



Did Vedic people really eat cow? 1

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Under the pretext of disseminating true knowledge about the past to young, impressionable school children, a perverse assault has been launched upon the religious sensitivities of the Hindu community. Marxist historians allege that ancient Hindus ate beef, that scriptures, and that this should be taught to school children. The Hindu prohibition on cow slaughter, they say, is a more recent development and Hindus are shying away from this truth because it is intimately linked with their sense of identity.



A Marxist specialist on ancient India, ignorant in both Vedic and Panini's Sanskrit, claims that the Shatapatha Brahmana and Vasistha Dharmasutra clearly state that guests were honoured by serving beef. She also cites archaeological evidence as reported by H.D. Sankalia and B.B. Lal. While the lady thinks her evidence is irrefutable, I have decided to pick up the gauntlet.

To begin with, the Shatapatha Brahmana is Yajnavalkya's commentary on the Yajur Veda, and not a revealed text. As for the Vasistha Dharmasutra, the legendary Sanskritist, late P.V. Kane, said, "beyond the name Vasistha there is hardly anything special in the dharmasutra to connect it with the Rgveda." Kane also added, "grave doubts have been entertained about the authenticity of the whole of the text of the Vas.Dh.S. as the mss. (manuscripts) contain varying numbers of chapters from 6 to 30, and as the text is hopelessly corrupt in several places. many verses bear the impress of a comparatively late age." Kane tentatively places this text between 300-100 B.C., that is, long after the end of the Vedic age.

According to archaeologists, the early Vedic age tentatively falls between the fourteen century BC to the first millennium BC. The later Vedic period lies between 1000 BC to 600-700 BC. But if we go by astronomical dating of some of the hymns, we get a period of 7000 BC for a portion of the Vedas.

The honest question, however, is whether the Vedas offer evidence about cow slaughter and beef-eating, and if not, how the controversy arose in the first place. A few clarifications are in order before we proceed. The word 'cow' (gau), for instance, is used throughout the Vedas in diverse senses, and, depending on the context of the verse, could mean the animal cow, waters, sun-rays, learned persons, Vedic verses, or Prithvi (earth as Divine Mother).

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Quote from scripture

If one is trained to honor and worship the cows and brahmanas, he is actually civilized. SB 6.18.52 Purport

Is this advancement?

The arguments in the West for cow slaughter are no more uncontested. There are better sources of protein than beef. Any dietician's chart shows that beef with 22 per cent protein ranks below soya-bean (43), groundnut (31) and pulses (24 per cent).

Then, Vedic society was heterogeneous, pluralistic, and non-vegetarian. In theory, it is possible that the cow was killed and eaten. **The fact, however, is that throughout the Vedas the cow is called a non-killable animal, or "aghnya."** According to "An Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Sanskrit on Historical Principles" (Vol. I, Deccan College, Poona), "aghnya" means "not to be killed or violated" and is used for cows and for waters in the presence of which oaths were taken.

The Rig and Sama Veda call the cow "aghnya" and "Aditi", ie. not to be murdered (Rig 1-64-27; 5-83-8; 7-68-9; 1-164-40; 8-69-2; 9-1-9; 9-93-3; 10-6-11; 10-87-16). They extol the cow as un-killable, un-murderable, whose milk purifies the mind and keeps it free from sin. Verse 10-87-16 prescribes severe punishment for the person who kills a cow. **The Atharva Veda recommends beheading (8-3-16) for such a crime; the Rig Veda advocates expulsion from the kingdom (8-101-15).**

Hence, it seems unlikely that the cow would be slaughtered to entertain guests, as claimed by Marxist historians. But before coming to any conclusion, the archaeological evidence should also be examined. Archaeologists have excavated bones of cattle in huge quantity, "cattle" is a collective noun which includes the cow, bull, buffalo, nilgai and all other bovine animals. Nowhere in the world can experts differentiate between the bones of cows and other cattle recovered from excavations.

There are good reasons for this difficulty. Most of the bones found are not whole carcasses, but large pieces of limbs. Experts feel that these could be the remains of animals that died naturally and were skinned for their hide and bones. Ancient man used bones to make knives and other tools; the splintered bones found could be part of the tool-making exercise. In all honesty, therefore, cattle bone finds do not prove cow slaughter or the eating of cow meat, especially when all literary evidence points in the opposite direction.

There has been talk about cut-marks on the bones. But apart from tool-making, even if a tanner skins dead cattle for the hide, he will inflict cut marks on the carcass. Scientifically, it is not possible to say if the marks on the bones are ante-mortem or post-mortem. This can be determined only where the body is intact (animal or human), by analyzing blood vessels, tissue, rigor mortis and other factors. Fortunately, there is now clinching evidence why the Marxist claim on cow-flesh rests on false premises. As already stated, the allegation rests mainly on literary sources and their interpretation, and we are in a position to trace the source of the mischief - the Vachaspathyam of Pandit Taranath and his British mentors.

Pandit Taranath, a professor of grammar at the Calcutta Sanskrit College, compiled a six-volume Sanskrit-to-Sanskrit dictionary, which is used by scholars to this day. The Vachaspathyam is a valuable guide for scholars because there are certain words in the samhita (mantra) section of the Vedas that are not found later in the Puranas.

What most Sanskrit scholars have failed to notice is that Taranath artfully corrupted the meanings of a few crucial words of the Vedic samhita to endorse the meaning given by Max Muller in his translation of the Vedas. Swami Prakashanand Saraswati has exposed this beautifully in "The True History and the Religion of India, A Concise Encyclopedia of Authentic Hinduism" (Motilal Banarsidass).

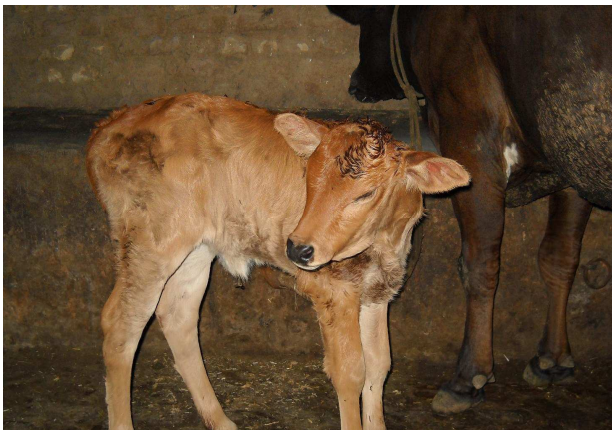
The British idea was that Max Muller would translate the Rig Veda "in such a scornful manner that Hindus themselves should begin to reproach their own religion of the Vedas," while a Hindu pandit would "compile an elaborate Sanskrit dictionary that should exhibit disgraceful meanings of certain words of the Vedic mantras." As Hindus would not question a dictionary by a Hindu pandit, the British would be able to claim that whatever Max Muller wrote about the Vedas was according to the dictionary of the Hindus.

Swami Prakashanand Saraswati focuses on two words - goghn and ashvamedh. "Goghn" means a guest who receives a cow as gift. Panini created a special sutra to establish the rule that goghn will only mean the receiver of a cow (and will not be used in any other sense). But Taranath ignored Panini's injunction and wrote that "goghn" means "the killer of a cow." He similarly converted the ashvamedh yagna from 'ritual worship of the horse' to the "killing of the horse."

The Swami proves the British hand in this mischief through the patronage given to Taranath by the Government of Bengal in 1866, when Lt. Governor Sir Cecil Beadon sanctioned ten thousand rupees for two hundred copies of his dictionary. This was a king's ransom in those days, as even in the 1930s the headmaster of a vernacular primary school received a salary of twenty rupees a month. Today, ten thousand rupees is the equivalent of two million rupees.

When the basic premise upon which all modern translations rest is thus knocked off its pedestal, what beef is left in the theory that Vedic Hindus enjoyed the flesh of the cow? I rest my case.

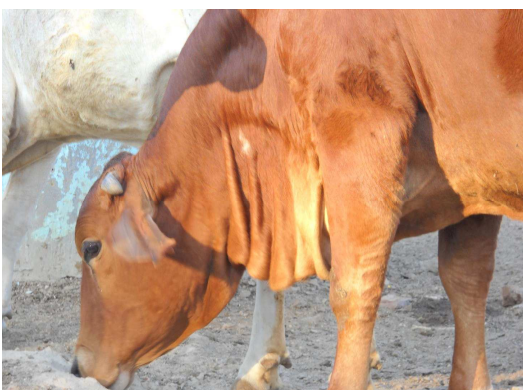
Make friendship with Krishna's Cows 2



**New Born
Tattoo No 051**

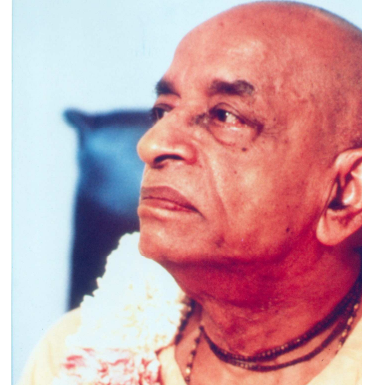
ADOPTION OF THE MONTH-NANDINI VENUGOPAL FROM BANGLORE

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Asvamedha-yajnas or Gomedha-yajnas, sacrifices in which a horse or a bull is sacrificed, were not, of course, for the purpose of killing the animals. Lord Caitanya said that such animals sacrificed on the altar of yajna were rejuvenated and a new life was given to them. It was just to prove the efficacy of the hymns of the Vedas. By recitation of the hymns of the Vedas in the proper way, certainly the performer gets relief from the reactions of sins, but in case of such sacrifices improperly done under inexpert management, surely one has to become responsible for animal sacrifice. In this age of quarrel and hypocrisy there is no possibility of performing the yajnas perfectly for want of expert brahmanas who are able to conduct such yajnas. Maharaja Yudhisthira therefore gives a hint to performing sacrifices in the age of Kali. In the Kali-yuga the only sacrifice recommended is the performance of hari-nama-yajna inaugurated by Lord Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu. But one should not indulge in animal killing and counteract it by performing the hari-nama yajna. Those who are devotees of the Lord never kill an animal for self-interest, and (as the Lord ordered Arjuna) they do not refrain from performing the duty of a ksatriya. The whole purpose, therefore, is served when everything is done for the will of the Lord. This is possible only for the devotees.

SB 1.8.52



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