irrespective of differences in environment, technology and education, are all logically integrated by the central belief in the achievement of salvation through cows, and the sharing of this belief by all Hindus.

In the cultural framework, the cow is a mediator in the relationship between man and the gods, in addition to being an instrument between man and nature. Proximity to the gods and the achievement of happiness comes with the achievement of salvation. In worldly life, the relationship between man and nature is mediated by the gods. In the relationship between man and nature the cow thus mediates through the gods. In this framework of meaning, cow is more an object for the accomplishment of the ultimate end of salvation rather than merely an object for maximising immediate material rewards. In worldly life, most basic problems such as fate, suffering, evil or benefits from the gods are all linked with attitudes towards the cow. Cow-worship pleases the gods and helps to win abundant favour from them; cruelty to cows angers them, resulting in suffering and misery. The rural migrants into the urban sector took with them their belief in the instrumental role of cow-worship in the accomplishment of ultimate goals. In a more complex social environment, urban Hindus like rural Hindus, go to Haridwar and donate cows to the Brahmins so that the deceased might reach heaven. They continue to observe Kanagat rituals through offering food to the wandering cows in the cities so that ancestors might receive this food. The persistence of this belief even

among some educated people continues to reinforce their belief in the sacredness of the cow. Thus, on the cultural level of meaning of the sacredness of the cow, there is not much difference between rural and urban Hindus, between a rural Hindu farmer of mechanised agriculture or of less mechanised agriculture, or between an educated urban Hindu and an illiterate rural Hindu.

The sharing of this belief by many Hindus all over the country and the beef-eating practices of British rulers caused Hindus to launch a freedom movement. Castes, sects and others could integrate much smaller numbers of people and would have been incapable of initiating a national level freedom movement. After Independence, the belief in the sacredness of cow and of cow-protection as one of Hinduism's highest religious ideals continued. Hindu political parties were aware of this, and used cow-protection as a political weapon in the struggle for power. On the other hand, both the British government and the Congress government were aware of the Hindu sentiments for the cow and consciously and deliberately evaded the issue. They neither accepted the demand for a ban on cow-slaughter nor openly rejected it.

The attitude towards cows requires a redefinition of the relationship between man, god and nature in the Hindu central value system and a reformulation of metaphysical ideas about ultimate ends, immediate needs, proper responses to problems of fate and suffering, and religious duties and the secular struggle for power. Neither the substitution of bullocks by tractors, nor the revolutionary changes in agricultural practices can bring about an automatic reformulation of these ideas. This will only be possible when political interference in the religious field is eliminated and an independent attempt is made to reinterpret the ancient texts, or to use them in a suitable way to develop a scientific attitude towards the cow

in the economic interests of the country, and secular values for the development of the country.

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