

Cows caught in the crossfire:

Provisional remarks on India's current cow slaughter debate

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Abstract

This article focuses on the voices raised from Muslim, Christian and Dalit communities on the highly sensitive topic of beef consumption in India. It discusses the main points of the debate on cow protection which has taken place in the last years. India is defined as a secular country,² but already in this text (in Article 48) the Hindu portion of the population managed to obtain an important recognition of the inviolability of the cow. As a matter of fact, the vast majority of Indian states (excluding the North-East states, West Bengal and Kerala) currently forbid the slaughtering of cows, and often also of bulls, bullocks, heifers and calves. Many Muslims, Christians and Dalits, in addition to many people who work in the beef-related business, regard the constitutional immunity given to the cow as discriminating against their communities, through a sort of 'food fascism', not only from a religious point of view, but also in relation to their economical subsistence and livelihood.

Keywords: India, cow protection, cow slaughter, right-wing Hinduism, inter-religious debate

Introduction

This article arises out of the intriguing discussion regarding cows³ that has been taking place in India within the last few years. It focuses on the views expressed by Muslim, Christian and Dalit communities regarding the highly sensitive topic of beef consumption, the slaughtering of cows, and, more broadly, their role as religious icons. However, in a dialogic approach, it also deals with the opinions of those who feel they belong to the opposing group, that of the cow protectors. Particular attention will be given to some of the most recent crucial events and focal points of this debate.

This article will also reflect upon the heated (and often verbally violent) discussions currently taking place in the press⁴ and in the main virtual arenas of modern public debate, such as Twitter.⁵ While it is not my intention to put virtual clashes on social networks on a par with the riots that have caused deaths and imprisonments, ignoring these new arenas of public debate would only yield an imprecise discussion. India, like the rest of the world, is becoming increasingly digital at a fast pace. Moreover, as the 2014 General Elections have shown, alongside the conventional political campaigning, social media were widely used by Indian politicians to attract votes, especially because they prove to be the most effective way to reach India's youngest voters. For example, Narendra Modi's tweet 'India has won! Good days are coming' on the day of his electoral triumph became the most re-tweeted post in the history of India's social network media (Chilkoti 2014).

Brief historical background of the sanctity of bovines in Hindu religion and the issue of cow protection in Indian politics

Within modern Hinduism, the cow stands out for her particular role in religion and culture and the many positive values Hindus ascribe to her. Often called *go mata* (mother cow), she is the embodiment of the concept of motherhood, an animal providing not only milk for peoples' sustenance, but also dung for fuel, urine for medicines and offspring for draught purposes. So she is the personification of abundance and fertility (especially in the case of the mythical cow Kamadhenu), but also of gentleness, innocence, calmness and purity. Her body produces the *panchgavya* (the five products of the cow, i.e. milk, curd, clarified butter, urine and dung) (Nadal 2014), is the abode of 330 million gods, and is the perfect miniature of the universe (Korom 2000). Together with the sacred river Ganga and the sacred text Bhagavad Gita, she is one of the main symbols for Hindu devotees.

The principle of the holiness of the cow is regarded as one of the central symbols representing the Hindu culture, and among scholars, its origin and underlying reasons remain a highly delicate and debated issue, as demonstrated by the prolificacy of the 'sacred cow controversy' which went on for a long time in the 1960s and 1970s.⁶ Similarly, within Indian politics the related issue of cow protection and its history have often been controversial and thus hotly discussed.

In the historical records there is ample evidence that bulls were prominent in cult activities in the Indus Valley civilization (2500-1700 BCE) (Basham 1954), and in the following Vedic age cattle (of both sexes) gained even more importance as a source of food and a measure of wealth (Kosambi 1970). In the later part of the Vedic age, killing cattle to honour deities, to reward the sacrificial priest or to feed distinguished guests was a common custom, and Brahmins were in charge of this task (Prakash 1961). At those times, a *goghana* was specifically a guest for whom a cow is killed (Crooke 1912). Though there were objections to slaughtering certain cattle, the cow was not sacred at all (Simoons 1973).

Only at its very end, and in a bare manner, Vedic literature started to mention the doctrine of *ahimsa* and the special sanctity of the cow (Brown 1964). The first textual reference to this doctrine appeared in the *Chandogya Upanishad* (Lodrick 2005), and that period was marked by the weakening of the old Vedic tradition and the strengthening of the influence of Buddhism and Jainism within Hindu religion and culture. These two religious traditions were particularly strict on adherence to the principle of *ahimsa* and opposition to brahmanical sacrifice. Slowly, they gave to the newborn and still feeble idea of the inviolability of the cow a kind of moral sanction hitherto lacking. However, while the Maurya emperor Ashoka (304-232 BCE) made Buddhism an imperial religion and strongly promoted vegetarianism, till the third century CE classical religious texts such as the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Manusmriti* remained equivocal on the concept of *ahimsa* (Brown 1964). The consumption of beef was discouraged and finally became a taboo only in the fourth century CE, thanks to the start of the Krishna cult of Vaishnavism (Lal 1967). The Brahmins themselves not only abandoned cow slaughter and beef eating, but became leading protagonists of cow protection movements.

After the establishment of the Muslim rule in India, some Muslim rulers (such as Babar and Akbar) respected the inviolability of cows, promulgating anti-slaughter laws (Parel 1969). However, during the seventeenth century the Maratha ruler Shivaji exploited cows symbolically to gain political support in his opposition to Muslim rule (Smith 1919), and in the following century Dayananda Saraswati, founder of the Arya Samaj, did the same in his fight for Indian political and cultural independence (Freitag 1980). In 1881 he wrote the treatise *Gokarunanidhi* (Ocean of mercy to the cow) in which he strongly opposed cow slaughter as an anti-Hindu act. In the following year he set up the Gorakhshini Sabha (Cow Protection Society) in Punjab and made cow protection a symbol of nationalism and Hindu identity, against both the Muslims and the British, both beef eaters. This movement spread rapidly in North and Central India, and in 1893 it led to about forty communal riots between Hindus and Muslims (Misra 2008).

For Mahatma Gandhi (1954: 3), ‘the central fact of Hinduism is cow protection,’ but he never incited the Hindus against the Muslims and never used the term ‘*raksha*’ (‘protection, defence’) in this issue, since for him it implied an aggressive, and counterproductive, anti-Muslim attitude (Bourgat 2004). He instead founded the Go Seva Sangh (Cow Service Society) in 1924 and his vision would later deeply influence the pro-cow members of the Constituent Assembly in the drafting of the Indian Constitution in 1946-1950. This phase of the political battle over cow protection will be described in detail later in this article.

Before continuing, a short mention of the other bovine of India, the buffalo, is needed, especially because this animal is quite neglected in the academic literature (exceptions are the studies of Hoffpauir 1982 and Kancha 2004). From a religious point of view, within Hinduism buffaloes have been ascribed an extremely negative status compared to that of cows. In India, the pair cow/buffalo carries important symbolic meanings: the cow is associated to feminine, the colour white (the colour of Brahmins, the *sattva guna*, and milk), life, deities, vegetarianism and purity; the buffalo is linked to masculine, the colour black (the colour of the *Shudra*), death (the vehicle of the death god Yama is a black buffalo), blood, demons, meaty diet, the lowest castes and impurity (Toffin 2005). This range of negative religious and cultural values attributed to buffaloes is there even if these animals have a key role in Indian agriculture and dairy industry, very often even exceeding that of cows. For example, being fatter and more abundant the milk of she-buffaloes is usually more in demand, and thus higher-priced, than that of cows, and their physical strength and adaptation to humidity and rainy weather makes them the preferred draught animals in many parts of eastern and southern India (Randhawa 1946).

Most recent pro-cow or anti-beef initiatives

As shown above, in the last century the topic of beef-eating in ancient India has been raised in many studies by Indian and foreign scholars. Most probably, these studies have always met the disapprobation of those Hindus who did not recognize or accept that beef was eaten, but the public response that the book of Dwijendra Narayan Jha received in 2002 is exceptional and revealing. Jha, Professor of History at Delhi University,⁷ published his book *Holy Cow: Beef in Indian Dietary Traditions* (Jha 2001), stating that in Vedic times beef was a frequent ingredient in the diet not only of the common people, but even of the Brahmins. Even now, more than a decade later, this book appears to continually divide India. On one side, the pro-BJP newspaper *The Pioneer* states that Professor Jha has challenged authentic traditions and has ‘reiterated the wholly discredited beef-eating refrain’ (Dutt 2013), while on the other side Sukumar Muralidharan, the Delhi bureau chief for *Frontline*, claims that ‘the Hindu nationalist lobby is trying to force a kind of polarization in terms of a singular cultural inheritance on one side and all the rest on the other side. And their idea of the inheritance is very much their own construct, not a full reading of history’ (Eakin 2002).

The ‘Hindu nationalist lobby’ that the spokesman of this left-wing magazine refers to can be identified as the right-wing political parties such as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the Shiv Sena, the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) which, for its highly ideological approach, has been criticized as an extremist paramilitary group (Bhatt 2013: 140). The political ideology these organizations base their actions on is *hindutva*, which could be translated as *hinduness*, according to which Indian culture should be defined in terms of Hindu values. Briefly, this concept promotes adherence to Hindu traditional values, fights against communism, and longs for decolonization from the cultural influences spread in the country by Muslim and Christian/British ‘invaders’. In other words, the *hindutva* manifesto equates Indian, a nationality, to Hindu, a religion, alienating whoever and whatever according to this agenda does not conform with the monolithic idea of authentic Hinduism and Hindu tradition.

An idea, by definition, does not exist outside the mind of the subject who creates it as an object. To understand this point it is useful to use Hobsbawm and Ranger's (1992: 1) definition of 'invented tradition', that is a 'set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past.' Believing in and sharing idealized models, for example regarding the consumption of beef, *hindutva* supporters replicate their *own* ad hoc, self-styled, history and their 'authentic' or 'true' form of cow protection.

Among the various evidence that *hindutva* supporters commonly use to uphold their argument of the cultural and moral corruption of Hindu traditional values caused by foreign, intrusive non-Hindu forces, the cow is a very recurrent one. One of the most significant examples of this exploitation of the cow comes from some responses to the brutal mass rape that occurred in Delhi on 16 December 2012. This event created such unprecedented public disdain that all political parties sought to comment on it and somehow take sides in the issue. While some of them quickly dismissed it, blaming the moral degeneration that transformed the old and upright Bhārat⁸ into the modern and perverted India, Mohan Bhagwat, the leader of the RSS, went even so far as to propose a solution to this state of depravity. He publicly suggested that Hindus rediscover their lost traditional values by personally rearing a cow (Hindustan Times 25/12/2012).

It is not surprising then, that from the right-wing side of Indian politics a request has arisen, originating through a movement organized by mobile phone, to declare the cow as the 'mother of the nation'⁹ or, alternatively, India's new national animal, instead of the tiger. The *Times of India*, reporting the news, states that 'Ashok Kumar Pandey [chairman of the Sanatan Brahma Foundation which launched this initiative] admitted that the Sanatan Brahma Foundation is one of the hundreds of branches of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, and is a social organisation, which is engaged in restoring the pristine glory of the Indian culture and traditions, which over the years have eroded and have also faded from the public memory' (Sinha 2014). Replying to the reporter of the newspaper, Pandey stated that 'A tiger is known for its carnivorous nature, a cow on the other hand is revered owing to the fact that from its milk to urine and dung are being used by the mankind'. Turning the cow into the national animal and exploiting its potential would, in Pandey's expectations, create a fortune for India's economy.

Beside these personal statements, it is useful to consider the official stance taken regarding the 'cow-issue' by the BJP, the political party that, after the epochal defeat of the Congress Party in the Indian General Elections of May 2014, is currently attracting the largest public consent. In the manifesto issued for the elections, BJP made predictable but ambivalent use of the cow. On the one hand, the cow is mentioned for the first time only in the penultimate page of the document. On the other hand, it is referred to in the section concerned with cultural heritage, yet at the same time, in the paragraph under the headline 'Cow and its Progeny' the text particularly focuses on the economic value of this animal:

- In view of the contribution of cow and its progeny to agriculture, socio-economic and cultural life of our country, the Department of Animal Husbandry will be suitably strengthened and empowered for the protection and promotion of cow and its progeny.
- Necessary legal framework will be created to protect and promote cow and its progeny.
 - A National Cattle Development board will be set up to implement a Programme for the improvement of indigenous livestock breeds.

Even though the first argument whereby cows are said to contribute to the country is within the field of agriculture, cows or, more broadly, cattle, never appear in the sections of

the document devoted specifically to this topic (such as the one entitled ‘Agriculture—Productive, Scientific and Rewarding’).¹⁰

Keeping in consideration the dialogical purpose of this article, it will be useful also to analyse the presence, or absence, of cows in the electoral manifestos of three other parties which are particularly important in India’s current political scene. The first is the centre-left Indian National Congress, which, after decades of continued success, in May 2014 lost the battle against the BJP. The second is the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), the third largest party in the Lok Sabha, which can be located at the centre of the political spectrum. The third and last is the young centre-left Aam Aadmi Party (AAP). Even though it is present mainly in the political arena of Delhi and not the entire country, its overwhelming victory over the Congress and the BJP in the 2015 Delhi Legislative Assembly election marks it as a new significant part of Indian politics.

In the Indian National Congress manifesto the word ‘cow’ never appears.¹¹ However, cattle are mentioned in the 33rd page (out of 49) in the section ‘Agriculture and Farmer Welfare’:

Small and marginal farmers own more than half the country’s total cattle and buffalo. However, only 12% of the total expenditure on agriculture is on livestock development. The Indian National Congress will place a special emphasis on livestock, fisheries, opening of veterinary schools and centres, fodder development through animal husbandry programmes and schemes.

The manifesto of the AIADMK mentions the cow openly, but only in its first part, which sums up the achievements of the team of the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, Puratchi Thalaivi Amma, within the politics of this State. In the section ‘Social Welfare Schemes’ one can read:

In order to usher in a white revolution,¹² the scheme of free distribution of Milch Cows and Goats is being implemented. So far, 34,687 cows and 15,93,168 goats have been distributed.

Lastly, the AAP manifesto never mentions cows or cattle.

In October 2014, five months after the installation of the BJP in the Lok Sabha, an unprecedented milestone was implemented in the path of cow protection. In Rajasthan, Otaram Devasi was appointed India’s first cow ‘minister’ (Deshmane 2015). Technically he is not a minister since the Constitution does not allow states to set up new ministries. Yet he is in charge of cow-related affairs, leads the Gaupalan (‘cow protection’) Department and is responsible also for Rajasthan’s Gau Seva Commission and Cow Conservation Directorate. While he intends to convince Narendra Modi to set up a true cow ministry at the Centre, he also claims that ‘Cows have a spiritual importance unlike other livestock animals. They must be protected at any cost. I would request Modiji to ban cow slaughter and, if need be, introduce strong legislation for that’ (Deshmane 2015).

In the current state of affairs, this wish to ban cattle (and especially cow) slaughter on a national level is difficult to achieve, since the ‘Preservation, protection and improvement of stock and prevention of animal diseases, veterinary training and practice’ is exclusively the responsibility of the individual state legislations. Given this freedom of choice, the laws governing slaughter of bovines vary greatly from state to state.¹³ In some states (Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, Tripura and Kerala) there is no restriction, so bovines can be slaughtered and beef and carabeef (buffalo meat) can be freely consumed. The majority of the other states forbid

the slaughter of cattle but, through the ‘fit-for-slaughter’ certificate, acknowledge some exceptions depending on factors like the age and gender of the animals and their economic viability. A few other states (Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab and Rajasthan) completely ban cattle slaughter (thus including bulls, bullocks, heifers and calves) and some states ban buffalo slaughter as well. Among these states the penal provisions can include a jail term which varies from six months to ten years and a fine up to 50,000 rupees. In most of these states cattle slaughter is a bailable offence, but it is also cognizable (i.e. the police have the authority to start an investigation without the permission of a court and to make an arrest without a warrant). Apart from cattle slaughter, the most restrictive states also ban export of beef for any purpose, the sale and transport of beef or beef products in any form, and the possession of beef.

New amendments to these laws on cattle slaughter can always be enacted, and the trend of the last ten years¹⁴ has clearly showed an increased legal tightening. Every time this happens, accusations of unconstitutionality are raised from those citizens who are not in favour of a legal immunity for cows (and even less for cattle in general). Since 2 March 2015, similar waves of protest have already started to arise in the BJP-led state of Maharashtra. That day, in response to the request of the BJP Member of Parliament Kirit Somaiya, the President of India, Pranab Mukherjee, gave his consent to the almost 20-year-old *Maharashtra Animal Preservation (Amendment) Bill* that was pending approval. This bill was passed by the Maharashtra Assembly during the BJP-Shiv Sena rule in 1995, and was meant as an amendment to the *Maharashtra Animal Preservation Act, 1976*, which banned only cow slaughter and acknowledged the validity of the ‘fit-for-slaughter’ certificate in the case of bulls and bullocks. Now, section 5 of the *Maharashtra Animal Preservation (Amendment) Bill, 1995* also extends the ban to bulls and bullocks. It also provides that nobody shall export and transport these animals outside the state for the purpose of their slaughter, purchase and sale, or have in possession their flesh (even if they have been slaughtered outside Maharashtra, where cattle slaughter is legal). As far as the penalties are concerned, whoever contravenes these provisions can now be punished with imprisonment for a term which has been raised from six months to five years, or with a fine which was of one thousand rupees but has now been increased to ten thousands rupees. Section 10 states that ‘Notwithstanding anything contained in the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 (2 of 1974), all offences under this Act shall be cognizable and non-bailable’. Finally, section 13 states that ‘No suit, prosecution or other legal proceeding shall be instituted against any person for anything which is in good faith done or intended to be done under this Act.’

Through Twitter, Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis announced the news with the words ‘Our dream of ban on cow slaughter becomes a reality now’, while Kirit Somaiya defined his victory as an ‘a historic step, which has cultural as well as economic implications for the state’ (Struggle for Hindu Existence. *Ban on Cow Slaughter in Maharashtra*). The (supposedly) positive economic repercussions of this ban have been explained to the press by the Finance Minister Sudhir Mungantiwar: ‘It not only ensures that animals are not killed, but would also stabilise the agricultural situation ... Even healthy animals were being killed for money, but it will stop now.’ The illegal killing of healthy animals is certainly part of the issue, the part the supporters of the ban prefer to highlight. But the other aspect of the problem, which greatly concerns farmers, is the fate of unproductive animals, such as the ones who are old, disabled, infirm, sick or barren: in other words, uneconomic. For their owners, a prohibition on their slaughter means an economic burden,¹⁵ since they are no longer allowed to sell their cattle to slaughterhouses and instead have to maintain them.

Manifestations of disapproval have been immediate. Equally immediate have been the replies given by the promoters of this ban and their devoted and new supporters. The result is a very articulate, multi-faceted, and often heated debate, and, above all, a sectarian picture of the facts of the present and the past. While it is not my intention to play down the complexity of this situation, for the sake of discussion I think it can be useful to distinguish five main groups in this dispute: right-wing Hindus, left-wing Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Dalits. Of course this classification is in no way inclusive of the entire Indian population, and these five categories are not meant to be mutually exclusive (for example, among Dalits there are Christians, and left-wing Hindus). Moreover, each of these five categories cannot be described by an abstract, static and univocally valid definition, since the way that the members of these groups actually define themselves and are defined by others varies considerably depending on the situation and the confrontation with their counterparts. It is therefore advisable to avoid rigid definitions that are disconnected from the context which gives them their meaning.

Let us start considering the dispute between the most fierce opponents: right-wing Hindus and Muslims. Left-wing Hindus are part of the dispute as well, defending the secularism that the Constitution explicitly recognises.

Hindu-Muslim dialogue

To tackle this discussion and to understand its present content, it is essential to go back briefly to the drafting of the Constitution of India in the years 1946-50 and to sum up the turbulent story of its article number 48 which, under the heading 'Organisation of agriculture and animal husbandry', 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.

Cow protection was proposed to the Constituent Assembly of India by Pandit Thakur Dass Bhargava, who wanted it to be included in the Fundamental Rights of the Constitution with the ultimate aim of guaranteeing incontestable legal immunity to the cow. Muslims were ready to accept the ban on cattle slaughter demanded by right-wing Hindus, but wanted them to admit openly, and demonstrate in the drafting of the constitutional article, that their demands were clearly and unambiguously religious in nature (Simoons 1973: 283). Considering the risk of this assertion, the pro-ban section of the Assembly withdrew; secularist Hindus led by Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar strongly opposed conservative Hindus' requests and worked for a compromise, which was eventually accepted (Chigateri 2011: 142).¹⁶ As a matter of fact, cow protection was included in the Directive Principle of State Policy (and not in the Fundamental Rights section) and was provided with the explanation regarding agriculture and husbandry that made it understandable and acceptable for those who, like Jawaharlal Nehru, wanted independent India to be a secular country and its Constitution not biased by religion. This concession was not easy to accept for those members of the Constituent Assembly who wished to reflect in this article their Hindu sentiments towards cows. Pandit Thakur Dass Bhargava described this compromise as a 'sacrifice', and closed his speech with the highly significant sentence: 'I do not want that, due to its inclusion in the Fundamental Rights, non-Hindus should complain that they have been forced to accept a certain thing against their will' (Government of India 2002: Chapter 1, Paragraph 43).

As these words suggest, the controversy among secularist and conservative Hindus was only one part of the delicate problem regarding the constitutional protection of cattle. There

was also the dispute with some of the followers of two other religions present in India: Christianity and Islam. Even though these two faiths have a long presence in India, they have originated outside the country. Therefore, it is not difficult to imagine the position on the emotive issue of beef consumption from the right-wing citizens who, apart from being 'Hindus', are generally also proud nationalists. Not acknowledging as historically true that ancient 'Hindus' also ate beef, their most common argument is that the ones who have introduced cattle slaughter and beef consumption in India have been the Muslims, then followed by the Christians. The Report of the National Commission on Cattle dated 2002 has no doubt regarding 'The genesis of cow slaughter in India':

Cow slaughter in India first started around 1000 A.D, when various Islamic invaders came to this country from Turkey, Iran (Persia), Arabia and Afghanistan. According to Islamic traditions in Arab countries they used to kill and sacrifice goats and sheep. ... When the invaders came to India, they started sacrificing cows, especially on the occasion of Bakri-Id. This was done more to humiliate the natives of this country and establish their sovereignty and superiority rather than for food purposes. (Government of India 2002: Chapter 1, Paragraph 25)

Given the atmosphere of controversy in which Article 48 was born, and the current increasing radicalisation of the factions involved in this debate, it is not surprising that this article and the topic it seeks (or carefully avoids?) to regulate has very often created moments of tension within the last sixty years.¹⁷ The Gau Raksha Dal (Party for Cow Protection) is frequently involved in these clashes, standing on the side of those who object to cattle slaughter. Since August 2010 the president of the Gau Raksha Dal Punjab, Satish Kumar, runs a blog where he explains their activities and intentions. 'War against cow killers', is the self-explanatory sentence which follows in every page of the website with the logo of this association, a white cow and a *trisula* (trident). In the 'About us' page Kumar introduces himself with a photomontage which depicts him wearing a scarf, not accidentally saffron (the colour of the Hindu right), accompanied by a herd of cows. In the seven pages of the blog, Satish Kumar does not deny or hide the remarkable violence its message contains and openly displays. The introductory text is quite explicit about the purpose of the initiative he is leading: 'It is aim of my life to die for saving cows from Butchers'; 'Satish Kumar has demanded from Govt., it [cattle slaughter] should be banned immediately, otherwise, consequences may be very horrible'; 'We are group of cow devotees who voluntary serves for protect of cows by direct fight with killers of cows on the roads'; 'I am saving my mother and other devotees are with me who took risk of life for protection of cows'; 'This objective can only achieved by killing of all killers of cows ... This is time not to martyr but to kill the killers of cows in India'.

A slideshow of two hundred photographs demonstrates the work of the Gau Raksha Dal Punjab. Apart from countless pictures depicting the illegal transportation of cattle in overloaded trucks and in dreadful conditions, others show the cattle rescuers who freed the animals, giving them medical treatment or burying the corpses of the ones which had not survived the journey. Most of these people show no evident hallmark of their faith (if any), but some are clearly Hindus and a few are Sikhs. A dozen pictures show explicitly the presence of a religious foundation at the base of the Gau Raksha Dal movement. In fact, some of the images shown have not been taken at truck halts, but in *goshalas* (cattle shelters) and during religious meetings characterized by the ubiquitous presence of the recurrent colour saffron and images of Krishna, the Hindu deity most clearly connected with cows. The last category of pictures shows the treatment given to the truck drivers. They are usually shown squatting on the ground or in the truck with their arms under their knees and their hands protecting the face, but in some occasions they are depicted with the face covered with motor

oil, partially undressed or with pairs of shoes hanging around their neck. Surrounded by the cattle rescuers, they are often depicted begging for mercy. Some pictures demonstrate violence in a more evident way, with the drivers being beaten with sticks and fists. The captions ‘Captured Cow Butchers’ and ‘Beating Cow Butchers’ leave no doubt, as well as the eight needs expressed by the group. In addition to donations of money, diesel, and fodder and medicines for cattle, potential supporters can also contribute to this cause by providing weapons.

The Gau Raksha Dal is active in almost the whole of Northern India, Maharashtra included, so, given its ideological proximity to the principles which characterize the political agenda of the BJP, it is legitimate to ask if this organization could have any influence in the issue of the *Maharashtra Animal Preservation (Amendment) Bill, 1995*. Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis was quick to dismiss this speculation, saying that the ban on cattle slaughter is not driven by any religious grudge against Muslims, has nothing to do with the *hindutva* agenda and is guided only by the Constitution. Again, he has stated that the only aim of this ban is the promotion of agriculture and the socio-economic welfare of the state. In an interview with *The Indian Express*, he added that ‘those viewing every decision from a narrow prism and accusing us of a hidden agenda are playing dirty politics’ (Khapre 2015).

Predictably, many Maharashtra Muslims do not seem to believe in Fadnavis’ justification of the agro-economic rationale for the ban and, above all, in its constitutional correctness.¹⁸ Their voices can be heard in *The Milli Gazette* that has clearly expressed its position on this matter by republishing a report by Anand Teltumbde (2015) of the Committee for the Protection of Democratic Rights, Mumbai. This report highlights that article 48 of the Constitution protects only the productive animals and that the ban on the slaughter of non-milk and non-draught cattle deprives many people of their livelihood and staple food. Refuting the claims of the BJP spokesperson Madhav Bhandari, according to whom the ban finds its justification also in the Gandhian principle of *ahimsa* (non-violence),¹⁹ the Committee for the Protection of Democratic Rights states that ‘while the cow supposedly engenders ahimsa, violence is unleashed against the Other in the guise of the holy cow’s protection.’

For a moment, let us put aside the religious component of this ban and consider only its economic side. Despite the legal protection for cows granted by the Constitution and the State laws, India has 32,000 illegal slaughterhouses, plus 3,600 which are regularly registered (Krishnakumar 2003). Even if the largest portion of this meat is for export (Ghosh 2013), remarkable quantities are also for the local market, since, despite the myth of the vast diffusion of vegetarianism in India, people who do not eat meat are no more than 40% (Yadav and Kumar 2006).²⁰ What is more, among Brahmins, who ‘by tradition’ should be the strictest followers of vegetarianism, only 55% are vegetarian. Similarly, only 43% of the Hindus who define themselves as actually observant are vegetarians. These data show quite clearly that the religious motivations for vegetarianism seem not to be so strong as many, conservative people included, would like to believe.

In practical terms, these data also show that meat generates huge business in India, since India’s beef and carabeef consumption post-Independence has witnessed a much faster upward spiral than any other kind of meat (Lal 2012). Even though beef, the target of Maharashtra ban, is only a part of it, it is not insignificant. In fact, in the total beef and carabeef market of Maharashtra, beef represents not less than 75% (Shaikh 2015). It is undeniable, then, that the ban will affect the incomes of many families. In fact, Mumbai owns one of the biggest abattoirs in the country, in Deonar, and the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation has already calculated that will lose up to 15,000,000 rupees annually because of the ban (Nayak Dutta 2015), which of course will cause cuts in staff and fewer job opportunities in the city. The same economic loss can be expected in the leather industry in the Dharavi quarter of Mumbai.

Despite the considerable repercussions of the *Maharashtra Animal Preservation (Amendment) Bill, 1995* on the practical level of simple subsistence for those people who live by meat-related business (as truck drivers, middlemen, butchers, workers in the slaughterhouses, meat vendors, bone and leather exporters, owners and workers of cold stores and of restaurants serving beef), when this topic reaches public debate it very often gets reduced, again, to a Muslims versus Hindus matter. Old arguments are reignited, even if in an up-to-date version. Let us take for example the recurrent thefts of street-wandering cattle which went on in Delhi in 2012-2013 and have often been ascribed to Muslims coming from Mewat, in Haryana. The violence, and illegality, of these actions is unquestionable. Therefore the cow protectors' opinion on this issue is rather predictable and reasonable. What can be less understandable is a statement like this one, written in *The Pioneer*: 'Incidentally, even in the sensational Dhaula Kuan gang-rape case in Delhi it was alleged by the police that the victim was assaulted by a gang of cattle thieves who had entered the Capital from Mewat with the intention of stealing cattle' (*The Pioneer* 16/12/2014).

However, to stir up conflict regarding this sensitive issue, it is not necessary to speak about cattle thefts and, especially, horrific rape cases. Recently, a Hindu Bollywood actor's statement also managed to rouse a huge debate on social media. On 15 March 2015 Rishi Kapoor tweeted: 'I am angry. Why do you equate food with religion?? I am a beef eating Hindu. Does that mean I am less God fearing than a non eater? Think!!'. After a selection of the most pertinent and not too offensive comments, here are some of the thousands of public replies this tweet has received:

I think he has already change his name to KHAN ... We real Hindu are in the minority, Aryan (originals Indian People) are already less than two percent of the populations, but the anti-Hindu forces are breeding like cockroaches... 98% of you people voted for Porkstan so what are you doing here

This is hindustan first of all.

You must be thrown out of hindu dharma..... We don't need crooks and polluters to pollute this Pure dharma that never allowed to kill and consume

They are anti Hindu. All people who are opposing Beef ban, they are not human being, I never see they speak against terrorism.

He should convert himself to Islam or Christianity ... They are slaves to their beef eating masters Muslim Mafia.

This is the saddest part of being a Hindu...the culture is so liberal that it would happily accommodate even those who go against it...had it not been for these traitor Hindus, Hinduism had been in a far better light.

You should thank that you are in India in the land of Hindus, if not satisfied go and stay in Pakistan.

(Firstpost)

Hindu-Christian-Dalit dialogue

The *Maharashtra Animal Preservation (Amendment) Bill, 1995* provides us with an opportunity to tackle the issue of cow protection from another, less common, perspective. This issue involves not only cattle slaughter but also beef consumption. While cattle slaughter

mainly reminds us of the Hindu-Muslim dispute, beef consumption also pertains to other components of the Indian population, such as Christians, followers of tribal religions and low-caste Hindus, or Dalits.

Bans on cattle slaughter deeply hit Dalits on two fronts. Firstly it deprives them of their job, since a common occupation of these people is skinning the carcasses of cattle. In fact, touching dead cattle and burying them are jobs 'traditionally' assigned to Dalits. Secondly, it denies them the little animal protein food they have, since beef is the one they can more easily afford, because of its low price.²¹ The absence of beef will raise the food costs for these underprivileged people, not only because they will have to resort to more expensive meats, but also because their price (as well as that of vegetables) could consequently rise. According to Bhimrao R. Ambedkar, this is not the first time this lack of alternatives hits Dalits. The same, he claims, happened also in the past when they remained the only ones among Hindus who ate beef (at least publicly). According to Ambedkar (1990), when, in the third century BCE, upper-caste Hindus abandoned beef eating, turned vegetarian and declared the cow holy, society still needed somebody to clear the cattle carcasses. Dalits were assigned this task and, because of their destitution, they started eating dead cattle meat as ordinary food. Thus, following Ambedkar's thesis, because of eating beef they were labelled untouchables, and because of being untouchables they continued to eat beef.

Despite the close connection between beef consumption and untouchability, for the BJP spokesperson Madhav Bhandari the problem of the Maharashtra ban dramatically affecting the livelihood of millions of Dalits seems not to exist. In fact, he stated that 'leaving aside the North East, beef is not part of the staple diet anywhere in India' (Punwani 2015: 18). This assertion does not differ too much from the verdict reached in 2005 by the Supreme Court of India bringing in Gujarat's total ban on cattle slaughter, stating openly that beef contributes to only 1.3% of the total meat consumption pattern of Indian society, and that nutrition is not 'necessarily associated with non-vegetarian diet and that too originating from slaughtering cow and its progeny.' While this last statement is indisputable, the choice of vegetarianism being its most valid proof, it does not take into consideration the fact that for many of India's most destitute citizens non-vegetarianism is not a matter of preference. In fact, in another verdict on the issue of cow slaughter in 1958, the same Court²² had no qualms in declaring that 'there is no getting away from the fact that beef or buffalo meat is an item of food for a large section of the people in India' (Rajagopal 2015).

The ban depriving these people of the best of the options they have has been judged as an instance of 'food fascism'. This expression started to circulate in India about three years ago, when at Osmania University, in Hyderabad, on 15 April 2012 a Beef Festival was organised. The purpose of its organisers, some students representing Dalit groups, was to campaign for promoting the inclusion of beef in the menu of a hostel, where they cooked and ate beef biryani. Predictably, this festival met strong opposition and resulted in incidences of stone-pelting and vehicle-torching. However, it was also welcomed by two outstanding Dalits who, on this issue, can be considered as spokespersons of their community, a community that is rarely acknowledged.

The first spokesperson is the writer Meena Kandasamy (2012), who participated in the event, urging that eating beef is 'an act of Dalit assertion'. In other words, publicly eating a food that for centuries has been made an object of social stigma and doing it by rapping 'Beef is the secret of my energy' is now, for opponents, a too-arrogant manifestation of low-caste pride, and a sign of an anti-caste revolution. The other is the activist Kancha Ilaiah, Professor at Maulana Azad National Urdu University in Hyderabad. To sum up his opinion, 'Maharashtra's beef ban is not merely communal, it is theocratic' (Sebastien 2015), since it is the result of a policy which is pursuant to the doctrine of the elite upper caste of Brahmins and imposes it on the rest of society. Ilaiah considers this ban to be also a 'Nation breaking agenda' or, in other words, anti-national, since, for example in the North-East where beef is

eaten more commonly than in the rest of India, the feeling of the unity of the country could be deeply compromised by this ban and, above all, the ideology which lies behind it. But, after all, the core idea of *hindutva* is, to put it simply, Hinduness and not Indianness. On the basis of this ideology, and the many instances of violent episodes of discrimination towards North-East students in New Delhi,²³ one could logically infer that supporters of *hindutva* who consider themselves as ‘pure’ and ‘authentic’ Hindus would not be that upset at the idea of a rupture between their Bharat and other, culturally different parts of India.

That said, if this ban and the ideology which has supported it is ‘Nation breaking’, it can also be considered as ‘Hindu breaking’, if we take into account the delicate issue of individual and mass conversions of low-caste/tribal Hindus to Islam, Christianity and Sikhism. In recent years, journals have reported cases of mass conversions at a growing pace (Naqwi 2014; Tiwari and Abbas 2015; Times of India 12/10/2013), and an interesting paper has been published on the legal limits on religious conversion in India (Dudley Jenkins 2008). With reference to the past, and the topic discussed here, Oliver Mendelsohn and Marika Vicziany (1998: 87) in their book about Dalits write that the Arya Samaj, among other groups, was particularly ‘obsessed with the idea that the seeming egalitarianism of Islam and Christianity was providing an avenue of escape for subordinated Untouchables’. Even if detailed research is lacking, the reasons for these conversions can most probably be found in the desire of low-caste/tribal Hindus to be liberated from a hierarchical system which looks down on them, oppresses them and humiliates them, and to continue the cultural tradition they did not want to abandon because of external pressure and social stigma. According to Ilaiah, these religious conversions of the oppressed castes could increase because of this ban. These conversions would then cause an emptying of the lowest layers of Hinduism which, as an ironic but predictable consequence, will also deprive upper-caste Hinduism of its meaning and identity.

Interestingly, the issue of conversion and, especially, re-conversion is common also in the discourse of the right, in relation both to Muslims and Christians. Quoting Gandhi,²⁴ *hindutva* advocate Lal Krishna Advani in his blog said with reference to Muslims that ‘they are still Hindu in many essential ways, and in a free, prosperous, progressive India, they would find it the most natural thing in the world to revert to their ancient faith and ways of life’. Going back to the animated Twitter debate born out of Rishi Kapoor’s statement on beef consumption, the topic of conversion of ‘pristine’ Hindus is also common at a popular level:

You will always remain follower of someone who has exploited your grand[parent]s.
Try to find out your origins.

Don't call yourself Christian. Find your origin. You must be Hindu somewhere before freedom.

From past 50 years christian evangelists are converting people in the name of god. are we blind to not have noticed these acts? Just now, when RSS started ghar wapasi [‘homecoming’, a movement for conversion of non-Hindus to presumed ancestral Hinduism], the secular voices within us woke up from a long hibernation
(Firstpost)

Conclusion

In summarizing the historical background of the sanctity of bovines in Hindu religion and culture and the issue of cow protection in Indian politics, I stressed the delicacy of these topics and the level of controversy they can arouse in India. I then focused on the most recent initiatives on cow protection and beef ban implemented in the last decades by right-wing nationalist political parties such as the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Vishva Hindu Parishad.

The *hindutva* ideology they promote has emerged as the underlying motif of many of these initiatives, which assume the unanimous agreement of all Indians, or at least all Hindus, over the monolithic idea of ‘authentic’ Hinduism that this political agenda is spreading. This agenda leaves little or no space to those people who are considered to be foreigners, or ‘invaders’, such as Muslims and Christians, or somehow different from orthodox Hindus, such as Dalits. What unites these people, for the purposes of this paper, is their beef-eating. Together with the people who work in the beef-related business, they are raising their voices against the constitutional immunity of cows, the growing attempts to strengthen anti-slaughter laws all over India and the ‘food fascism’ they are facing.

With reference to food in South Asia, Arjun Appadurai (1981: 497) has stated that consumption practices act as ‘the semiotic instrument of Hindu ideas of rank and distance’. While it is certainly true for beef consumption, it seems to be valid also for cow protection, and conversely cow slaughter, which have been given the power to create several parallel histories and traditions and to divide conservative Hindus from Muslims and Christians, as well as left-wing Hindus and Dalits from right-wing Hindus.

According to the VHP, before the arrival of foreigners (Muslims and British) ‘*naturally* this holy species [cow] was protected by the worshipful and grateful people [the Hindus]’ (Vishva Hindu Parishad, italics mine). Similarly, BJP leader Anil Vij claims that even nowadays ‘it is *natural* for everyone to protect cows revered in our country’ (Khatry 2014). On the basis of this supposed non-cultural essence of cow protection, on 29 March 2015 Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh said that he was going to work hard to evolve a full consensus, at a national level, on the issue of cow protection (Ghatwai 2015).²⁵ It seems he was realizing a prediction of some months back, when the right-wing website Hinduexistence announced that ‘Bharat will be declared as a No Halal Zone with no slaughter of Cow’ and ‘Another Bharatiya (Indian) resurgence for Hindu freedom is coming up fast through Goraksha [Cow Protection] movement’ (Struggle for Hindu Existence. *High Turn in Goraksha Movement in India*). Thus the intense debate on cow protection has still a long future ahead of it and, most probably, its climax has still not been reached.

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² In the Preamble of the Constitution, India is a ‘sovereign socialist secular democratic Republic’. The term ‘secular’ was added in 1976 by the Forty-second Amendment of the Constitution of India, which was enacted during the Emergency by the Indian National Congress government led by Indira Gandhi.

³ In India the most common bovines are cattle – *Bos taurus* (of Indian breeds belonging to zebu species, foreign breeds, and crossbreeds) and buffaloes – *Bubalus bubalis*. Since buffaloes do not have the sanctity accorded to cattle, and do not enjoy any legal or ethical protection, they will not be treated in this paper. The noun ‘cattle’ encompasses both sexes, while ‘cows’ are adult females, ‘bulls’ are entire adult males, ‘bullocks’ are castrated adult males (in British and Indian English), ‘calves’ are young male and female cattle, ‘heifers’ are young cows before they have had their first calf. The plural feminine form ‘cows’ is generally used colloquially to refer to both sexes collectively, or, as in the case of the Indian legal language (Gandhi 2013), to include also heifers and male and female calves. However, these usages can be misleading as the speaker’s intent may indeed be just the females. Anyway, even if bulls have some religious importance within Hindu religion and culture, adult females (cows) are the main beneficiaries of devotion, worship, and legal, economic and ethical protection. In the official (especially within the political environment) and common language, ‘cow protection’ and ‘cow slaughter’ have become consolidated expressions which, on the one hand, include cattle of all ages and sexes, but, on the other hand, clearly affirm the paramount religious and economic importance of cows. It is not by chance, in my opinion, that Article 48 of the Constitution while aiming to forbid the slaughter of all (‘other’) milk and draught cattle, lists first, and foremost, cows.

Thus, because of the peculiar role of cows, the term ‘cow’ will be widely used in this chapter, to refer both to cows and to cows/calves/heifers (‘cows and her progeny’, in the legal language). However, when needed, more appropriate and specific terms will be chosen, while the general use of the term ‘cattle’ will refer only to *Bos taurus*. ‘Bovines’ will include buffaloes as well. By ‘beef’ I will mean only cattle meat, while by ‘carabeef’ I will mean buffalo meat.

⁴ Newspapers and magazines of all main political orientations have been selected for this paper, to try to represent the widest range of points of view. However, only English-language newspapers have been used to select from the rich available material the topics, and the related quotes, included in this paper, I have considered only those reported in at least two sources (preferably belonging to opposite political orientations). Facts, opinions and speeches reported are useful to this discussion not as a source of the ‘truth’, but, quite simply, as representing voices in a debate and carrying the power to greatly influence public opinion.

⁵ The messages and comments reported in the article are all in the public domain, but the anonymity of their authors will be guaranteed. They have been selected only on the basis of their representativeness.

⁶ Over the origin of the holiness of the cow in India, two main lines of thought are found among scholars. Those who support the classical approach consider the sanctity of cows as religiously determined and link it to the adherence to the principle of ahimsa, while the other side relates it with techno-environmental factors and sees the cattle population in quantitatively in harmony with nature and the features of Indian agricultural economy and thus doesn't consider it a surplus. In the first group one could see Brown (1964), Dandekar (1969), Heston (1971), Misra (1973), Lodrick (1979). The most famous supporter of the techno-environmental approach is Harris (1966), backed up also by Raj (1969), Rao (1969) and Odend'hal (1972).

⁷ Dwijendra Narayan Jha, born in 1940, is an Indian historian specialized in ancient and medieval India and pupil of the eminent scholar Ram Sharan Sharma during his studies at Patna University. He taught History, first as Reader and then as Professor, at Delhi University from 1975 to 2005.

⁸ With reference to the Indian modern state, different names are usually used depending on the language and the context, and the most common ones are India, Bharat, and Hind/Hindustan. While 'India' and 'Hind/Hindustan' are words of foreign origin, respectively Greek and Arabic/Persian, 'Bharat' (in Hindi) comes from Sanskrit 'Bharata'. Article 1 of the Constitution clearly identifies India with Bharat, stating that 'India, that is Bharat, [...]', but in today's India a sharp divide is constantly growing between these two terms and especially the ideas which lie behind their use. Broadly speaking, India is westernized, urban, modern, rich, powerful, developed, liberal, globalized, secular, while Bharat is rural, traditional, simple, humble, conservative, regional and, above all, 'authentic' (compared to what it has become, that is India). Within Hinduism Bharat Mata is also the mother goddess who personifies the Indian state and the related motto 'Bharat Mata ki Jai' (Victory for Mother India) is commonly used by the Indian Army. On the base of this, (Hindu) nationalists consider the defence of the nation not only a patriotic but also a religious duty of all Indians (Menon 2009). Interestingly, according to Christopher Pinney's (2004) analysis of Bharat Mata's iconography, she is also portrayed as a cow protector from beef-eating Muslims and British, especially after Independence when she has increasingly become an exclusively Hindu symbol.

⁹ The organisers, The Aligarh branch of the Hindu Yuva Vahini (HYV), are circulating this message: 'Make cow rashtra mata, give missed call on the toll free number – 07533007511' (Agha 2015).

Also in the past rapid means of communications and mass media played a key role in the campaigns for cow protection. For example, Anand A. Yang (1980: 586) highlights the pivotal role of the railways and the press to serve 'as the contagion for the disturbance of 1893'. He also describes the 'village telegraph', a system of chain letters based on shared commitment where the recipients of the message preaching the importance of cow protection have to copy and spread it to at least five other villages (p. 588). S.M. Batra (1981: 20- 25) points out the importance of mass petitions, signature collections and distribution of provocative printed material in the fight for cow protection against the British, while Peter Robb (1986: 312) describes the role of snowball letters in spreading anti-Muslim feelings.

¹⁰ Smitha Rao (2011) has traced the history of the cow in BJP manifesto since 1999. In this document the cow is mentioned among economic issues, under good governance and agriculture/animal husbandry and dairying. The 2004 manifesto talks of improvement of livestock breeds and the need for legal protection to protect the cow and her progeny. In 2009

the language changes drastically, and cow protection falls under the section ‘preserving our cultural heritage’.

In the 2004 general elections the BJP tried to introduce a central bill banning cow slaughter in the whole country, basing it on the *Report of the National Commission on Cattle* of 2002. According to this report, those who contravene the legal prohibitions on cow slaughter fall under the sphere of competence of the Prevention of Terrorism Act, 2002 (Chigateri 2011: 140).

¹¹ Nonetheless, this does not mean that the Congress has never exploited the political benefits of the cow. For example, also this party adopted the cow and its suckling calf as its symbol (Lodrick 2005: 74).

¹² Operation Flood, the kick-off of the Indian White Revolution, is a project of the National Dairy Development Board launched in 1970 under the guidance of Verghese Kurien. This dairy development program made India not only a milk-sufficient nation, but also the largest milk producer in the world.

¹³ For reference, see Gandhi 2013.

¹⁴ For example in 2005 in Gujarat and in 2010 in Madhya Pradesh.

¹⁵ Ban supporters say that cattle can be profit-bearing also for their production of dung and urine. This is rather incontestable at a theoretical level, but at the moment this path does not seem to be practicable on a large scale.

¹⁶ According to Shraddha Chigateri (2011: 157), ‘if secularism is to have any coherence as a fundamental principle of democratic India, then both Article 48 as well as the laws on cow slaughter have to be repealed’.

¹⁷ It is important to make clear that not all Hindu cow protection acts are performed through violence and not every BJP supporter would agree on extreme pro-cow initiatives. In fact, in riots and pro-cow manifestations it is not incorrect to speak about ‘professional agitators’ (Robb 1986: 314) with the role of creating tension deliberately.

¹⁸ I do not mean to say that no Muslim supports this ban or, in general, BJP agenda. In fact, many examples demonstrate the opposite. See for example Dhattiwala 2014, Deccan Herald 04/03/2015, The Times of India 30/10/2013, The Economic Times 01/11/2014.

¹⁹ Finding evidence to demolish this assertion is not difficult. See for example Bourgat 2004.

²⁰ If we accept the statement of food writer and researcher Pushpesh Pant according to whom ‘India is full of closet meat-eaters because we are a nation of hypocrites’, the number of vegetarians could be even smaller (Jishnu 2014).

²¹ Currently in Delhi a kilo of beef costs 180 rupees, compared to 400 for the same quantity of goat meat.

²² Which, according to Daphne Barak-Erez (2010: 434), ‘identifies itself with Hindu culture’ and sides ‘at least partially, with Hindu perceptions of nationalism.’

²³ The murder of Nido Taniam, a young man from Arunachal Pradesh who was beaten to death by some shopkeepers of New Delhi on 29 January 2014, has become the emblem of the atmosphere of racism and discrimination that North-East immigrants (and especially university students) in the capital have been denouncing for years. Several episodes of violence and intolerance have been reported by media and scholars (Bhattarai 2014, McDuie-Ra 2012, Ngaihte 2015, Thounaojam 2012).

²⁴ This quotation is frequently attributed to Gandhi (Sharma 2015: 186) and appears in many BJP websites.

²⁵ I don’t know whether a full nation-wide consensus will ever be reached, but for sure the distance from this objective is shortening rapidly. In fact, only two weeks after the Maharashtra ban, on 16 March 2015 Haryana passed the *Haryana Gauvansh Sanrakshan and Gausamvardhan Bill, 2015*. Announced as the strictest law on this issue in the entire India, it brought to ten years of imprisonment and 700,000 rupees as the fine of the punishment for

cattle killers and also banned the sale of beef in any form including that contained in sealed containers and imported in the state (The Daily Pioneer 17/03/2015).