

**What's the Menu?
Food Politics and Hegemony**

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Students participating in the Beef Festival Conducted at Osmania University, Hyderabad

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Guest Editors : *Sambaiah Gundimeda, V.B. Tharakeshwar, Uma Bhrugubanda*

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Production: *A.Srinivas, T.Sreelakshmi*

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What's the Menu? Food Politics and Hegemony

On the 15th of April this year, various student organizations of Osmania University organized a Beef Festival on campus. The festival became controversial even when the idea was first mooted leading to a tense atmosphere on that day. Some student organizations, mainly the ABVP pelted stones on the organizers and even set fire to a vehicle. A student was stabbed by another group of students. Though the tension has since subsided, the discussion and arguments continue to feature in the news media and on social networking sites. In the meantime, some students' organizations in other universities like JNU, New Delhi have announced that they will hold a Beef and Pork Festival in the coming days. However, this issue is by no means a new one. Over the past two decades, the hostels in the universities of Hyderabad have witnessed intense debate, argument and altercation over the nature of food cooked, served and eaten in the university hostels. The absence of beef in the hostel menus has been particularly contested.

In 1997 when the mess secretary decided to serve beef in the hostel of the then Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages [CIEFL (now EFL University)], this move was welcomed by a significant group of students. These included a number of Bengali and Malayali students, Muslim and Christian students, a handful of dalit students, and those upper-caste students who were progressive and therefore supported this practice despite their not eating beef themselves. But there was also stiff opposition from other upper caste students and staff organizations, besides the refusal of the head cook to prepare beef. Therefore, the students themselves cooked beef and served it for a period of one month. The mess committee changed in the following

month and removed beef and pork from the menu.

In 2006 the annual students' festival called *Sukoon* in the University of Hyderabad became the occasion for the question of beef to be raised once again. The dalit students demanded setting up of a food stall serving beef, arguing for representation of their culture as part of the festival. The permission to establish a stall was denied by the university administration stating that it would create caste and communal tension. But the students managed to set up the stall with the support of some students' organizations. The ABVP opposed it claiming that beef eating was against "Indian culture". However, the University acceded to the demands of the majority of the students/organizations and permitted the setting up of the stall. In 2010, an event of mass eating of beef cooked on the campus was once again organized at the English and Foreign Languages University (earlier CIEFL). This event was disrupted by students opposing it who resorted to stone pelting and vandalization of the food prepared.

One fundamental question that immediately comes to our mind is—why do dalit students want to organize beef festivals in the campuses and why now? Another related question is, why do mainly right-wing upper-caste students object to beef-eating? Although modern higher educational spaces like universities belong to every citizen of this country, they were dominated and controlled by the upper castes for a long-time. It is only in the last two decades that universities have begun to welcome the entry of dalits, adivasis, backward castes and other marginalized sections of our society. As long as the university spaces were dominated by the

upper castes, their culture was hegemonic in all aspects of university life, including the kind of food that was served in hostels. Only those items of food that have been traditionally consumed by the Brahmins and non-Brahmin upper castes – varieties of vegetarian food, chicken and mutton items, were served in the hostels. Although dalits also consume all varieties of food that are consumed by the upper castes, they are also traditionally habituated to eating beef on regular basis. Indeed, for dalits, who cannot otherwise afford to buy expensive varieties of vegetables and meats, beef is the cheapest and most nutritious food available. When dalit students enter universities and hostels, they miss their traditional food. Interestingly, this is not the case with the upper caste students. What is being consumed in their homes is also being served in the university hostels, and so they do not miss their food at all. In other words, for the upper caste students whether they are at home or in universities, it is the same in terms of food. But for dalits their entry into universities is the beginning of not only the loss of their traditional food but also the experience of the stigma and humiliation attached to the practice of eating it. Over a period of time, this pain of losing of their traditional food turns into deprivation, which, in turn, may negatively affect the overall performance and well-being of the dalit students in universities. It has been common experience of several dalit students in the Hyderabad campuses that whenever they feel like having a 'good meal' (that is a meal with beef), they go to the Kalyani Biryani hotels that serve beef biriyani and other varieties of beef dishes. The Kalyani Biryani hotels are located in several pockets in around Hyderabad and Secunderabad. Alternatively, these students get raw beef, cook it themselves and eat in their hostel rooms.

The changing student composition in universities has allowed certain questions to be raised about the nature of such public institutions and our so-called secular politics. Demanding that beef be served in the hostel, setting up beef stalls as part of cultural events, publicly consuming beef and in fact, celebrating it as a festival ought to be, therefore, seen as a political challenge to vegetarianism and cultural assertion of Dalit and other marginal groups.

There is yet another important dimension to the recent beef festival at Osmania. It is the dalit and marginalized students of the University who are at the forefront of the movement for separate statehood for Telangana. These students are seeking not just a territorial Telangana, they are seeking a just and representative Telangana (*Saamaajika Telangana*). What do they mean by just and representative Telangana? A just Telangana is one in which people are treated with respect and dignity and there are no discriminatory practices against the marginalized; and a representative Telangana is one in which dalits and other marginalized groups are given due representation in all the public spaces of Telangana state. The Beef Festival is then a challenge addressed to the ABVP group which is involved actively in Telangana struggle but which opposes dalit cultural assertion. The entire contestation is, in that sense, a contestation for the democratization of public spaces and public culture.

To shift our focus a little—let us examine the arguments that are offered in opposition to the consumption of beef in hostels and university campuses. One argument claims that beef eating is against Hindu culture, even Indian culture. This, of course, begs the question whose culture is defined as Hindu culture or Indian culture. Historians have asserted that eating the meat of cows was a common practice among all castes, including Brahmins in ancient India. They have also pointed out that vegetarianism became a “Hindu” virtue only after the challenges thrown up by Buddhism and Jainism. And further, it is during the 19th century nationalist mobilization in north India, that the “cow” becomes a holy symbol of Hindu religion and a rallying point. They have also pointed out that the cow protection movement targeted Muslims who were believed to be the main consumers of beef.

But contemporary dalit assertions critique the right-wing opposition to beef eating on several different counts. Firstly, they offer their own history of oppression by the Hindu caste order as primary evidence. The hierarchical caste order compels them to sacrifice cows and buffaloes in temple rituals, to eat the meat of the sacrificed animals and to make footwear from the hides of these

animals. In many places, dalits have refused to conduct these sacrifices. They also speak of the ways in which they were forced to remove the carcasses of dead animals in the villages. Secondly, dalits also talk of their intimate relation with cows and buffaloes and with cattle in general. While, the upper castes only venerate the “cow”, it is the dalits who clean, feed, nourish and take care of the animals in sickness and health. As the Madiga labourer in a Kannada story by Kumbhara Veerabhadrapappa argues it is the right of the dalit to receive the dead body of the cow. So, when his Gowda landlord buries his dead cow, the Madiga digs it up in the middle of the night and claims his “right” much to the shock and disapproval of the landlord and the bewilderment of the police called upon to arrest the “criminal”. The dalit critique thus complicates the claims of hurt Hindu sentiments by interrogating what constitutes Hindu culture and by foregrounding their own pain and humiliation when beef eating is seen as a sign of their backwardness and inferiority.

Another argument usually put forward by those opposing beef-eating is that the university hostel is a common public space and therefore, the preferences of the majority of the students ought to be respected. We have already discussed this as indicative of the hegemony of an upper-caste culture which describes itself as modern and secular. Here, we want to make the further point that today vegetarianism is no longer as hegemonic as it used to be even a decade ago. At least in all the metropolitan cities, including Hyderabad, big and small restaurants serving meat are more visible. With the arrival of multi-cuisine, international restaurants, the variety of foods, both vegetarian and meat-based has definitely increased. Nevertheless, beef is available only in select restaurants which are either very cheap or very expensive. So, while there is now a market for a wide variety of meats in the public domain, the hostel mess is sought to be preserved as a domain of some putative national culture!

A pervasive false belief is that beef is not nutritious and that it is, in fact, ‘contagious’. Those opposing the practice of beef eating often use this argument. Therefore, in 2008 some Dalit students from University of Hyderabad wrote a letter to the National

Institute of Nutrition seeking clarification on this issue. They received a reply from the then deputy director, Veena Shatrugna stating that beef is a non-contagious and nutritious food. As Shatrugna has argued elsewhere the hegemony of vegetarianism has affected not just hostels but the nation as a whole because the national nutrition policy itself does not acknowledge widely-consumed and inexpensive meats and eggs as sources of nutrition that could be distributed to a chronically undernourished population.

Furthermore, when beef-eating is framed simply as a “religious” or “cultural” issue, the economic dimension of this issue which is extremely significant remains unacknowledged and unaddressed. There is an entire industry and trade that is dependent on the beef business. The meat is sold as food and various parts of the animals are used in making leather products, cosmetics, medicines, musical instruments and so on. A significant number of Hindus and Muslims are involved in the meat industry both domestic and export. And several dalits and poor Muslims (especially Qureshis) are involved in the meat business at different levels. The cow protectionists and animal rights activists seldom take into account the interests of these sections. Neither do they take note of the fact that anti-slaughter laws have led to a lot of illegal and secret slaughtering and have increased the cost of beef.

It is a range of such issues that the selections in this broadsheet address, interrogate, critique and grapple with. Unlike earlier issues of the broadsheet, we have put together here different genres of writing—not just academic or journalistic articles but fiction, poetry, experiential accounts, visual material and even menus of some hotels and recipes of subaltern foods!

The Editorial Team

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Democratization of the Public Sphere: The Beef Stall Case in Hyderabad's Sukoon Festival

■ Sambaiah Gundimeda

Within the caste-based Hindu society, a food hierarchy goes from vegetarianism (at the top), to meat-eating (involving no beef) to beef eating. In "Origin of Untouchability," 1916, Ambedkar drew attention to these two taboos and the socio-cultural codes they carry with them: There is one taboo against meat-eating. It divides Hindus into vegetarians and flesh-eaters. There is another taboo against beef-eating. It divides Hindus into those who eat cow's flesh and those who do not [...]

Interestingly, this food hierarchy is not built upon brahminical notions of caste. It is constructed on a matrix comprising the superiority of non-violence, a conception of the graded hierarchy of living things, and most importantly a belief in the sacredness of the cow. In modern India, this matrix was shaped by none other than Mahatma Gandhi, a Hindu to the core [...]

In this discourse cow slaughter and beef eating become unnecessary and immoral acts. However, in practice the food hierarchy is far messier, especially when it comes to what specific castes and communities actually eat and what they are supposed to eat. For instance, brahmins of all sub-castes in Bengal and saraswat brahmins in the coastal regions of Karnataka eat fish. Several communities in the middle of the caste hierarchy, such as vaishyas and lingayats, are vegetarians [...]

The effects of the caste Hindu discourse on beef consumption, especially upon dalits, are appalling. In everyday social relations they are made vulnerable to humiliating treatment. Following the rise of Hindu fundamentalist forces, on several occasions dalits have been lynched by caste Hindus, allegedly after killing a cow. Dalits are forced to consume beef stealthily, far from the gaze of the caste Hindu public. This, however, does not mean that dalits accept their subordination. They are engaged in an intellectual critique of the food hierarchy as well as symbolic acts of consump-

tion of beef in public so as to dispel the stigma attached to it [...]

The Demand for a Beef-Stall

Setting up the beef stall at Hyderabad Central University's *Sukoon* Festival was an attempt to tease out and highlight this stigmatizing treatment. Towards the end of each academic year the University Student Union, which represents the whole student body, organizes a three-day cultural festival called *Sukoon*. A number of competitions are held for students, and there are quizzes, plays, debates, music, and sports. In the evenings they relax in an open theatre where different bands play for them. Along with the competitions, students and others open stalls selling books, clothes and food. The food served in these stalls is mostly vegetarian. Meat is also served, but it is generally confined to chicken dishes.

At the same time, other more culturally specific foods are eaten. Festivals are special occasions, and on such occasions people enjoy food associated with their cultural background. As the name *Central University* suggests, students as well as teaching and non-teaching staff come from all over India and have diverse cultures and varied food habits. For instance, dalits (at least South Indian dalits) prefer beef to other varieties of food. Similarly, Muslims enjoy *mutton biriyani*, and students from an adivasi background as well as from the north-eastern states favour pork. Unmindful of this diversity, an exclusive preference for a particular variety of food, identified with a specific culture, especially on the occasion of the cultural festival, is a marker of the hegemony of a specific culture over the plural cultural terrain of the campus.

A few months before the *Sukoon* Festival in 2006, the Dalit Student's Union challenged this hegemony. They argued that the food in the stalls did not represent the cultural diversity of the university community, and was simply another manifestation of the hegemony of the

upper castes and their culture. The university, as a public institution should not allow its public space to be colonized by a particular culture, but should ensure that the space is shared equally by every culture of the university community. In short, the cultural festival of the university should represent the many cultures of Indian society. As a step towards equality in representation, the DSU demanded that it should be allowed to set up a beef stall in the *Sukoon* Festival, as beef constitutes an important part of the food habits of dalits and is thus part and parcel of dalit culture and that such food culture is equally shared by Muslims and a few others from caste Hindu cultural backgrounds. The administration, the executive body of the university, was 'irritated' by this request and instantly denied permission for the stall on the grounds that 'consumption of beef (on the campus) creates caste and communal tensions'.

This is an absurd justification. How does beef consumption create caste and communal tensions? Beef is consumed outside the university campus as well, and does not appear to create caste and communal tensions, or even tensions between the consumers and non-consumers of beef. In any case, the administration's refusal was taken as a rejection of dalit culture by the DSU. It organized protests against the decision and led an indefatigable campaign among the students. Its efforts divided students into two diametrically opposed groups, one supporting the stall and the other opposing it. Many student organizations supported the DSU. The only organization that opposed it was the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), the student organization attached to the Bharatiya Janata Party.

As it happened, in 2006 the University Student Union was under the leadership of the Marxist Student Federation of India (SFI), a key supporter of the promotion of dalit culture. Disregarding the decision of the University, the President of the Student Union allowed the DSU to set up a beef stall in the festival. The opening of the stall generated great euphoria as well as despair in the campus. Dalits and other supporters of the stall celebrated the occasion by shouting slogans in praise of Babasaheb Ambedkar, clapping, dancing to the energizing rhythms of the madiga dappu, congratulating each other on their triumph and relishing the taste of beef. The ABVP however, bemoaned the installation as 'the tragedy of the campus' and 'a calamity for Indian culture'. Further, it organized noisy protests against the stall and demanded that the administration should remove the stall, since 'beef eating is against Indian culture and against the sentiments of [the] majority students'.

The administration, as if waiting for this response, hurried to the stall and demanded that the DSU close it down at once, alleging damage to 'order' on the campus. The DSU and other supporting organizations, especially the SFI and the Ambedkar Students Union (ASU), stood firm and argued that the food habits of the dalits are different from those of the (caste) Hindus and this difference should be represented in the food served in the *Sukoon* Festival. The administration, both on account of the logic of the reasoning and the support rendered to the stall by a majority of the students, appeared to come to its senses. Taking cognizance of the prevailing local as well as national laws on the issue of beef consumption, it officially issued a letter of permission to the DSU for the beef stall.

Claiming Human Agency

The Dalit Students Union, by setting up a beef stall in the public space of the university, was not merely challenging the domination of Hindu culture, but also opening up the public space for other marginalized communities and cultures to enter that space. The Dalit Students Union was not only realizing citizenship rights accorded by the Constitution, but also protecting the law itself from the exclusionary claims of caste Hindu culture.

The rejection faced by the Dalit students is not only humiliating but also injures their humanity...According to Sanjay Palshikar (2005: 5428): "To be humiliated is to be rendered inferior or deficient in some respect by others in a deliberate and destructive way. It is therefore a deeply distressing experience. It is something one cannot get over easily, and those who have to face it everyday sense a constant threat to their sense of self-worth". Margalit (1996: 109) writes that to humiliate is to treat a human being as nonhuman. This treatment is an injury to their very humanity. One of the ways of doing so is to consider some of their physical characteristics as a sign of a deficiency in their humanity. For instance, caste Hindus may regard the dalit drum (*dappu*) as inferior or stigmatizing as also their food, particularly beef, depicting them as deviant and as severely flawed human beings or as subhuman.

The key question is how do the humiliated retrieve their humanity? To the three possible responses suggested by Palshikar (2005: 5431) revenge, retribution and forgiveness, let me add two more - restricting or avoiding those practices, and the converse, asserting them as positive and taking pride in the practices.

To begin with, if taking revenge against the humiliator implies reciprocating humiliation, how can this be achieved? Since dalits are humiliated on account of their beef consumption, reciprocating this would require humiliating caste Hindus on account of their food

habits as well as their ways of life. Some remarks made by dalits and other lower castes against brahmins and other upper caste Hindus suggest that this has happened. For instance, one finds Telugu expressions such as *pappugaallu* (lentil fellows), *jandhyamgallu* or *threaddugallu* (thread fellows, a reference to the sacred thread) and *sinthapandugallu* (tamarind fellows—referring to Vaishya castes as well as their complexion). These terms are used not only by dalits but also by other upper castes. However these 'insults' are relatively ineffective, for two reasons: Firstly, lentils or the sacred thread, unlike beef, carry a positive social value on account of their consumption by the upper castes. Secondly, caste-Hindus have enough social confidence to ignore these jibes.

But, isn't the idea of revenge silly, as Chakrabarti (2005) described? One, the avenger cannot 'get even' with the original attacker. Second, revenge always escalates violence, never puts it to rest and third it also connotes moral and strategic defeat, not a display of victory or power. If revenge is not the way out, what are the victims supposed to do with the haunting memories of past sufferings inflicted by others and the toxic resentment that this generates? His advice to 'remember' and 'resist', although morally sound, seems unviable for two reasons. First, asking a victim to remember an act of violence or humiliation is a way of leaving the victim in permanent mental agony. The victim is doubly victimized, first on account of the humiliating treatment itself, secondly on account of retaining such treatment in memory. Second, the idea of 'resistance' implies continuation of the problem. The solution to a problem is annihilation rather than temporary solace. By resisting one is at best pushing the problem aside rather than eliminating it on a permanent basis.

Retribution as a response to humiliation is problematic too. Firstly, violence, causing destruction either human or material, is a regression of civilisation. Secondly, though the population size of each individual caste is no greater than any other individual caste within the social hierarchy of India, there is a massive gap when castes join into larger social categories. The combined population strength of the caste Hindus is between 65 to 70 per cent of the total population of India, while the combined strength of the Dalit population is between 22 and 24 per cent. But it is not just a question of numbers. Caste Hindus are better equipped in other ways too and in the event of violent retaliation, dalits would obviously suffer more than others. Thirdly, resorting to violence suggests that parties involved in violence have lost trust and faith in each other.

Palshikar notes that forgiveness commonly requires a change of heart and requires that

the victimizer repent his wrongdoing. I remain sceptical about forgiving as a response in a caste-based society. One of the pillars of Hindu caste society is the theory of *karma*, which suggests that the birth of individuals into various castes in the hierarchy occurs on account of their deeds in their previous life. This means that the present positions of upper caste and lower caste are a consequence of their earlier good deeds or bad deeds. It is possible that, shaped by karma theory, caste Hindus believe that their attitude and behaviour, including violence and humiliation against dalits, is not only a way of reaping the benefits of their good deeds in previous lives, but also a way of punishing dalits for their bad deeds in the past. Shaped in such an ideological environment, the question arises whether caste Hindus can ever repent the violence or humiliation they inflict on dalits [...]

Since none of the above responses to humiliation seem suitable, let me discuss the two other possibilities that I proposed earlier: one, to avoid those practices at the root of the humiliating treatment, or to affirm those practices as positive and take pride in them. The first option would require dalits to give up beef, assuming that people are willing to sacrifice anything to avoid humiliation. While it is true that dalits are humiliated on account of beef consumption, relinquishing this practice will not, by itself, guarantee them human treatment. We have several instances on record where dalits have continued to be humiliated by caste Hindus despite strict adherence to vegetarian food. Giving up beef to avoid humiliation can itself constitute an act of humiliation, not inflicted by others, but self-inflicted. Taking an action that goes against one's interest and strengthens the power of others over one is damaging to one's self-respect and is a self-inflicted humiliation.

The second course of action, positively affirming the practices denigrated by others and taking pride in them, appears to be the best course of action. It shows that the practitioners value this practice. Although dalits are not ashamed of beef eating and in fact relish its taste, they are made to feel ashamed of their food when they encounter caste Hindus, whose social norms prohibit beef consumption. The installation of the beef stall in the public space by the Dalit Students Union can be interpreted not only as an assertion of positivity and pride in their food practice, but also an invitation to caste Hindus to taste this food and re-evaluate their perception of it. In this case, the victims are not acting on the wishes of the humiliator, but on their own terms, and thus claim agency for themselves, inviting others to accept, or at least re-assess, the value of the denigrated action.

Vegetarians Only

(A short story)

■ Sky Baba

We had been walking since morning in this basti. Our legs ached badly. The soles of our feet burned. We had roamed all the streets and bylanes. We greeted every TO LET board that we sighted. And there were many more streets left to search. We had covered all the lanes to the right and left of the main road. Of the three houses we had looked at, we liked one very much. It was a small portion of a house. The rent was 1500 rupees per month. One room and a small kitchen. In a big city like Hyderabad, this would do for a couple like us. The owner asked us to pay two months' rent as an advance. We said that we would pay one months' rent now and another after moving in. He agreed. We were relieved. Paying three thousand immediately would have been impossible. We only had fifteen hundred right now, so this worked out well. We were anxious to give the money to him immediately. Both of us had the same thought—we'd be in deep trouble if someone else gave him an advance before we did!

I took out the money and gave it to him. He counted the money and said, "All right. When would you like to move in?"

"Right away, sir! We'll bring in some of our things this evening" I said.

"Ok". As he turned to go in, he paused and asked, "What's your name?"

I hesitated for a few seconds. We looked at each other. My heart sank. At that moment I really wished my name was Ramesh or Rajesh. But there was nothing I could do.

"Yousuf", I said.

The owner froze as if he had received an electric shock! He blurted out, "What did you say?!"

"I said 'Yousuf', sir!" I knew that this house too was a gone case.

"You're Muslim!" He asked in disbelief.

"Yes, sir. But there won't be any trouble. I leave for work early every morning and she is doing her M.Phil in Telugu..." I was mentally searching for more things to say even as I felt that whatever I said was not going to satisfy

the landlord. I felt that there was nothing I could say that would please him.

"I thought you were 'our people' going by the Telugu you spoke. I'm sorry but we can't rent out the house to Muslims" he said as he tried to return the money he had taken.

Shaheen pleaded, "Sir, We really like your house. We are really tired with the all the searching. We won't trouble you in the least bit. We are both educated, sir. And we will keep the house very neat."

"I am sorry. My family will not agree."

I said, "Sir, why don't you consult them once. Please tell them about us. Please ask them to speak to my wife."

The owner gave me a strange look.

"Sir, please!" I pleaded.

"Ok. Let me see." He went inside.

I sighed. I was hoping they'd agree. We couldn't hear the conversations inside. "No raised voices, maybe his wife doesn't mind." I whispered to Shaheen.

The owner stepped out.

"I'm sorry. They're not willing", he said as he handed back the advance. And without looking back even once, he retreated inside.

A thorn pierced our hearts once again.

I slipped the money back into my pocket and we began our search all over again. We roamed all the streets in the vicinity but didn't find a single house that we liked. After a while, we thought maybe only Muslims would rent out houses to us Muslims. So, we started off in the direction of a Muslims locality. I recalled what my friend, Shankar said about Chintalbasti. He said that you could find people of all castes and religions there. Moreover, they were all just ordinary people, what you could call the "masses". Not only Muslims but Christians, and even Jains. People who migrated to Hyderabad from all over the country seemed to be living there. He said that you could see a large number of Nepalis too. Chintalbasti also had a large

vegetable market and the general weekly market was on Sundays. So everything was easily available and the bazaar would be bustling with people, mostly from the working class, walking around to buy their daily food and other necessities. All this made Chintalbasti very convenient and an attractive proposition to us.

Immersed in these thoughts, we reached the Muslim neighbourhood in no time. The houses were narrow and small. Poverty announced itself from every corner. Most of the front doors were closed. A few purdahs appeared here and there. A newly built house carried a TO LET board. Our spirits rose. We rang the doorbell. A sweet voice called out, "Who's that?"

"We saw the 'To Let' Board"

"Please wait for a few minutes"

"Ok, thanks"

After a few minutes, the owner emerged out of the house, adjusting his lungi. He threw a surprised glance at us.

He looked at me and asked, "What do you do?"

"I am a journalist and she is studying in the university. It's just the two of us"

"Are you from Andhra?", he queried.

"No", I replied, "Why do you ask?"

He gave Shaheen an irritated look, "You don't wear the purdah!?"

"No" said Shaheen in a neutral tone.

"Why?" he asked.

Shaheen was nonchalant. "Just like that".

He leaned against the wall and said in an insulting tone, "We won't rent out our house to people like you!"

I was tempted to retort in the same tone but I controlled myself with some difficulty. Shaheen was bursting with rage and was about to say something when I pressed her hand to restrain her. He continued to stare at us insolently. We had a strong desire to burn that look. Suppressing our anger and anguish, we stepped out on to the road.

"Its no use. Muslims will not rent us a house. We have to search in the non-Muslim areas. You seem really tired. Go back to the room. I'll search some more," I said to Shaheen.

I set out in another direction. I was reminded of an incident similar to what just happened.

Ibrahim was my batch-mate at school and a distant relative too. He had come once to visit us in our room. We were living in Saidabad then. As we were talking over dinner that night, he mentioned that a portion was

available for rent in his mother-in-law's house in Pisalbanda. I immediately asked him to inquire whether we could rent the place. We were shocked to hear his instant response, "My in-laws will not allow people who don't wear the burqa or the purdah." I was even more pained when I recalled this incident.

I came to the second main street and entered the first lane. On one side were houses with two and three floors and on the other side were houses with just the ground floor. Those were clearly not houses meant for renting out. So, I began walking looking up on the side of the storied buildings. I was excited when I saw a "To Let" board hanging from the second floor of the fourth house in that row. I paused near the front gate and looked around. I opened the gate and went inside and rang the bell near the staircase. I walked out again and waited looking up at the second floor. A woman emerged from the first floor balcony. She asked me, "What do you want, son?" "It's about the portion to rent, madam" I said nodding in the direction of the sign board.

"Are you vegetarian or non-vegetarian" she asked.

I was shocked by this question. I was never confronted with such a straightforward question before. For a few moments, I didn't know how to respond to this. Of course, I couldn't lie. I sighed to myself, "We are such truthful beings!"

"Non-vegetarians, Madam" I said

"Sorry". Not only did she shoot back the reply instantly but also disappeared inside right away.

I felt ashamed with myself...or did I feel ashamed of the world? I looked around. Thankfully, there was no one around. I moved forward, wearily.

What did she mean exactly? That they won't rent out the house to Muslims? No, that was not it. They won't rent it out to anybody who was non-vegetarian. So, who could she be? Who are the people who are purely vegetarian? They would be so few, isn't it? So, are these people among the few? And who are non-vegetarians? Think about it—Muslims? Completely non-vegetarian. Christians? Yes, perhaps. Dalits, backward castes? Yes, all of them are non-vegetarian. So, who does that leave out? The Brahmins and the Vaishyas! So, these people must belong to one of these communities! So, that means they will rent out the house only to people from their own castes. Oh, how clever these people are! You can learn so much from just one single question. And in one shot you can eliminate so many people! Remarkable!

Meanwhile, I saw another "To Let" board nearby. I walked towards it full of hope. There

was something else written beneath the words "To Let". I moved closer wondering what it was. "ONLY VEGETARIANS". Oh, my God! This was direct speech! There was no need to ask for any more information. The board simply said, "Get Out!"

This lane was of no use. I moved on to the next lane.

After more searching, I left the lane to move into a cluster of houses. There were many houses but none carried any boards. I spotted an old woman sitting on the verandah of a house chewing betelnut. I approached her and asked, "Grandma, are there any houses here for rent?"

"That house there, son! That has a portion to rent", she said pointing out a house to me. Her words were soothing to my ears.

I went to the house and knocked on the door. There was a small gate on the side and I could see part of the house. I waited for sometime and knocked again. There was a hand pump in one corner of the house. A girl stood pumping water into a plastic pot. She was staring at me. I adjusted my hair and looked a little impatiently at the door. I was about to knock on the door once again when the door flew open as if by magic. A stout, fair skinned woman stood in the open doorway and she looked at me with a question in her face.

"Madam, I heard there were rooms for rent."

"Yes, there are. Are you a bachelor?" she asked.

"No, I'm married. Just the two of us."

"You work somewhere?!"

"Come in through the side gate." She said. And without another word closed the door on my face.

Thank goodness! She seemed to have some faith in me. I hope the rooms are good. As soon as I opened the gate and went inside, she led me up some stairs. I followed her.

"Where are you living now?"

"Erramanzil, Balapur Ma'am", I replied.

She unlocked the door and stepped aside. "Take a look", she said. It was just one single room. There was no washbasin/sink either. I asked her about that. She pointed to a small drain hole in one corner of the room. There was a pipe that ran downstairs. She said we should wash there. There was a bathroom and a latrine adjoining the room. That seemed all right, I thought. But I was doubtful, so I asked, "Are these just for us?"

"No. There are two families living on the other side. These are for common use."

So, we'll have those people coming near our door every time they needed to use the bathroom or latrine. This wasn't going to be easy. But what to do?! It was already the 30th of the month and we had to vacate the following day.

"Alright. Ok, madam. How much is the rent?"

"Fifteen hundred" she said.

I waited for her to say more. She didn't ask for a two months' advance. What luck! I was really pleased. I thought to myself that even if it wasn't all that convenient, we ought to adjust and manage somehow in this house.

"Can we move in tomorrow?"

Suddenly, she asked, "What caste are you?"

My heart sank. What does this mean? How does it matter who we were! I wanted to scream that we were just human beings. But she wasn't going to understand all this. And anyway, no Brahmins or Reddys were going to come to her house. But there would be no hesitation in declaring that one was a Reddy but why was it so difficult to say you were a Muslim? Maybe it would be as difficult to say that you were Mala, Madiga or a washerman.

"We are Muslims, ma'am. My wife did her M.A in Telugu. We won't be any trouble at all"...I was going to say more...when she dropped another bombshell...

"Do you eat beef?"

How was I to answer this question? If I said yes, there was no way she would rent the house to us. What were we to do? The last time I was asked this question, I had shaken my head saying 'no' because we badly needed the place and had nowhere to go. A month later, the landlord caught me buying beef at a meat shop. Well, what can we do, that's the cheapest meat. They abused us really badly that day. They asked us to vacate the house instantly! We were shamed in front of the entire neighbourhood. The owners were golla people, a cattle-rearing community. One of them almost beat us up. We left immediately and took up another house even if we had to pay more rent.

And now, here was the question again! I sighed, it was difficult to live in this world. What did it matter what we ate! What was I to do?

"Ma'am, we eat beef once in a while. We won't eat it if you don't want us to. We really need the house. We've been searching since morning." I said in a pitiful tone.

"We won't rent the house to those who eat beef," she said as she locked the room. I simply stood there not knowing what to say. I had already stooped before her and said that we wouldn't eat beef if they didn't like it.

What more could I do! I felt like shouting out to her, "The whole world eats cow's meat."

But she didn't even glance at me. She walked downstairs wordlessly and I had to follow her.

Ok, so this entire neighbourhood was going to be useless to me. The girl I had seen earlier was now pumping the water violently. I felt her violence was directed at me.

I came on to the road. I saw the lane leading to the other side of the road. I went there. A two-storied building with a To Let board! I rushed to the gate and went inside. There was a staircase on one side and a woman was coming down just then. She looked at me enquiringly. There's a board for renting a house", I said. "Go on in and ask the owner. He's there". She said as she was leaving. I went up and saw a man who was very big-built and seemed to be educated.

"Sir, the house for rent.."

"How many of you?"

"We are a couple; just the two of us".

"The rent is two thousand and two hundred and it includes the electricity and water bill", he said as he unlocked the house to show it to me. It was a big room and a kitchen. The place had an attached bathroom and was really nice. But the rent was too high.

"Sir, can you reduce the rent please. My wife is still studying..."

"Well, you won't get such a house for less than Rs. 2500 in this area. And I am not even asking you for an advance! Anyone else will ask for two months' advance."

"You're right, sir. But it's hard to manage with my salary alone. Please make it 1800. We will increase the rent after some time.

"That's not possible", he said pausing to think a little. "Very well. Give me 2000. You say

your wife is still a student. Let's settle it at that. ...I can't make it any less...you won't find anything cheaper."

I began thinking, "The house was good and the owner seemed like a nice person. What should I do? 2000 was a lot of money. Will we be able to manage? It was going to be tough. But we have no choice; we are running out of time.

"Ok, sir. I only have 1500 at the moment. Please take this. I will give you 500 in a couple of days."

"All right. When will you move in?" He asked as he took the money and counted it.

I was overjoyed to hear this question.

"Tomorrow, sir."

He said, "I like educated people. Moreover, you say that it's just the two of you. Keep the house clean. That's all I want." He didn't ask me anything else. He seemed like a prophet who had descended just for me.

He hadn't asked which caste I belonged to! Which religion! What I ate! Such a good person! Are there such good people in this world?...But I should tell him that we are Muslims. What if even he says no, once I tell him this? I had no energy left to begin the search all over again. But it wasn't proper to not tell him this. Lets see....

"Sir...My wife speaks mostly in Telugu, sir. She did her M.A in Telugu. I work as a journalist in a Telugu newspaper, sir. We are...Muslims, sir. I hope that's ok, I said hesitatingly.

"You're Muslim! You don't seem like that. You speak such good Telugu" he asked in surprise.

I stood with a forced smile on my face. What was so great about knowing Telugu when we lived in a Telugu state? And is the Telugu language their sole property? Does Urdu belong just to Muslims? Certainly not.

The old man patted my shoulder and left.

Even after a whole week, the mystery of the three questions that the owner didn't ask me continued to haunt me.

The servant maid who worked in the neighbouring portion said she would work for us too. Shaheen agreed to employ her after listening to her story. It was the first time we had a servant in the house. Washing the vessels and clothes and sweeping and mopping the floor, these were her duties. 200 for all this. Even though it was a meager wage, it was still a burden for us.

One day, as she chatted with Shaheen while working, she mentioned the landlord.

"Narsamma, what people are they?" I asked.

"Arijans" she said.

The mystery was now clearing up. I sank into a chair.

For the Brahmins, all non-vegetarians were untouchable people. For the Sudras, those who ate beef were untouchable. For Muslims all those who didn't eat halal meat were untouchable. Those who didn't wear the purdah were untouchable. SO who was left? Only the 'arijans' in Narsamma's words, that is the dalits. But who was untouchable for the dalits? No one! There were no untouchables for the dalits. This meant that only dalits were real human beings. The others were the real untouchables!

I closed my eyes. I could see the Madigas in my village beating the drums and singing—'flinching not at the whiplash, missing not a step in the tiger dance'! Yes, everybody else was untouchable except the dalits. Except the Madigas, in particular.

Translated by Uma Bhargubanda

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Shuddhodaka¹ for purification of food/water

■ Gulvadi Venkatrao

An excerpt from *Indirabayi* (1898), the first social novel in Kannada. The excerpt is a discussion between a young man Bhaskar Raya and his mother that takes place sometime in the second half of 19th century when he is about to go to England for his Civil Service studies/exam. The mother is concerned about his access to unpolluted food/water while journeying and during his stay over there.

“What! Where are you off to...?”

“I have to go to vilayat²...”

“Where?”

“Vilayat.”

“What do you mean by vilayat?”

“Vilayat is that country where her Highness, the Queen resides.”

“Why do you have to go there?”

“To take the C.S.³ exam.”

“Ayyo! How many exams! How far is this vilayat?”

“It is about 6000 miles from here.”

“How is the climate there? What sort of people live there?”

“The climate over there is slightly cold. The people who are there are those whom we call our rulers (sardar) over here.”

“Are there people from our caste there?”

“There would be one or two who have gone there from our country.”

“How many months will it take you to pass that exam and come back?”

“Not months, it will take me at least three years.”

“How will you travel there? How long will it take you to reach that place?”

“I have to take a steamer from here to Bombay, and from there again another

steamer to vilayat. It will take me three weeks in all to reach there.”

“What will you do for food meanwhile?”

“There is a way out for it. Don't many people go there and come back?”

“What is the way out – is it eating food cooked by others?”

“Why that? Amrutharaya⁴ will engage a cook for me and send him along.”

“That is fine but where will you get water untouched by mlechchas⁵?”

“Where indeed would you find water untouched by mlechchas? In fact, isn't the water we generally use also touched by mlechchas? Brahmans don't dig wells, do they? The people who dig the wells would have touched the water we use.”

“What if they touch? Afterwards, don't we purify it by sprinkling shuddhodaka?”

“Then that's fine. I will also take two cups of shuddhodaka with me when I go abroad.”

“I don't know what to say. It is difficult to argue with the English educated as they employ only absurd logic.”

“It is not absurd logic, mother. You reason it out. I cannot understand how touch can pollute. If a mlechcha touches me, will my body become impure?”

“Undoubtedly.”

“In that case, if I touch a mlechcha's body, will his body become pure?”

“I cannot answer such magical questions.”
(She laughs)

“There is no magic, mother. Our hearts need to be pure. What I think is that if the heart is rotten within and if you sprinkle shuddhodaka on it from outside, there is no use. I am not capable of saying any more to you.”

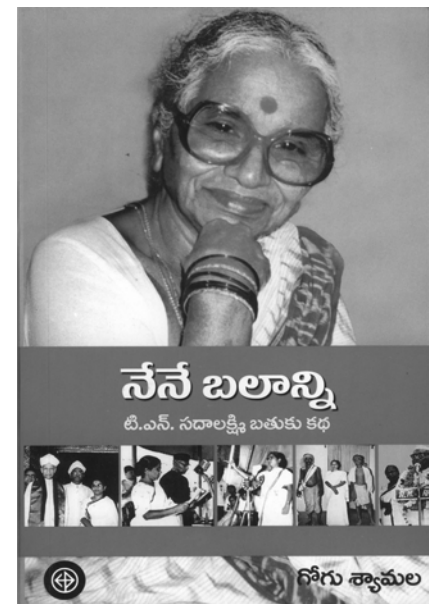
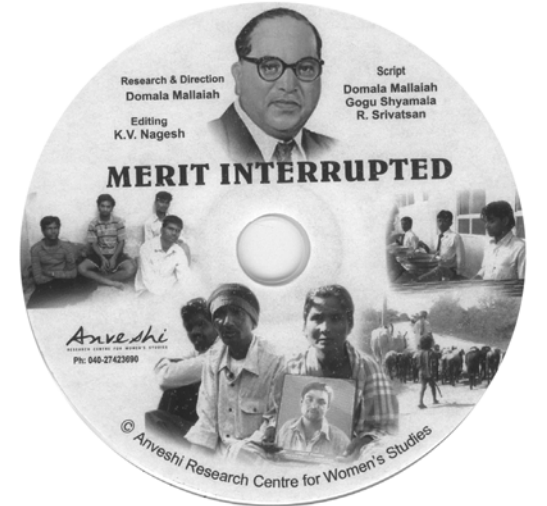
“If that is so, then what of our elders' words that it is against our dharma to go to vilayat? Don't they excommunicate such people who go and come back from our caste? Why do they do so?”

“What can I say? They do it because it is a matter of convenience.”

“But will those people not lose caste?”

“It is not the people who go to vilayat who will lose caste. As more and more people go, I don't have to tell you who will lose caste.”

Translated by *Tharakeshwar V.B.*



¹ Shuddhodaka literally means clean water, and is another name for urine of the Cow (Gomootra).

² Vilayat in Urdu, Persian and other Indian languages literally means 'foreign country'. In the colonial context it refers to Britain.

³ C.S.- Civil Services examination, equivalent to today's IAS (Indian Administrative Services)

⁴ The adopted father of Bhaskara Raya, the protagonist here. He is the one who is sponsoring Bhaskara Raya's visit and stay in England.

⁵ "Mlechcha", is a word that is generally used to describe the "other" non-self, it also means non-Sanskrit, uncivilized, outsider etc.

Why Is Modern India Vegetarian?

■ Sneha Shaj

Indian cuisine is as diverse as it comes. It is common knowledge that certain types of food considered taboo by some are relished by others. How many times have we not seen vegetarians look at a meat loaded plate, crinkle their noses, and say, “How do you eat that stuff?” How many times have we not watched friends eat beef on the sly because their mothers would “kill them if they found out”?

We are quick to judge some food as unhealthy, and hence a bad thing. Some foods are even considered “contagious”. Dislikes that arise because one is used to a different way of cooking food are quickly legitimized in terms of hygiene and health. But have we ever questioned the legitimacy of the standards that we are using to reach these conclusions?

This skewed hierarchy of food is not a result of a recent campaign, but something more complex, older. “[A] country can be said to have achieved complete food and nutrition security if each and every person in that country is able to consume a minimum quantum and quality of various ingredients of what I would like to call ‘an adequate and balanced diet’ on a regular basis,” reads a report ‘Indian Experience on Household Food and Nutritional Security’ by N.P. Nawani. But what constitutes this “balanced diet” is a matter of furious debate.

In India, this balanced diet is based on the Recommended Dietary Allowance or the RDA, for various age groups, including special groups like infants, nursing mothers and so on. For a normal adult male the RDA recommended 2400 Kilocalories derived from a balanced diet. The root of the problem, as Veena Shatrugna, formerly a deputy director at the National Institute of Nutrition points out, was that nutrition planning for the nation’s population inadvertently used the RDA to constitute an unbalanced diet consisting of cereals alone—because cereals were the cheapest, and the most easily available source of 2400 Kilocalories. This measure of nutritional requirements thus became an economic one, with the result that RDA had direct ramifications on the measure

of poverty (the Poverty Line), in determining the per capita incomes that will enable a person to achieve daily intake of the required 2400 Kilocalories, and consequentially the minimum wages. This also makes the Public Distribution System what it is today, i.e. machinery for doling out rice and wheat at cheap rates, but which does not distribute meat, eggs, nuts, or any non-vegetarian food. So in a country where vegetarians are a definite minority, we now plan our daily meals based on a Brahminical notion of a “desirable diet”. Thus, modern India is produced as vegetarian. This was fine for the upper caste rich that had the luxury of eating 3-4 kinds of vegetables, and other supplements like milk, nuts, oil etc., along with their rice, but for the poor, this meant a serious lack of vital sources of energy. So if the poor man got his plate of rice, or 3 rotis a day, he was expected to be happy and satisfied. The cereal was expected to provide 2400 Kilocalories and whatever poor quality protein it yielded was implicitly taken as adequate (because that was what was possible). The result? We survived, but barely.

The question that arises is: Why didn’t nutritionists and bureaucrats look at alternate sources of proteins, more importantly meat proteins, which are not just widely consumed, but also recommended by medical opinion for a child’s growth, and even for anemic populations? Why was there no acknowledgement of differences in cuisines and the palate? The answer seems simple enough. The bureaucrats took the average Indian diet, but the average Indian that they had in mind was not the majority who ate meat, but the dominant upper caste minority. The preference of the brahminical minority became the norm.

The food that the various tribes used to eat, says Dr. Shatrugna, was never analysed for its nutrient content. So while we romanticized their customs, did detailed anthropological investigation on how they lived and how they married, there is very little research to evaluate what they eat, and how their food, or the lack of thereof is affecting their health, growth, childbirth or birth weight of their

children. The result: 41.9% of adults belonging to the ST and 38.4 % belonging to SCs have Chronic Energy Deficiency, while the pooled average of the nation is 34.8 %. Further, 62.7 % of the children born to Scheduled Caste parents are under-weight, 57.6 % are stunted, while among the other castes the numbers are 53.1 % and 50.1 %

Women suffer more. Most studies and recommendations are made with the modern working class male as the average and the requirements of the women are adjusted proportionately. Questions such as different working style, responsibilities, and requirements of the women are not taken into consideration. The birth weight in the low socio-economic groups has not increased significantly since the past 50 years. Pharmaceuticals rally to supplement women with iron, various multi-vitamin formulations during pregnancy, but with no significant impact. NGOs and activists blame the man—he eats first, the woman eats the leftovers, but the problem is much more complex, says Dr. Shatrugna. “The low socio-economic groups get 80% of their proteins from cereal. In a scenario where there is not enough food to eat, where is the point in asking the women to eat first?”

What we need to do now is take a second look at the standards that we have put in place. The items of food that were subtly delegitimized by the RDA—beef, mutton, chicken, fish, egg, etc., must be allowed to become a part of the daily diet of people of all economic strata. The argument that it is beyond the means of the lower caste man, just does not hold. Eggs are cheaper than vegetables; why are eggs not distributed via the PDS? Why are we raising a huge outcry over culture and heritage when eggs are being given out under the mid-day meal scheme? Why is eating beef against any religion?

The question why food becomes aligned to religion and caste may remain unanswered. However, in a society that lays claim to equality in opportunity and preferences, we need to realize that caste does not work in its open manifestations of discrimination and repression alone.

(Some students who wanted to put up a beef stall in campus for one of the student festivals were prevented from doing so. One of the arguments for the prevention was that beef was unhealthy. The Dalit Students’ Union approached Dr. Veena Shatrugna for clarity on the nutritional values of beef, and was given a letter certifying that beef was indeed neither unhealthy, nor “contagious”. See accompanying letter).

A post on the *Out-Caste*¹ blog
Friday, March 21, 2008

¹ Out-caste: A dalit studies course initiative, English and Foreign Languages University. Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh, India. Accessed on the following link on August 9, 2012: <http://out-caste.blogspot.in/2008/03/why-is-modern-india-vegetarian.html>

Source of Strength of Working Hands

■ Du. Saraswati

(A social activist and Kannada writer)

In order to enquire into the source of strength of working hands, we undertook extensive fieldwork consulting subaltern communities. It was very difficult to ask questions about food habits. One of the tribal girls we interviewed retorted, "What food? Most of the time there is nothing to eat!" Some belonging to other communities said that the yield of the day's begging is mixed well together and boiled on the fire before being eaten. P. Sainath in one of his articles states that some communities go in search of rat holes to collect the grains that rats pilfer and hoard. Such is the intensity of hunger in our country. Harsh Mander in one of his lectures says that some of the Dalit women who live in the border areas of Nepal, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar spend their entire day in search of food. They look for undigested grains in cow-dung to clean and use.

There are some proverbs in Kannada which allude to the hunger of the downtrodden communities:

'Close the lid on the pot when the Holey's stomach is full.'

'Horsegram is enough for the Holey.'

'When the Holey was given leftovers, he thought it was jaggery and ran to Bangalore.'

In Mangalore, the coastal region of Karnataka, there is a saying "In the homes of the haves, one finds milk and curd, while in the huts of the have-nots one finds *basale* thatched roofs" (a temporary roof constructed out of Malabar spinach creeper). The *basale* creeper is their main food source.

The following recipes indicate the role of women in producing nutritious food for their family, and in procuring low-cost, easily available food sources from their environment.

- 1) Meat of cow, sheep, buffalo and goat:
 - a) The blood of sheep, cow, buffalo and goat is collected when they are killed. When the blood solidifies in a short while, it is cut into small pieces and fried. The fried pieces are then boiled with a masala prepared by grinding green chillies, onion, garlic, cumin, pepper and salt. Soft liver is sometimes added. This dish is known to be good for the elderly who cannot easily digest meaty food.

b) Meat of the cow, sheep or goat is dried, pounded to make a fine powder, and then seasoned and cooked in masala. This is said to be good for children and those without teeth.

c) The water strained out after cooking beef is given to old people and the sick as tonic.

2) Different varieties of rat as food

a) Beak rat – This rat is generally found alone in its hole. The hole is quite deep. The rat is caught by pouring water into

the hole to force it out. The meat of this rat is said to be as tasty as pork.

b) White rat – These are generally found in groups of 5-6 in the rat-hole. A cow-dung cake is lit in a pot and the rats are smoked out. To ensure that they don't escape, a cloth is put around the mouth of the hole to catch them when they come out. If they die from smoke inside the hole, they are dug out. The meat of this rat is said to taste like chicken.

c) Net rat – These rats reside in burrows that they dig to upto 20 feet underground. Each hole has around 30-40 rats. The burrow has some openings for air circulation. When any attempt is made to catch them, the rats use these openings to escape. So the openings are first plugged to stop air circulation and force the rats out. As they come out one by one, they are caught. The fat content in this meat is said to be high.

d) Big rat – Each rat of this variety weighs nearly a kilo. These rats generally reside in small anthills. The rat is roasted on fire, its body hair removed and



DALIT STUDENTS' UNION

UNIVERSITY OF HYDERABAD

P.O. CENTRAL UNIVERSITY

Gachibowli, Hyderabad - 500 046. A.P. (India)

Email: dalit_hcu@yahoo.co.in Website: www.dalitstudentsunion.multiply.com

President :
Praveen Veluvolu
(Ph.D., Comparative Literature)
Cell : 9959046997

Vice Presidents :
Naveen Kumar Emmadi
(M.Phil., Economics)
Vijaya Kota
(M.A. Political Science)

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D. Sudhakar Rao
(Ph.D., Life Science)

Ref. Date: 14-02-08

To
The Deputy Director
National Institution of Nutrition
Hyderabad.

SUB:- seeking a certificate on beef
and its nutritious values

Respected madam,

We, Dalit Students' Union (DSU)
central University of Hyderabad are
seeking a nutritious certificate saying,
beef is not a contagious, its a healthy
food.

We want to know the benefits
of beef on a clear note. Hence our humble
request is to the Organisation is to give
a nutritious certificate.

Thank you

V. Praveenkumar
your sincerely,
V. Praveenkumar,
President DSU

cleaned, then cut into small pieces and masala is added to prepare a watery curry. The alternative way is to smear it with salt and pepper and roast it on fire. This is supposed to be tastier.

- 3) Kunkurugadde (wild onion) roti – Kunkurugadde is a kind of onion generally found in plains. After washing, it is baked on ash-covered cinders. Then it is mashed and mixed with ragi flour. This is then patted on a cloth before transferring it on to a pan for roasting. This is said to be good for health and is called “roti of the poor”.
- 4) Crab dishes:
 - a) Crab potion – The crab is cleaned and finely ground. Then it is put in a cloth and the liquid is strained and collected. Masala made of salt, green chillies, tamarind, onion, garlic, coriander and coconut kernels is added to the strained liquid and the whole concoction is boiled. Thereafter, seasoning can be added. This is supposed to be nutritious for women convalescing after delivery. It is said to improve breast milk.
 - b) The crab is pounded and boiled with garlic, pepper and 4-5 glasses of water. When the water is reduced to half, it is strained and it is given to women post-partum everyday for three days before they drink water.
- 5) White ants in anthills – These are caught, cleaned and eaten. In another variation, after cleaning, they are split, put in ghee and the ghee is given to babies.
- 6) Mushroom sambar – The cleaned mushrooms are seasoned and boiled. While boiling, meat masala is added.
- 7) Monitor lizard sambar – The cleaned meat of the monitor lizard is fried in oil and cooked with masala made of clove, garlic, onion, ginger, curry leaves and chilly powder. While boiling, a small quantity of jaggery or sugar is also added.
- 8) Gulkai sambar – After de-seeding the gulkai, it is cleaned and boiled in water. Fried avare beans are added. A masala made of green chilly, onion, garlic, tomato, coriander powder and salt is put in the gulkai and boiled.
- 9) Goddu khara – Roasted onion, garlic, tamarind, coriander leaves, mint leaves, red chillies, cumin, salt and a little water is ground together. Variations of this dish are made by slightly altering the ingredients.
- 10) Milk gojju – Brinjal or potato is cleaned and cut into pieces. It is boiled along with garlic, salt and chilly powder. After boiling and cooling it, milk is added along with some more garlic and chilly and the mixture is again boiled. This is said to be very tasty and a good curative for clearing phlegm.

- 11) Crane egg – Cranes lay eggs in thorny bushes near lakes and tanks. The light blue-coloured eggs are eaten. Cow dung is plasted on the egg, which is then thrown into fire. After 10-15 minutes, the egg is retrieved from the fire and the baked dung is removed. The shell is also removed and the insides are eaten.
- 12) Roasted beef – Dried beef is roasted in fire and used as a side dish taken along with main course, all through the year. It is also eaten along with goddu khara as side dish.
- 13) Rabbit-horn:
 - a) Curry – The rabbit-horn plant is found in shrubby, hilly forests. The stems are brought in, cleaned, cut and boiled for 10-15 minutes along with red chilly, cumin powder and salt.
 - b) Chutney – The stems are cut and fried in oil along with onion, garlic, cumin, salt, chilly powder, black pepper and seasoned and used along with rice or mudde. It is said to be a good appetizer, and also for general health.
- 14) Rain Flies –
 - a) Raw – the flies which swarm the sources of light after a bout of rain are caught and eaten raw.
 - b) The rain flies are dried, and added to rice grains, fried horsegram, chickpea, grated coconut and jaggery, and this tasty mixture is eaten in and around Chitradurga district (mentioned in “Janapada Aduge” by Chikkanna Nuggekatte)
- 15) The Soliga tribe uses many fruits available in the forest like kaale, kaare, sooli, jagadi, pokala, darasale, palm dates, wild cactus, wild jambhul, cashew fruit, etc. as food. Either these fruits are eaten raw, or juice is extracted from the fruits and taken. They use some of seeds of the fruits in local medicine. Salted jambhul fruit is kept overnight and eaten in the morning.

Recipes of the poor:

1. Naamadilige – Jowar flour is cooked along with jaggery, grated coconut, ginger, cardamom and then beaten flat on a wooden platform, cut into 4 pieces, then offered to the God and eaten.
2. Maradi Bobbatlu – Maradi trees are found in the forests of Tumkur and Madhugiri taluk of Karnataka. The tree bears fruit in May. The seed of the fruit has a hard shell around it. Once the fruit juice is sucked by the birds, the dried up fruit is collected, the shell broken open to take out the seed which tastes like badam. This oily seed is called “pappu”, and it is used to make bobbatlu (mentioned in “Janapada Aduge” by Chikkanna Nuggekatte).
3. The poor make rotis out of different varieties of corn. They also use corn to

make their sweet dishes in the form of bobbatlu and sajjige.

4. Crab:
 - a. Fried – after cleaning the crab, it is filled with a masala prepared out of chilly powder, coconut, garlic, onion, coriander leaves, mint leaves, cinnamon, coriander seeds, black pepper and tomato, and deep fried.
 - b. Crab sambar – The same masala is used to prepare sambar.
5. Buffalo meat sambar – The cleaned buffalo meat is cooked in water. While it is cooking, a masala made out of coconut, chilly powder, garlic, ginger, coriander, fenugreek, spinach, poppy seeds, pepper, turmeric powder, salt, jaggery is added. This is generally the food of the scheduled castes, and it is taken along with roti, mudde and rice.
6. Fox-meat sambar – Cleaned pieces of fox-meat are seasoned with cumin seeds. Pepper, garlic, and tamarind are ground into a paste and added to the meat while it is cooking. Salt is also added. Finally chilly powder and jowar flour is added to the boiling sambar. The people of Ramakonda caste are known for this recipe. It is also given to women convalescing after delivery.
7. Karri-Nakki (Pork sambar) – Cleaned pieces of pork are cooked in water. While cooking, a masala made of grated coconut, coriander, ginger, garlic, black pepper, clove, cinnamon, tomato and salt is added. Generally this dish is prepared by the Korava community. It is given to women five days after delivery.
8. Aambara – The water in which lentils are cooked is drained out, and seasoned with mustard seeds, cumin seeds and boiled along with coriander leaves, curry leaves, garlic, tamarind extract, chillies, salt and a little bit of jaggery. When bobbatlu is made, instead of pure jaggery, this sweet mixture is used as a stuffing in the recipe.
9. Fish sambar – Cut onions are fried along with a masala made out of garlic, coriander leaves, mint leaves, ginger, fried coconut and onion. Fried black gram powder and chilly powder is added, and when boiling, cleaned pieces of fish are added.
10. Chutneys:
 - a. Red-ant chutney – In Malnad, chutney is made out of red ants called chiguli.
 - b. Crab chutney – Varieties of crabs like karedi and belledi are used to make chutney and sambar.
11. Rice left-over from ritual practices is collected, dried out and used later.
12. Food is also prepared out of tubers obtained without any cost in their surroundings.

Translated by Tharakeshwar V.B.

Discussion on food, culture, politics

The following are notes from a discussion on food cultures among dalits. The editorial team held this discussion with Gogu Shyamala, a well-known writer and a research fellow at Anveshi, and Dr. B. Venkat Rao who is an Assistant Professor at the English and Foreign Languages University. The discussion was marked by the pleasure of recollecting foods eaten during childhood and the laughter and enjoyment that comes while sharing this experience with friends. It was also marked by a sober attempt to understand and critique the discrimination and even violence that differences in food cultures produce and the overall politics that structures something so seemingly basic and simple as food.

Gogu Shyamala who is from the Telangana region began by saying that during her childhood the madigawada in her village was a world in itself. There was very little contact with the upper-castes. So, they did not feel discriminated for eating beef. Indeed, during that time meat meant beef, nothing else. It was called the *pedda kura* (big curry). The *katika* caste people who are butchers would bring beef in baskets and sell it in the madigawada. Mutton was offered at the durgah on special occasions and was often referred to as *chinna kura* (the little curry). Chicken was believed to be a green vegetable!

They ate beef once in every two-three days and that was considered to be the most satisfying meal. They believed that Madiga youth grew strong because they ate the big curry. In fact, curry was anything with some pieces of beef in it. They also made a soup from the bones.

Shyamala said that beef was usually from buffaloes. They never ate meat from dead animals and neither did they ever kill a milk-yielding cow for meat. Buffaloes, oxen and goats were usually sacrificed at village goddess temples and there used to be frequent quarrels over sharing the meat. Generally, it was the Madigas who used to cut and cook the meat on festive occasions. She recalled that when she was around 16–17 years old, some Madiga youth in her village refused to sacrifice the animals at the temple. They invoked the law against animal sacrifice and sought the help of the police to enforce this law. Usually the sacrifices had the tacit support of the police who stayed away from these events. Although they routinely abused the dalits for being beefeaters, the upper-castes were keen on continuing these rituals in which caste hierarchy was strictly observed

and the Madigas were forced to kill the animals in sacrifice. The refusal of the Madiga youth was aimed at resisting this upper caste domination in the ritual space of the temple and over the food culture of the Madigas. So, while they enjoyed eating beef, they did not want to be forced to sacrifice the animals. For them it was an assertion of their self-respect.

Apart from beef, Shyamala said that on rare occasions her family ate the meat of rabbits. Her grandmother used to catch and cook crabs in the fields. The whole family used to eat the crabs but no one else knew how to cook them. Eating fish was also rare—it was only during the rainy season when the streams and wells were overflowing that fish was easily available.

However, the more commonly consumed food items were *jonna rotte* (maize roti) and dal soup. They also ate other cereals like *korralu*, *taidalu* and paddy. Though BPT seems to be the standard variety now, she recalled how they were familiar with several different types of paddy like *krishna neelalu*, *gosha vasalu* etc. They used *nalla kusumalu* and *tella kusumalu* which are the black and white varieties of safflower oil seeds for extracting cooking oil. They made *polelu*, a sweet made from wheat flour and jaggery on festival days. The day following the festivals was usually reserved for eating beef.

Venkat, who is from the village, Panchalavarama in Guntur district in Coastal Andhra, remarked that his experience was close to Shyamala's and that beef was a very common food item in his community of Malas. Curry meant beef—they hardly ever made any curry without pieces of dried beef or dried fish. However, curiously, the slaughter for beef was always announced

using code words. For instance, early in the morning, someone would go around their neighbourhood calling out "Morning Jasmines" or "Ramakoti Mithai" (sweet offered as part of worshipping Rama!).

Venkat remarked that it was only after entering school that he experienced the stigma attached to eating beef. The teachers often abused Mala children saying that they were idiots because of their habit of eating beef. They had a Brahmin teacher, who only ate milk and fruits and who urged his students to give up meat-eating in general and beef-eating in particular. Many students actually stopped eating meat after joining school.

Shyamala added that in her case too it was only after joining the social welfare hostel that she realized that beef-eating was looked down upon. She also said that she really missed beef while she was in the hostel and for a long time she could not stomach the mutton served there.

Venkat mentioned that they never killed a she-buffalo for meat and he was not even aware that the cow was eaten. The beef they ate came mostly from male buffaloes. It was only after coming to Hyderabad did he realize that cow meat was eaten. Shyamala said that eating cow was a practice mainly in Nalgonda district. Venkat also added that the meat of dead animals was seldom eaten. However, he recalled one instance when the meat of a dead ox was distributed among his relatives.

Venkat further spoke about the wide variety of meats they used to eat during his childhood. They ate snails found in the fields which were very tasty. They also ate the meat of tortoise, wildcat, cranes, *nippu kodi*, (ostrich? pheasant?) and sometimes donkey meat usually sold by Koya tribesmen. Eating pork was also a common practice and they ate dry beef during the lean season. Besides all these, they ate rice, different lentils like green gram, red gram and black gram. They never bought vegetables but ate whatever was available in the fields—brinjal, gherkins, cluster beans, pumpkin, ladies finger, cucumber etc.

Venkat noted that during his research on conversion in coastal Andhra, he came across Church records from around the 1850s, which mentioned that pork was a very commonly consumed food item during that time. During the famines of 1851 and 1861, all classes and

Sambaiah Gundimeda is a Research Fellow at Centre for Social Development, Hyderabad. V.B. Tharakeshwar and Uma Bhrugubanda teach at English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad.

castes ate beef and ate the meat of dead animals too. However, in later periods, the injunction against beef seems to have come into vogue again. The Malas of the Godavari districts, for instance, don't eat beef.

Sambaiah said he was from the Gundimeda village near Vijayawada also in coastal Andhra, and therefore shared a great deal of the food culture that Venkat discussed. He wanted to add that as children they used to collect the eggs of cranes and crows in the fields and make omelettes. Or they would boil them after coating them with cow dung. They also caught rats in the fields, which they would roast and eat with a bit of salt. They ate whatever they could get in the fields, whether it was groundnuts or lentils or even snails. Sam also mentioned that an uncle of his was very fond of fried *uusulu*, a type of insect generally found in the rainy season.

Shyamala said that they too ate whatever was locally and freely available. They ate roasted palm kernels, palm fruits, different kinds of berries, the juicy bark of the date trees and so on.

Venkat spoke of the Beef Festival that he and other students of the DBMSA (the Dalit Bahujan and Minority Student Association) had organized in 2004 when he was a research scholar at CIEFL (now EFL University). There was a lot of opposition and the cooks from the hostel mess refused to cook the beef. So, the students themselves cooked and served the beef. Venkat also spoke of their struggle against the hegemony of vegetarianism in the hostel menu and their efforts to make meat and eggs part of the regular menu in the hostel not "extras" to be paid for. He said the common practice was to serve eggs for Rs. 3, fish for Rs. 10 and chicken for Rs. 15 extra in addition to the common meal, which was vegetarian. They opposed this practice and made these items part of the menu with the option that vegetarians could take a fruit or sweet in lieu of these.

Tharakeshwar also recalled how he had eaten beef for the first time when he was in college. (His family did not eat beef.) However, later it became a regular part of his diet. When he was in hostel in the University of Hyderabad in the late nineties, it was a regular practice among his friends to either go out to eat beef or cook it in the hostel room. Needless to add, it was never served as part of the meals in the hostel mess.

*Conducted and recorded by
Uma Bhrugubanda*

The Workplace

■ Zarin Ahmed

The central workplace of the butchers in Delhi was the Idgah abattoir locally known as the 'Kamela' or 'mandi' (market) because the livestock market is also located there. It is located on Idgah Road behind Sadar Bazaar police station. Built in 1914, the abattoir covers an area of 7 acres which includes the livestock market, the slaughterhouses and the offices of the MCD which is responsible for maintenance. There are three sections in the slaughterhouses: halal, jhatka and buffalo section. Each section is again divided into ante mortem and slaughter. The veterinary doctor checks the animal before it is sent to the slaughtering sections and charges a nominal tax for each animal slaughtered. The abattoir works from 5.00 am to 12 noon everyday except Tuesdays since it is auspicious for Hindus and observed as a meatless day by most. Apart from regular government holidays, the abattoir is closed for three days during the bi-annual Hindu Navaratra festival since 1994. The abattoir was closed following a Supreme Court order of October 2009 and remains closed till date.

The trajectory

In the traditional system, the journey from the farmer to the meat shop involved at least fourteen people or more. The trajectory included the following people:

1. The farmer who rears the animals in Haryana, Rajasthan, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh;
2. The trader who sources the animal;
3. The transporter who brings the animal to Delhi;
4. A helper who takes care of the animal while in transit;
5. The supplier in Delhi;
6. The commission agent (aarhti) at the abattoir who sells it to the kaantewala;
7. The helper called gwala who takes care of the animals in lairage;
8. Chowkidar at the abattoir;
9. The maasha-khor who buys the animal from the commission agent on cash, slaughters it and/or sells it to the shopkeepers. This is an optional category and sometimes the shopkeepers procure the animal from the commission agent;
10. The Kameldar and sallaakh who slaughter and remove the hide;
11. The transporter or hand cart puller who transports the meat and its by-products

to different destinations;

12. The shopkeeper generally the owner of the shop;
13. Skilled employed worker in the shop who carves the meat when sold.
14. Unskilled worker in the shop to help in cleaning and running errands

Most transactions are based on credit and word of mouth. So the commission agent sells the animal to the shopkeeper on credit and pays off the money when he recovers money from the shopkeeper. He goes on collection duty to the different meat shops or they meet over tea or lassi in the evenings. Most of them work within the same network of people.

In this trajectory, the first two categories - the farmer and trader - are mainly non-Muslims; the next three categories, that is, the transporter, supplier and the helper are from both communities. The commission agent belongs to the Quresh biradree. The gwala and chowkidar are again from various communities but mostly poor Muslims from neighbouring areas. Categories 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13 are exclusively skilled people from the biradree. The chain shows that the trade involves Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims, Dalit Christians and Dalit Hindus apart from the Qureshi Muslims who constitute the main bulk in this trajectory. Within the Qureshis, it is the commission agent who interacts at all or most levels, thus maintaining the inclusiveness of the Qureshis. There are also people indirectly involved in this line of work. Women from the Khateek samaaj come to the abattoir to buy heads, hooves and entrails to sell them in areas like Madangir where there are pockets of dalits. It gives them a high protein diet at cheap rates. Apart from the trajectory of the animal to the meat shop or restaurant, there are also other areas like the lucrative export market and by-products. Horns, skin, offal, bones, intestine, blood, fat are sold and supplied at different stages to neighbouring areas where they are processed initially and then sold to factories. There is a whole line of production in each direction and involves people who indirectly depend on the meat industry.

from "Taleem, Tanzeem aur Tijaarat:: The Changing Role of the AIJQ" in Vinod Jairath, ed. *Frontiers of Embedded Muslim Communities in India* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2011) pp 158-173

Overview of the Beef Business in Hyderabad

■ Md. Abdul Faheem Qureshi

[Md. Abdul Faheem Qureshi a practicing lawyer who has trained in London, is the President of Hyderabad based AIJQAC (All India Jamiat ul Quresh Action Committee). This committee actively represents the Qureshi community (Muslim Butcher community) of Andhra Pradesh. Mr. Qureshi is also the president of Andhra Pradesh Arm Wrestling Association]

Then and Now:

During the Nizam's period, the population was considerably lower, and the relatively small beef need was met with local animals like cows, bulls, calves and buffaloes. There was no export at that time so the meat was cheaper and was not weighed exactly as it is today. Local animals used to graze in the surrounding grasslands and that's why their meat tasted good. The animals used to be healthy and fat. Cow's meat was preferred at that time (and even now) because of its good taste and nutrition.

The meat was cheaper and the income of butchers was satisfactory. Now the population has gone up affecting the meat business. Beef is now also exported from the state (Andhra Pradesh), mostly to Vietnam, Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, UAE and Russia. The export to U.S and Europe has declined because of the fear of Mad Cow, and Foot and Mouth diseases. Beef from India is preferred all over because the animals are bred organically and not according to new scientific systems and also since there are fewer diseases afflicting them.

Today it has become a fashion among various castes to eat meat. As the benefits of beef are scientifically proven, many people have taken to beef eating. The upper-castes earlier used to eat beef for medicinal purpose but now it is increasingly becoming part of their regular meals.

Anti Cow Slaughtering Act:

One group of Hindus in A.P that worships the cow started a campaign against cow slaughter

and had filed cases in the courts. They have argued in relation to Muslims that cow sacrifice is not essential during Bakrid and that therefore the Muslims should be made to forego cow slaughter. As a result of this campaign the "A.P. Prohibition of Cow Slaughter and Animal Preservation Act, 1977" was passed. The Act says that, in exceptional cases, a cow or any animal can be slaughtered if a doctor certifies it to be diseased and harmful to the public interest (through infection to other animals, etc). Cow slaughter is also allowed for research and experimental purposes and only in government institutions. Before this Act there was another law called "The A.P.(Telangana Area) slaughtering of animals Act 1950". This was not prohibitory, but the 1977 Act that replaced it, is. The prohibition of cow slaughter was added to it. With this new Act, cows and their calves (male and female) and all those animals that are used for agriculture, dairy cattle and the powerful draught animals that can be useful in various activities may not be slaughtered. When animals not in these categories are slaughtered, their anti-mortem inspection followed by a 24-hour rest period is required. Once slaughtered the meat is inspected by a veterinary doctor to ascertain whether the meat is edible or not. After the doctor's approval the meat is sent to the shops. These rules were imposed after 1977 Act. Another effect of this regulation was that the cow's meat became unavailable openly which led to its illegal and secret slaughtering.

Before this Act (1977) there was also a central act "The prevention of cruelty to Animals Act, 1960". Under this enactment the "Transportation of Animals Rules" were formulated in 1978, which specifies in detail how the cattle have to be transported. For example it says that the vehicle should not take more than a prescribed number of cattle, the vehicle should have a soft surface, first aid box, enough fodder and water, and during long

journeys the cattle should be taken out for a walk, etc. In 2001 the 'Slaughter Houses Rules' were framed in detail for slaughtering and inspection. After the 1977 Act, cow's meat was banned and in its place bull's meat became preferable in A.P, whereas in other states where similar acts were passed buffalo meat became preferable.

The other important implication of this Act was that many Hindu communities, seeing business opportunities entered into cattle and meat trade in a big way. On the other hand these same laws are constantly used to harass Muslim butchers and traders especially during the period of Bakrid.

Slaughterhouses:

In Hyderabad there used to be five slaughterhouses under MCH. They were in Ranmastpura (beef) Amberpet and Bhoiguda (beef and mutton), Jiyaguda and Gowlipura (mutton). These slaughterhouses were located a distance away from the residential areas. As the population grew around the slaughterhouses the people started complaining about the inconveniences and approached the court. In June 2003, the High court ordered the closure of all the slaughterhouses with in six months that is before 31st December 2003. The government proposed modernization of the slaughterhouses to which the court agreed and said that after the modernization is done the court order would remain cancelled. But the Andhra Pradesh government did not do any thing in the prescribed six months. In order to pressurize the government to implement the modernization promise, AIJQAC was formed on 31st December 2003 and began a campaign. As a result a resolution was passed in the standing committee of MCH regarding the modernization of slaughterhouses. This also happened because of active interest of MIM President late Sultan Salahuddin Owasi and cooperation of Qureshi Community. The modernization of four slaughterhouses began and they are expected to be functional in October 2012 after much delay.

Beef costing:

After modernization the price of beef is expected to go up. At present an expense of twenty rupees is incurred per animal. This is likely to increase to 125 rupees. The maintenance of slaughterhouses in Hyderabad is being offered to multi national companies, which again surely will make the beef even costlier. The four slaughterhouses that are

modernized in Hyderabad are the first of their kind taken up by any government in India. Taking over and operating these slaughterhouses means having governments support the beef exporting business and that's why most of the slaughterhouses and exporting companies are showing keen interest.

Presently there are no taxes on meat since it is a raw product whereas there is a small tax on sale and purchase of cattle. It is the perspective of our association that if beef export is stopped then beef can be sold at Rs.60 per kg (present rate Rs.160 kg). Though the export is not good for the local beef business, it has created large demands for by-products. Our association wants the best beef to be sold to the citizens at the cheapest possible rates.

Beef Business in Hyderabad:

Beef shops in the city mostly sell buffalo or ox meat. The animals are procured from agricultural markets in various districts but mainly form the two cattle markets in Hyderabad situated in Narsingi and Erragadda. After the closure of slaughterhouses it has become difficult to estimate the number of animals slaughtered. In Changicherla slaughter house 4000 animals are slaughtered daily out of which nearly 80% of the meat is exported. Secondly after the closure of the slaughterhouses many private, illegal and small informal slaughterhouses came up in the neighbouring localities since it is difficult and costly to procure meat from the distant slaughterhouse in Changicherla.

The beef business suffers from various difficulties the most prominent being the confiscation of animals on the highways by goons who operate under the cover of animal rights and cow protection committees. These are well-organized groups, active in the whole of the State. The police are not of much help. They are first of all ignorant of relevant laws and also their natural sympathies are more with the animal protectionists. They end up in supporting the goons rather than the legal traders. There are many cases of confiscated animals being used for private purposes or resale in the market rather than of sending them to *goshala*. Apart from these difficulties there are no cold storage facilities and existing facilities are becoming costly.

Beef opposing lobby:

Animal Rights Activists and Cow Protectionists are one and the same. I say this because animal rights activist only protest in the name

of cows and buffalos, they are not active against the meat, pork and poultry business that also cause cruelty to animals. The Cow Protectionists are well organized, well financed and adapt various strategies starting from the local police stations up to the courts and to the Ministers. For example they financed a booklet on cow protection laws for the AP Police in 2003, and based on it they conduct sensitizing programmes to the police department at their own expenses. This booklet is biased and doesn't show aspects in the law/act that approve the slaughtering. They have also marked areas in the city for fund raising; for example in a business area in Hyderabad they made have a target of Rs.20 lakhs which is divided by the total number of traders in this area. The traders—Hindus and Muslims—are supposed to pay the fixed amount without any excuse. I know a trader who pays twenty thousand rupees per year to Goraksha Samithis. There are 102 animal protectionist organizations in A.P out of which 13 are in Hyderabad. They maintain hundreds of goshalas. These goshalas have increased significantly in the last decade. As a result of their activities not only do the butchers but also dairy-farmers suffer difficulties and losses.

Government and Politics:

The government supports the cattle trade and meat industry through many acts and institutions: the A.P agricultural produce and livestock act 1966 and the A.P Agricultural Marketing Board, the Animal Husbandry and Fisheries Department, the Meat and Poultry Boards are some examples. There are 317 big and 577 small market yards in the State in which fruits, vegetables, and agricultural produce are sold along with the livestock of various kinds. The government charges one percent as market fee and two percent as commission on live stock trade and issues receipts. The government has earned nearly five hundred crores on overall trade last year. The cattle traders purchase cattle from these markets and resell in the specific cattle markets from where the butchers buy their animals. There is a slaughterhouse in each municipality. In the non-Muslim dominant districts the Christians and Hindus maintain and use these facilities.

The farmers' income from livestock has more importance than the income from agricultural produce. Agricultural produce has to be sold quickly whereas stock can be sold at the time of need. The farmers know the usefulness cycle of their livestock in terms of agriculture and dairy and decide accordingly. Farmers

benefit most in the meat trade. The government protects the farmers but it doesn't create a conducive environment for the meat business because of the pressure of cow protection lobbies. As a result of this, the meat business is under constant threat and strain. In spite of these difficulties the meat consumption and its export are increasing. The government should realize these facts.

No political party except the MIM (Hyderabad based Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen) supports us in times of trouble. This year I was in Tadepalligudem (West Godavari district) as a lawyer, with court orders to take repossession of cattle captured by the local cow protectionist organizations from the traders. The whole village gathered against us. One official even ask me to escape. I sent an sms about my situation to Hyderabad MP Mr Asaduddin Owasi, who was in Delhi. He responded immediately. Within a few minutes the police reached the spot and saved us. We executed the court orders under police protection and recovered the cattle that were legally and rightfully purchased.

AIJQAC:

There are more than one lakh members of butcher community in A.P and they come in the category of OBC and the BC(E) list in AP. Their representative body was the AIJQ (All India Jamaia ul Quraish, Hyderabad). In 2003 as a reaction to the AIJQ policy in relation to the closure of slaughterhouses in Hyderabad AIJQAC was formed. AIJQ supported the closure and shifting of slaughterhouses from the city, whereas a large number of the Qureshi community opposed it. To express their opposition AIJQAC was formed and under its banner. Rallies, hunger strikes, dharnas and fifteen days closure of meat shops were organized. As a result the government took the modernization of old slaughterhouses seriously. The AIJQAC is presently supported by a majority of the Qureshi community in Hyderabad. The objective of AIJQAC was to fight for the slaughterhouses and provide legal protection. It fights court cases for Qureshi community against the harassment of cow and animal protectionists and also against biased officials. It plays a role in resolving the differences and disputes between other organizations of the community in other states. It proposes to work for the educational upliftment of the community and encourage social reform.

*As told to M.A. Moid of the
Editorial Committee*

Beef, our life

■ Gogu Shyamala

Beef is our culture,
beef – our living green nature.
Life's diversity,
breath of our soul.

"Do not eat beef!" "But how?"

I ask you. Another question:

Who are you to tell me what to eat or not?

Where have you come from?

What is your relationship to me?

I ask.

To this day

have you reared a pair of bullocks?

A pair of sheep?

A buffalo or two?

Have you driven them to the forest to graze?

Have you at least reared a pair of fowl?

Have you once waded into the stream

to scrub and wash their bulk?

You've never plumbed a bullock's ear,

nor do you know the number of its teeth.

Don't know the medicine for its toothache,

don't know to trim its painful hooves!

Do you know of cattle fuzz?

What, in the end, do you know

my friend, but to say "don't eat beef"?

For her daughter at whose breast

a newborn child sucks; for that

just-delivered mother,

fine cut and pounded beef

anxious Yellamma plans to get.

Scan the village length and breadth

for that elusive sac of bovine bile that hangs

maybe from Mala Sattemma's rafter or

Madiga Ellamma's beam.

To soothe a baby's gripe,

cure elders' ills and aches

they trust the bile sac's bitter nectar.

And you dare tell them "Don't eat beef"?

They will reach for their old chappals, take speed!

Malas and Madigas don't only eat beef my lad.

To plough the field, they nurture the forest

they tame the buffalo

and yoke the ox.

Through eons they've ploughed their fertile fields,
through generations, raised their calves.

The culture of our cattle fairs

every ten kilometres – across

Dakkhan, (Telangana, Andhra, Maharashtra,
Karnataka)

Malnad, Mangalur, Chittoor, Nellore,

Ongole and Aurangabad, stand

and see the fair stretch in all directions,

cows, calves bulls and oxen on every side.

The world knows of cowboys, what

does it know of these fairs?

Behind them

do you know who slogs and sweats?

Ongole bulls, killera-horned oxen,

crescent horned cattle; splendid twelve footers

proper to the Dakkhan

do you know of these?

Have you heard of grazing cattle being driven off?

Do you know of bulls and cows

grabbed from those who reared them.

How could we forget that historic event when

ox-drawn carts replaced horse-drawn carriages?

We drive the cows and bulls to the woods

and meadows to graze.

We feed them to plough the land.

We know well to do this – don't forget, and

remember also this: Cattle are reared to bear the plough!

"You have abandoned the land, the pasture to eat beef."

You sing this same old song with your blackened, rotten teeth askew.

For all this, what do you do?

You call it *go-mata* (the holy cow).

You milk it dry and make some sweetmeat.

Did you think to feed the calf?

We don't milk the cow.

We don't revere *go-mata*, nor do we drink its piss.

We don't muzzle the calf to milk the mother.

We leave its scant udder to the baby

which must grow strong on its mother's milk.

It must become a powerful bullock that tomorrow ploughs the field.

For agriculture to grow and prosper

our cattle must be like bull-elephants.

We respect the cow that births the bull.

We feed her fresh grass, tender jowar stalks and rich rare fodder.

We don't make her work,

we don't show her off to beg in front of your homes.

We graze her well so that her calves grow strong,

we nurture the cow with an eye to growing agriculture.

At times when we are happy and relaxed

and want to celebrate,

we gather a fund, go to the fair.

We select and buy a healthy, strong cow to

bring down, cut and share. That evening

our dalitwada bathes in the aroma of joy as we feast.

The responsibility and respect due to the first-born son
go to the ox in our house.
We give it a name that pleases:
Ramagadu, Arjunagadu, Dharmagadu...
Cows, buffaloes and calves live with our families.
We call them pretty names too,
like Rangasani, Damaramogga, Mallechendu ...
Why, we have festivals for cattle –
there is a cattle festival called Yeronka – have you heard of this?
Do you know?

On that festive day,
In the clear streams and ponds
we scrub and bathe our bulls, cows, oxen,
he-buffaloes and young calves.
We print colored patterns on their hides to match
their myriad shades and patent hues;
we tie veils on their foreheads woven out
of brightly dyed strands of roselle hemp;
we adorn their necks with a garland of bells and rattles;
feed them cooked jowar and sweetmeats made of rice;
we pour raw eggs and liquor into their willing mouths, and
lead them through the village in a procession.

You speak always of the cow.
What is the cow to you?
You never speak of oxen.
You never speak of oxen ploughing land,
nor do you speak of their trampling clay to mortar our walls.
We remember a past when bulls and oxen
stomped out enough clay to build whole forts.
With what authority do you say, "Don't eat beef?"

You say, "Don't kill an ox", but force us to eat its carcass.
You call us untouchable,
you make us landless,
you push us to do your dirty work,
you force us remove dead cattle from the village streets.

Nurturing cattle,
balancing their number;

giving an ox or bull as a gift to the goddess
and feasting
is our culture.
What right have you to stop us?

You have copied Buddhism's stripes.
Don't we know Buddhism?
It said 'don't kill humans'.
You say 'don't eat mutton, beef, onions and garlic'.
Saying 'we don't eat meat' you are ready to slash and murder men.
Who are you to speak of animals – you
who have no humanity, no civilization?
The ox, the cow, the bull and buffalo
are members of our families.
What they need we know to grow,
what they suffer we know to treat.
Neuter them and make them work –we do this.
Go to the Mala Madiga wada and learn!
We have created civilization there.
Have you forgotten that
our country was born of this?
Ecology and civilization is our nature.
War and destruction, your culture.
Your relation to the cow is limited:
Milk, sweets, vegetarianism!

On our Ammavaru's festival day, we offer her a bull and ram.
We feast on them.
If you come in our way, you won't last long.
Our Maisamma, Ooredamma, Pochamma and Poleramma
will ask us, 'Orey, give me an ox'
'Arey, get me a bull, a goat!'
We mark them for our gods at birth and then nurture them to full
growth.
We are obliged.
Who are you to come between us?
Maisamma will confront him that obstructs!
Beef is our culture. Beware.

*Translated by R. Srivatsan with help from
Susie Tharu, N. Manohar and
Jayasree Kalathil.*

THE MANY USES OF BEEF BY-PRODUCTS:

Horns and hooves: imitation tortoise shell, combs, chew-bones for dogs, imitation ivory, piano keys

Fats and fatty acids: crayons, candles, floor wax, detergent bar soaps, shaving cream, cosmetics such as lipstick, deodorants, lubricant fluids, plastics, tires, perfumes, pet foods, livestock feeds.

Gelatine from bones: Photographic film, paper and cardboard glues, emery paper

Intestines: tennis racquet strings, musical instrument strings

Hide and hair: leather for furniture, automobiles, luggage, shoes, clothing, saddles, bridles, paint brushes, sporting equipment -- footballs, volleyball, soccer balls, basket balls, base balls.

Organs and blood: Pancreas: insulin for some diabetics; adrenal glands: epinephrine to treat allergic shocks, allergies; pituitary gland: ACTH to treat allergic diseases; blood factors: for treatment of haemophilia.

When the first South Indian BJP government wanted to amend the existing cow slaughter act and bring the *Karnataka Prevention of Slaughter and Preservation of Cattle Bill/Act 2010* as a stricter measure to prevent cow slaughter and protect cattle there were widespread protests across Karnataka. The dalit organizations were at the forefront of the protests. The government withdrew the bill in the first week of March from the Assembly but re-introduced it the very next week amidst protests and a walkout by the opposition parties. Once again the dalit groups organized protests across Karnataka. The dalit students of Bangalore University organized an event in front of the administrative block of the University where they cooked and served beef. This was followed in other places too. Organizing a seminar on the issue and serving beef became a mode of protest.

One example of the rich protest literature concerns a well-known folk poem that tells the story of how the cow, freed by a tiger that captured it, returned after fulfilling its duty of feeding the calf because it promised to do so. This poem was often cited as representative of the cow, its essential good nature, and therefore its sacredness in the imagination of upper-caste Kannadigas. During these demonstrations, this poem became a point of criticism and discussion among the Dalit writers who differed with the upper-caste signification. The following poem by Hanumantiah reproduced here was written four years earlier than these incidents. It is however, an outstanding example of the critical responses to this literary imagination of Hindu cow worship. It asserts beef eating by the Dalit communities, and at the same time asserts their love for the cow and the way cow is treated. It subtly re-signifies the upper-caste Hindu as the predatory tiger that eats the Dalit who eats the cow and becomes one with it.

I eat cow and have become one

■ N.K. Hanumantiah

Untouchable!

Yes; I'm like electricity
not accessible to your
cold touch

Untouchable!

Yes; I'm like the depth of the ocean
not accessible to the touch
of your searing eyes

Untouchable!

Yes; I'm the breast-sprouted land,
a Sambhogini¹
full of life, who loves skin;
forests and valleys, rivers and mountains take birth in me

Untouchable!

Yes; I don't care for
you faggots who indulge
in your solipsistic schemes;
rather I care for
the monkey which jumps from tree to tree
with its young one clinging to its sides

Untouchable!

Yes; I do not fear
the radiance of your eyes
which without tears and tomorrows
have become a furnace for
money and nuclear weapons;
rather I fear

the dog which eats
your shit and guards your house

Fake eyes don't see dreams

Untouchable!

Yes; I eat cow
and have become one
dancing in valleys, mountains, plains;
firmly planting my foot on land
I lift my tail to hit the rainbow,
I gore the rainy clouds and
fling them over graveyards

Untouchable!

Yes; I eat cow
and have become one.
I with an udder in every strand of my body hair
roam around feeding milk to babies found in garbage dumps

Untouchable!


Yes; I became cow by eating it
But I will not eat your fodder
to become human like you;
I can't eat humans.

*Translated from Kannada by Ankur Betageri
(With some modifications by the editorial team)*



'Govu Tindu Govinantaadavanu'. From
N.K. Hanumantiah's collection of poems '*Chitrada Bennu*' (2006)
Kannada Sangha; St Joseph's College of Commerce.

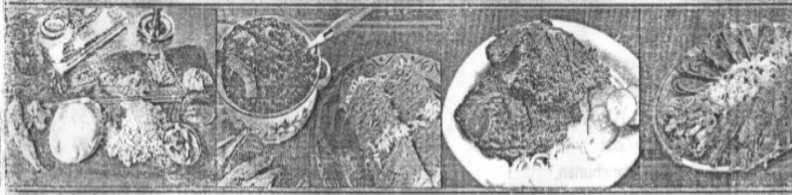
¹ Woman in a sexual embrace

Fish Masala	
Karimeen	205
Neymeen	265
Avoli	265
Malabar Fish Curry / Meen Mulakittathu	
Ailla Masala	80
Prawns	
Prawns Roast	180
Prawns Curry	180
Prawns Dry Fry	205
Meat	
Meat Fry	115
Meat Fry (with Separate Gravy)	135
Meat Roast	105
Meat Curry	105
Meat Pepper Fry	155
Meat Dry Fry	155
Chilly Meat	120
Mutton	
Mutton Roast	185
Mutton Masala	185
Mutton Stew	185
Mutton Curry	185
Mutton Mappas	245
Mutton Kurma	245
Mutton Pepper Fry	245
Egg	
Egg Masala	65
Egg Curry	55
Egg Roast	55
Coconut Omlete	55
Omlete	35
Dessert	
Payasam	45



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*VAT as Applicable

Restaurants which have beef in their cuisine often have to mask the item on the menu, or not mention it at all. They also have to be located with a strategic eye to safety. One example is the ubiquitous Kalyani Biryani, served by many low profile Muslim eating-houses across the city. Kalyani Biryani is a euphemism for beef biriyani, and the restaurants themselves tend to keep their locations, entrances and exits somewhat low profile. On the other hand, Kerala cuisine features beef prominently. Here the restaurant serving a high-class neighbourhood refers to beef as 'meat' as opposed to 'mutton'. On the other hand, another restaurant serving Malabar cuisine in a more convivial neighbourhood states beef explicitly on its menu.



Vegetarian Hegemony

Ann Mary George and Aby Abraham Veerappillil went around the city taking pictures of restaurants and teashops. They faced reluctant owners and managers when they asked to photograph the insides, so many of the images in the collage above were taken from the shelter of an autorickshaw! The images convey the predominant features of eating houses in the city. What are these? For one, they usually have a proper name, Reddy, Iyengar, Balaji, Aiyappa, in their signage which boldly signal that an upper caste person, a superior human being or a god has blessed the enterprise. Two, they often have a word in their name that describes the purity of their product (e.g., 'pure'), yet they are most often not very cleanly maintained (in fact recently, the most prestigious and oldest sweet house in Hyderabad was shut down due to unsanitary conditions). They are by and large vegetarian. They invite the customer to step in, confident of their own status and ritual purity. They rule the urban foodscape.

There are non-vegetarian restaurants too, which most often serve chicken or fish. If they are Muslim or Irani restaurants they serve mutton and sometimes beef. Restaurants that serve beef are usually less prominent and direct in their signage. They are also not in prime public locations. Entrances are low profile. At the other end, it is possible to have a beefsteak in the stratospheric heights of a five star restaurant.

It is nearly impossible to find a restaurant that announces that it belongs to a Mala or Madiga owner. One wonders when a time will come when we can go to a restaurant that proclaims its 'lower' caste status with the pride that comes from the promise of a tasty and nutritious food culture!

శాఖాహార ఆధిపత్యం:

ఆన్ మేరీజార్డ్, ఏబీ అబ్రహం వీరప్పిల్లిల్ నగరమంతా తిరుగుతూ భోజనశాలలు, టీ దుకాణాల ఫోటోలు తీసారు. భోజనశాలల యజమానులు, మేనేజర్లు ఫోటోలు తీయటానికి ఇష్టపడకపోవటం వల్ల ఈ ఫోటోల్ని చాలా మటుకు ఆటోరిక్షాలోంచి తీసుకోవల్సి వచ్చింది. ఈ చిత్రాలు మనకు నగరంలోని భోజనశాలలు, ఫలహారశాలల ముఖ్య లక్షణాలను తెలుపుతాయి. ఏంటవి? మొదటిది, చాలా వరకూ ఇవి రెడ్డి, అయ్యంగార్, బాలాజీ, అయ్యప్ప వంటి పేర్లతో ఉంటాయి. ఒక అగ్రకుల వ్యక్తి, ఉన్నత స్థానంలో ఉన్న వ్యక్తి, లేదా దేవుడు తమ వ్యాపారానికి దన్నుగా ఉన్నట్లు ముఖం మీదే చెప్తాయి. పేరులోనే 'శుద్ధమైన' వంటి పదాలతో తమ తినుబండారాలు 'అతి శుద్ధమైనవని' చెప్పుకుంటాయి. అయితే, పేరు పెట్టుకున్నంత మాత్రాన అవి శుద్ధమైనవని చెప్పలేం. (ఈ మధ్యనే నగరంలో అతి ప్రసిద్ధి చెందిన స్వీట్ల దుకాణాన్ని శుభ్రంగా లేదని మునిసిపల్ అధికారులు కొన్ని రోజులపాటు మూసేసి ఉంచారు) మూడవది, చాలావరకు ఇవి శాఖాహార భోజనశాలలు, తమ సామాజిక స్థానంవల్ల లభించే 'పవిత్ర, శుద్ధతలను వ్యాపార సమృద్ధిగా మార్చుకుని వినోయోగదారుల్ని తమ భోజనశాలల్లోని ఆహ్వానిస్తాయి.

మాంసాహార భోజనశాలలు కోడి లేదా చేప మాంసాన్ని వడ్డిస్తాయి. అదే ముస్లిమ్ భోజనశాలల్లో మేక, గొర్రె మాంసం, కొన్ని సందర్భాల్లో పెద్దకూరని పెడతారు. అయితే పెద్దకూర వండే భోజనశాలలు ప్రముఖంగా ఉండవు. తమ గురించి చాటించవు వేయవు కూడా. ముఖ్యమైన కూడళ్ళలో కూడా ఉండవివి. ప్రవేశ ద్వారాలు ప్రస్తుతంగా ఉండవు. అదే పెద్ద పెద్ద ఐదు నక్షత్రాల భోజనశాలల్లో, చుక్కలు కనించే ధరలకు పెద్దకూర వంటకాలు రుచి చూడచ్చు.

తాము ఒక మాల లేదా మాదిగ యజమాని అధ్వర్యంలో నడపబడేవని చాటింపు చేసే భోజనశాలలు వెతుకుదామన్నా కనపడవు. తాము రుచికరమైన, పౌష్టికాహార సంస్కృతికి చెందిన వాళ్ళం కాబట్టి అటు వంటి వంటకాలను తప్పకుండా అందించగలమనే నమ్మకంతో తమ 'తక్కువ కుల' స్థాయిని గర్వంగా చెప్పటానికే భోజనశాలలకు మనం చెళ్ళగలిగే రోజులు ఎప్పుడొస్తాయో?