

“Cow Is a Mother, Mothers Can Do Anything for Their Children!” Gaushalas as Landscapes of Anthropatriarchy and Hindu Patriarchy

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This article argues that gaushalas, or cow shelters, in India are mobilized as sites of Hindutva or Hindu ultranationalism, where it is a “vulnerable” Hindu Indian nation—or the “Hindu mother cow” as Mother India—who needs “sanctuary” from predatory Muslim males. Gaushalas are rendered spaces of (re)production of cows as political, religious, and economic capital, and sustained by the combined and compatible narratives of “anthropatriarchy” and Hindu patriarchy. Anthropatriarchy is framed as the human enactment of gendered oppressions upon animal bodies, and is crucial to sustaining all animal agriculture. Hindu patriarchy refers to the instrumentalization of female and feminized bodies (women, cows, “Mother India”) as “mothers” and cultural guardians of a “pure” Hindu civilization. Both patriarchies commodify bovine motherhood and breastmilk, which this article frames as a feminist issue. Through empirical research, this article demonstrates that gaushalas generally function as spaces of exploitation, incarceration, and gendered violence for the animals. The article broadens posthumanist feminist theory to illustrate how bovine bodies, akin to women’s bodies, are mobilized as productive, reproductive, and symbolic capital to advance Hindu extremism and ultranationalism. It subjectifies animal bodies as landscapes of nation-making using ecofeminism and its subfield of vegan feminism.

I carefully walked the wet, slippery stone steps, smeared with feces, urine, and water, to the back end of the Calcutta gaushala, where milking cows were tied with short ropes and tightly packed against one another, leaning over empty feeding troughs on both sides. I did not see even one calf near the lactating mothers. Muffled sounds emanated from the last line of cows on top of the steps; as I drew closer, I saw that an emaciated, sickly cow had keeled over and was suffering a massive epileptic fit, eyes rolling, mouth foaming heavily, milk spurting from her udders at the same time and mixing with the urine and dung. The other chained mothers around her watched

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impassively. “A cow has fallen!” I shouted in panic. A few workers came running. “That’s okay,” one laughed. “She fits like this for half an hour every day when you start milking her. Then she stops and then we can finish milking her.”

The gaushala manager explained in his interview later that the rescued cow had been in the shelter for more than four years, had always shown “weakness” during milking time, and they were not worried. “But why do you still get her pregnant then, if she cannot handle it?” I asked. “Oh she can handle it,” the man said. “She is a mother, mothers can sacrifice anything for their children!”¹. (See Figure 1.)

“MOTHER COWS” IN INDIA’S COW PROTECTIONISM: BEYOND FEMINIST THEORY

This article argues that bovine bodies as “mothers” and gaushalas, or cow shelters, are both mobilized as (re)production sites of Hindu ethnonationalism to advance the idea of a “Hindurashtra” or an upper-caste *Hindu* Indian nation at risk from predatory Muslim males. Gaushalas are popularly regarded as cow sanctuaries for unproductive “dairy” cows,² who can ostensibly live out the rest of their natural lives instead of being slaughtered. However, as sanctuary spaces only for cows, gaushalas are sacred and political Hindu spaces where cows can be worshipped as living gods—and used as instruments of nation-building. The bovine body represents Mother Cow as Mother India—implicitly a Hindu Mother India, and as the vignette above demonstrates, her motherhood itself is mobilized as a resource for exploitation. The cow’s exalted status as a ‘mother’ - a fecund, lactating mother of the Hindus - is fundamentally indistinguishable from her mundane status as a ‘dairy’ cow. Gaushalas are sanctuaries for the *vulnerable Hindu nation*, and the sentient cow is above all, a Hindu state.

In this article, I propose the term “anthropatriarchy,” conceptualized as the human, gendered oppression, exploitation, and control of nonhuman animals *via* their sexual and reproductive systems, which is required to sustain all animal agriculture. I suggest that the combined and compatible narratives of anthropatriarchy and Hindu patriarchy mobilize the cow’s reproductive labor, motherhood, and breastmilk as religious, political, Hindu nationalist, and economic capital to defend the Hindu body politic. Animal production, regardless of its scale, is profuse with “*gendered commodification*” and “*sexualized violence*” for the animals (Gillespie 2014, 1321; emphasis in original). In dairying, additional harms of anthropatriarchy are associated with the financialization of nonhuman breastmilk for human consumption. Placing animal breastmilk and animal motherhood on the production line involves forced and repeated impregnation, maternal malnourishment, infant malnourishment and death from lactation deprivation, mastitis (Blowey and Edmondson 2010), and the emotional traumas of repeated disruption of the mother–child bond to both mothers and infants (Gillespie 2014), all of which are routinized normatively as “dairy production.”

In India, the universal objectifications of anthropatriarchy in dairying are compounded by the particular objectifications of bovine motherhood and milk by Hindu patriarchy. Hindu motherhood is defined by mothers’ roles as custodians of the Hindurashtra, with responsibilities beyond their biological children. That is, women are

positioned as *sacrificing mothers* for the Hindu nation itself (Hansen 1994). As Hindu women are used as “cultural transmitters as well as cultural signifiers” (Yuval-Davis 1993, 621) of a pure Hindu civilization, so too are cows burdened as guardians of Hindu purity. This role is maximally harmful to bovine mothers who are required, through the realities of dairy production, to repeatedly endure the sacrifice of their own infants for the milk-worshipping Hindu nation.

This research takes an original approach by grounding postfeminist theory in three years of empirical, archival, and ethnographic work that focuses on the *cows* in India’s cow-protectionism discourses and practices. To understand the grounded implications for the animals enmeshed in human identity politics, I visited sites of both bovine “production” and “protection”; gaushalas were initially identified as sites of protection. I visited nearly fifty gaushalas across India, including in Mathura (birthplace of Lord Krishna), Brindavan, Ahmedabad, Pathmeda, Jaipur, Delhi, Thane, Mumbai, Calcutta, Visakhapatnam, Chennai, and Hyderabad. The gaushalas were variously managed by temples devoted to the cow-loving god Krishna and his various forms, Hindu political parties, state municipal corporations, private owners, or Hindu trusts. I conducted the interviews mostly in Hindi, which is fairly widely spoken, in Tamil in Chennai, and English in ISKCON-run (International Society for Krishna Consciousness) gaushalas, which routinely host Western devotees. Local activists would translate specific words or entire sentences. I interviewed managers, workers, priests, and devotees about their ideas and practices of cow protection, and the concept and role of gaushalas.

To focus the animals in these spaces, I used “the ethnographic approach of participant observation” (Alger and Alger 2003, 37) in the “multispecies contact zones” (Collard and Gillespie 2015, 206–207) of gaushalas. I spent hours with the animals at each gaushala at milking and non-milking times to observe animal behaviors, cow-to-cow engagements, and cow interactions with human workers. Rosemary-Claire Collard and Kathryn Gillespie write, “Attention to these contact zones and to the fraught power relations existing in them is a key feature in a critical geographical multispecies ethnographic approach” (Collard and Gillespie 2015, 206). The observation method “allows the time to learn animal gestures, expressions, and sounds that we can use in many ways to further our understanding,” to ensure that “humans and animals can achieve ‘operative understandings’ that not only make routine interactions possible but also provide insights into the animal mind” (Alger and Alger 2003, 38). Like Timothy Pachirat’s ethnographic account of a slaughterhouse, “[m]y account relies . . . on context, with an emphasis on little things and multiple voices, and with a tolerance for ambiguity” (Pachirat 2011, 18).

The article attempts to contribute new insights to posthumanist feminist theory by responding to Maneesha Deckha’s call to “*centralize* the dynamics of race and culture” to avoid the risks of homogenizing gender in feminist work on animals (Deckha 2012, 530; emphasis in original). It expands on Indian feminist and sociological critiques of Hindu religious fundamentalism by politicizing cows as not only instruments, but also subjects of violent ethnonationalism. The article illustrates how bovine bodies in India, akin to women’s bodies, are enmeshed as productive, reproductive, and symbolic

capital in the intersections of anthropatriarchy and gendered ultranationalist Hindu patriarchy. It theorizes a more inclusive understanding of motherhood to suggest that the discursive practices of anthropatriarchy and right-wing Hindutva patriarchy narrow “violence” to deny reproductive, gendered, and sexual violence as such violence for nonhuman animals, by privileging them as uniquely human traumas. Hindutva asserts that Hinduism is as much about (righteous) militant violence as it is about peace (Valiani 2011), and in this honorable “war,” gendered beings, whether women (Hansen 1994) or cows, are deployed as nation-building resources.

To politicize animals in *gaushalas*, this article subjectifies animal bodies as landscapes of nation-making using feminist critiques of the mobilization of women and motherhood by Hindutva nationalism, ecofeminism, and its radical subfield of vegan feminism. Ecofeminists have argued for stronger alliances between women’s and animal liberation; the need for these intersections is exceptionally strong in India where similar, if not identical, Hindu nationalist discourses operate on the role of women and cows in building and sustaining the Hindu nation.

The article also politicizes the complex geographies of the *gaushala* through the optics of gender, nationalism, and species. Although sanctuaries are conceptually different from other sites of animal captivity in that they are framed as spaces where animals are safe from human harms, sanctuaries differ widely in how they are organized, based on how these “harms” are understood (Gruen 2014). In *gaushalas*, cows (but not other animals exploited for breastmilk) are protected from the harms of slaughter, but not the harms of milk production. In the making of the milk-loving but beef-spurning Hindu nation, *gaushalas* are rendered nation-making spaces where Hindu Mother Cows are “saved” from Muslim men who are depicted as quite literally predated upon female (human) Hindu bodies through rape and murder (Gupta 2001), or upon bovine bodies through slaughter and beef consumption.

SEXUAL AND GENDERED HARMS IN DAIRYING

DAIRYING AS ANTHROPATRIARCHY

Anthropatriarchy, or a meta-patriarchal ordering of society constructed around human gendered exploitation of nonhuman animals, is essential to sustain *all* animal agriculture. Patriarchy as “a system of interrelated social structures which allow men to exploit women” (Walby 1986, 51) is manifest in its fullest extent in anthropatriarchy where “modernity’s fundamental intellectual boundaries” of the constructed nature/culture binary (Moore 2016, 3) reinforce human/nonhuman dualism, exceptionalizing the human species as not-animals. Anthropatriarchy extends beyond patriarchy in the total ownership of living animal bodies as resources; their reproductive systems, germplasm and ovum, labor, familial relationships, and their genetic material itself are human property. This absolute control of sentient bodies is the foundation of all animal agriculture (including dairying in India), and is enabled by

humanist frameworks that privilege human exceptionalism and reinforce speciesism, a sociopolitical condition akin to racism, where human domination of nonhuman animals is normalized and legitimized (Ryder 2004).

Political institutions, cultural traditions and religious norms, histories, and biology all cooperate to sustain anthropatriarchal violence against nonhuman animals in production spaces, while erasing it as such violence. In particular, the neglect of gendered and sexualized violence toward animals as a feminist concern depoliticizes animal bodies as also landscapes of gendered and sexual violence. Although feminist geographers are interested in the “corporeal [as] a key site of analysis . . . wherein violence hidden in plain sight through cultural values can be revealed” (Springer and Le Billon 2016, 2), the conceptual connections between the *animal* and the *body* have largely been a fragmented subject of research, even for many ecofeminists (Gruen 1993; Gaard 2013). Ecofeminism compares the domination of women and nature, and calls for an end to oppressions based on politicized binaries (nature/culture; women/men; rationality/emotion), but has been slower to question the constructed human/animal binary (Adams 1991, 2010). This binary is sanctioned by similar rhetoric of the (il)logic of dualism that feminists challenge in other oppressions:

The specific justifications for [animal exploitation] . . . are rooted in dual assertions: of significant human/animal difference, and of the putatively scientifically provable “lesser” intellectual or emotional capacities of animals. . . . The debates about animals unmistakably echo familiar racist and sexist ideologies about . . . categories authorized by nature, destinies inscribed in biology, and “scientific proofs” of the limited capacities of “the other.” (Seager 2003, 169)

In privileging humanism, feminism itself has been charged with complicity in “othering” nonhuman species (Cusack 2013), and perpetuating spaces and cultures of speciesism and anthropatriarchy. The starkest consequence of engendering an ontological “state of exception” for animals is the privileging of sexual assault, exploitation of reproductive labor, sexualized and gendered violence, and mother-child separations as uniquely human—rather than *species*—traumas. Carol Adams points to the “persistent patriarchal ideology” that pervades feminism in rendering animal bodies and labor as quite literally consumable, including by feminists:

Ideology creates what appears to be ontological: if women are ontologized as sexual beings (or rapeable, as some feminists argue), animals are ontologized as carriers of meat [and “dairy” and eggs]. In ontologizing women and animals as objects, our language simultaneously eliminates the fact that someone else is acting as subject/agent/perpetrator of violence. (Adams 1991, 136)

This ontological obfuscation of animal labor—reminiscent of the diminishing of women’s reproductive labor and household work—reinforces the fetishization of meat (and beef in India) as uniquely violent. In doing so, it denies the forcible extraction of *reproductive and gendered labor* of animals in the production of infant breastmilk and avian ovulations (eggs) as free from gendered, sexual, and disposal (slaughter)

harms. Dairying and egg industries require the reproductive systems of cows, buffalo, sheep, goats, camel, and chickens and other avians to be constantly “in production.” To achieve this, the animals are subjected to forcible sexual penetration at human hands, or manipulated via their own species (as in overcrowded, high-stress “parent” chicken-breeding farms where constant rooster gang-rape of hens is engineered) (Davis 2017). Dairying involves acts that could be considered bestiality in non-“farming” spaces, such as the human masturbation of the bull for sperm extraction (Narayanan 2018a), and forcible human-driven penetrations of animal vaginas and anuses to inseminate them for breeding (Cusack 2013). The dairy industry in fact colloquially refers to the structure designed to corral and pin down female animals for artificial insemination as the “rape rack” (Gillespie 2014, 1331). In her article titled “Why Feminist-Vegan Now?,” Carol Adams argues that animal milk and eggs are “feminized protein” and their consumption must provoke feminist anxieties about the human violation of nonhuman female reproduction:

Feminized protein is taken from living female animals, whose reproductive capacity is manipulated for human needs. I felt that the unique situation of domesticated female animals required its own term: a sexual slavery with chickens in battery cages and dairy cows hooked up to milking machines. Even though the animals are alive, dairy products and eggs are not victimless foods. (Adams 2010, 305)

These ontological distinctions scaffold the conceptual and spatial distinction of the forcible human “involvement” in animal breeding *as rape*. This declassification is crucial to morally, legislatively, and commercially justify animal agriculture, including and especially dairying. Akin to the way marital rape in the private spaces of the home may be exceptionalized *as rape* in patriarchal societies, the forcible sexual invasion of animal bodies in the “production spaces” of the “farm” is exceptionalized *as* such violence in anthropatriarchal societies. Founder of United Poultry Concerns Karen Davis argues that the sexual acts performed against animals in the production spaces of “farming” are no different from such acts that may be considered deviant, cruel, or even sadistic in non-farming sites. Davis writes, “Sexual manipulation in one form or another is the very foundation of animal farming, and for this reason it is neither illegal nor regarded as deviant or obscene by animal farmers” (Davis 2017). However, the idea that nonhuman animals can experience rape *as rape* may be particularly seen as a provocation to feminists, who may be complicit in speciesist sexualized harms to animals (Twine 2010). As Joanna Cusack writes:

Mainstream feminism condemns rape but ignores the connection between the sexual abuse of women and cows because feminist theory and law legitimize human superiority and speciesism. The law and feminists control the definition of the word “rape” so that it specifically excludes the sexual abuse of animals. (Cusack 2013, 24)

Instrumentalizing sexism or racism to “utilize” gendered or racialized categories of humans as ecological resources would constitute oppressive politics from a social-

justice perspective. Instrumentalizing speciesism to place animals as environmental resources allows us to disregard that the attachment of milking mammals to their infants—and of suckling infants to their lactating mothers—is as deep and profound for nonhuman animals as for human animals (Cusack 2013; Gillespie 2018). The disruption of the mother–child bond, which is fundamental to dairying, constitutes the kind of gendered violence and trauma that is one of the most enduring anxieties of the human feminist movement.

To muddy the issue of self-determination that must be present in sexual relations between two or more persons, anthropatriarchy manufactures the mythology of “consent.” In the forcible sexual relations between humans and animals that underpin animal farming, fictitious and mythologized narratives of “consent” (for example, the “mother” sacrificing herself for her “child”) are produced, whereby the animal willingly gives of her body parts and lactation for human consumption. In his book *Farm to Fable*, Robert Grillo writes:

By portraying the relationship between farmer and the animals he exploits as consensual, we, as the consumers of his products, are misled into believing that other animals don’t mind being used against their will, thereby reducing the issue to one of how we treat them. This has led not only to a wholesale denial of the value of their lives but also to a depraved standard of treatment we call “humane,” which, if applied to our cats and dogs, would be considered torture and even sadism. And not only do we portray them as consensual, we embellish this fiction by portraying ourselves as their benevolent masters and protectors. (Grillo 2016, 24–25)

The celebration in Hinduism of the lactating cow as a freely giving, sacrificing *mother* to her human children epitomizes this relationship of manufactured consent. Simon Springer and Philippe Le Billon note that often, “[violence] is hardly recognizable at all, hidden beneath ideology, mundanity and the suspension of critical thought, where we have to look very closely through the lens of theory to appreciate how a particular set of social relations is imbued with violence” (Springer and Le Billon 2016, 1). The broadening of feminist interrogations of religious ultranationalism to include animal bodies illuminates the instrumentalization of bovine motherhood and breastmilk to serve Hindu patriarchy.

DAIRYING AS HINDU PATRIARCHY

The objectification of female and feminized “Hindu” bodies—whether human, bovine, or the physical and metaphorical landscape of “Mother India”—as *mothering bodies* is a crux upon which Hindu extremism is founded. The bovine “mother” of the Hindus is instrumentalized to further the Hindurashtra by exploiting cows’ reproductive capacities for dairying. Hindutva is driven by a notion of virile masculinity (Hansen 1994) that requires Hindu “mothers, sisters and daughters”—and cows—to be protected from “the Muslim’ who is lecherous and a potential rapist” (Anand

2007, 209)—and a cow slaughterer. Mangala Subramaniam writes that women—and cows—are “endangered” as Hindu men’s property (Subramaniam 2014, 76), and “instrumentalized as victims” (93), rather than being recognized as self-governing subjects. In both cases, the women’s—and cows’—trauma from violation is less than the trauma that such violation ostensibly presents to the men’s sense of honor.

The mothering body as a landscape of nationalism is not unique to Hindu patriarchy. Motherhood has been historically conceptualized as a sociopolitical and cultural institution profuse with particular “socialization patterns and economic constraints” (Maroney 1985, 40) through which motherhood itself becomes an instrument of political domination of women. If the defense of motherhood, in its most exalted form as the motherland, is a righteous duty, then upholding the dignity and respect owed to the institution becomes a patriotic duty of mothers, and the institution itself becomes state or national property. As Amrita Basu writes,

both communalism and fundamentalism employ gendered images of motherhood to romanticize the past and suggest continuity with it. Hindu communalism also finds in motherhood imagery, particularly mother goddess worship, a basis in religion. But motherhood imagery is not confined to communalism or fundamentalism; it is a staple of nationalist movements. (Basu 1999, 116)

Female Hindu bodies are mothers not exclusively, or in the case of the cows, even at all, to their biological young, but to the Hindu nation state, who is also a “mother.” Women—and cows—are tasked with upholding Hindu culture and identity, and assuaging the anxieties of Hindutva patriarchy about Muslims and Dalits undermining their privilege, “*through their roles as wives and mothers*” (Basu 2011, 7). The “primacy of motherhood” meant that women’s bodies were confined to the “protective canopy of Hindu nationalist organization,” and the “internal institutional patriarchy within the Hindu nationalist movement itself” (Hansen 1994, 82). In the case of Hindu women, Thomas Blom Hansen describes mothering as “*patriotic motherhood*” (93; emphasis in original). Hansen identifies three themes around the idea of Hindu motherhood. One, “women are first and foremost mothers.” To serve the children and her husband is the “supreme duty of any woman.” Two, “motherhood is a patriotic duty,” as it is the women who uphold Hindu values and culture, and pass them to the children. Three, patriotic motherhood does not entail freedom outside the home. Her patriotic duties explicitly lie within the defined threshold of the home. In this construction of a modern and “classicized” culture where the material/freedom/external world has been removed, “the woman was constructed as a goddess, and as an upholder of tradition” (87) (Figure 1).

The cow mother-goddess is exalted as not only the mother of the nation, but of the Hindu universe itself. In the Bhagavad Gita, one of the central texts of Hinduism, Lord Krishna equates the cow to the entirety of the Universe. Frank J. Korom writes, “One thing that we can discern from the portrayal of the cow during [the early Vedic] period is that she was identified with the totality of the universe” (Korom 2000). Since the early Vedic times (1500 BCE), the lactating, fecund, mothering cow, and her generous



Figure 1 “Cow is a mother, mothers can do anything for their children!” A sick cow in a Calcutta gaushala performs “patriotic motherhood.” Photo credit: Yamini Narayanan. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com].

outpouring of milk, symbolize fertility and material abundance. Cow milk and milk products permeate every ritual Hindu practice (King 2012). Ralph Griffith’s analysis of *Rigveda* 1.164.9, *Atharvaveda* 9.9.9, 4.39.2, and *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 4, 5.8.10 notes that the cow’s veneration as a *lactating* mother is clear from the ways in which her breasts/udder is objectified: “That the great Cow may, with exhaustless udder, pouring a thousand streams, give milk to feed us” (Griffith 1896, 726). The cow’s udder is “pure” (231) and “heavenly” (605), and it swells with “lordly nectar” (223), and the cow’s milk is “nutritious, brightly shining, all-sustaining” (234). A passage from the *Mahābhārat*, Book 13, *Anusasana Parva*, illustrates the concept of the *sacrificing, mothering* cow, whose motherhood is an instrument for resource extraction:

They are the mothers of the universe. O, let kine [cows] approach me! There is no gift more sacred than the gift of kine. There is no gift that produces more blessed merit. There has been nothing equal to the cow, nor will there be anything that will equal her. With her skin, her hair, her horns, the hair of her tail, her milk, and her fat—with all these together, the cow upholds sacrifice. What thing is there that is more useful than the cow? (Ganguli 1896, 117)

Hindu patriarchy conceptualizes “motherhood” by un-self-consciously conflating maternal and material exploitation. Human colonization of bovine motherhood becomes, in effect, the start of the “disassembly line” of animal production (Pachirat 2011) where the cow is stripped of her *biological* bovine motherhood, her infants, their milk, and eventually her flesh, skin, and bones. In the Hindu anthropatriarchal worldview, this is her dharma, her ethical duty. Pankaj Jain, an upper-caste, male Hindu scholar in Hinduism and nature, describes every aspect of the exploitation of the cow as “‘bovine *dharma*’ [or] a dharmic environmental ethics for cows ... [inspired by] the inherent qualities and virtues of the cow, i.e., *the dharma of the cows*” (Jain 2014, 172; emphasis in original). Framed thus, as the cow’s *responsibility* to “give,” Hindus’ exploitation of every part of the animal body becomes a loving act of the animal, willingly delivering maternal care to humans:

The cow *gives* all of her belongings to humans: milk and other dairy products strengthen us, bullocks are utilized in farming, cow dung is utilized as a fertilizer, and urine is used as an Ayurvedic medicine. After her death, the cow’s bones are utilized in the sugar industry, her skin is used in the leather industry, and her horns are used to make combs. ... Indians do not just exploit cows for materialistic benefits but instead regard them as mothers. (Jain 2014, 170–71; emphasis added).

The material and the maternal are interlinked in the indistinguishably blurred *reverential and production* activity, where production sites of farming the breast-milk of the infants of other animals, are reconceptualized as spaces of warm and protective mothering. Scholar of religion and nature Catherine Albanese makes a critical distinction between nature as sacred and nature as sacred *resource*, where the commodification of nature as sacred involves domination of, and even violence toward, nature (Albanese 1990). In her work on the spiritual significance of cows in gaushalas, Samantha Hurn describes animals as “symbolic entities whose physiological or behavioral characteristics are consumed by human imaginations” (Hurn 2017, 213). The exalted mother-goddess status of the cow makes her body consumable, saleable, and profitable.

In conflating the biological, cultural, and material roles of the cow as mother, the gaushala emerges as an important space. The gaushala is more than a dairy; in gaushalas, the supposedly *consensual* familial relationships between bovine “mother” and human “progeny” are enacted in the human consumption of infant bovine breastmilk. Hurn argues that cows are denied wills in intensive dairy farms, as opposed to gaushalas where they are self-determining autonomous entities who choose to procreate. The cows in gaushalas willingly “*provide* a surplus of milk for human consumers” (221; emphasis added).

However, bovine sexuality, reproductive organs, ovum, germplasm and genetic material—regardless of the site at which they are located—are *property* of the owners of animals designated ‘livestock’ as per the Livestock Keepers Movement that originated in India (FAO 2002), to be used at human will. Private multinational corporations seek ownership and patents on “animal genetic *resources*” (FAO 2002; emphasis

added). This global resource status applies to all bovines, including in a gaushala, regardless of human-imposed statuses such as “mother.”

The political instrumentalization of the cow as a Hindu mother, and the gaushala as a production space for the glorious Hindu nation-state and civilization, is a relatively recent historical development. In the gaushala, the exploitation of bovine motherhood, and diversion of her breastmilk away from her biological infant, is framed as a religious duty of Hindus, to protect the Hindu nation from non-Hindu invasion.

GAUSHALAS AS ANTHROPATRIARCHAL HINDU NATION-STATE

Cows were not particularly revered in premodern Indian society; cow protectionism and the institution of gaushalas is a modern phenomenon. In his *Sacred Cows, Sacred Places*, one of the most highly regarded studies on the sanctity of cows and gaushalas, Deryck O. Lodrick notes that the “Muslim invasion” (Lodrick 1981, 59), and later British colonial rule, were impetuses to establish the cow as a signifier of Hindu identity. The Cow Protection Movement that spread through north India during British rule gave the advocates “a much wider influence” (Gupta 2001, 4295), and political parties like Vishwa Hindu Parishad focused on Hindu revivalism and stimulated the growth of gaushalas in India (Lodrick 2008). The conceptualization of gaushalas as political spaces of “sanctuary” for cows from a sociocultural and religious “other” (Yang 1980) implies cows were not at risk of harm from Hindus. Lodrick writes:

The Moslem presence in India did much to promote, albeit indirectly, the doctrine of the sanctity of the cow in Hindu society. Even today, Hindus are known to explain the establishment of their goshalas in terms of protecting the cow from the depredations of the Moslems. (Lodrick 1981, 65)

Gaushalas gave “a more systemic form” to Hindu nationalism (Gupta 2001, 4295). However, cows were never only Hindu capital; gaushalas were also crucial to sustaining the prosperity of a secular Indian nation. Mahatma Gandhi declared that gaushala maintenance was “not merely a religious issue. It is an issue on which hinges the economic progress of India” (Gandhi 1999, 56). Gandhi advocated breeding reforms in gaushalas for dairying (Gandhi 1925). The Sabarmati Ashram Gaushala in Ahmedabad, intended by Mahatma as a model gaushala, is now the largest and the most advanced bovine semen extraction station in India.

From 1946, gaushalas started to be formalized from religious spaces and quasi-sanctuaries as part of the economic growth program for dairying when the Indian Council for Agronomic Research, Ministry of Agriculture, recognized their potential as breeding centers for high-yielding ‘dairy’ cows (Burgat 2004). In 1949, the Central Gaushalas Development Board was established to coordinate financial support for breeding and dairying, which was further developed in India’s second and third Five-Year Plans between 1955 and 1966. According to a survey conducted in 1956, “there were 1,020 organized Gaushalas in 21 states of India which maintained 130,000 cattle, and 1,400 breeding bulls and produced 11.2 million kg of milk . . .” (Chakravarti 1985, 29).³ In

his book, C. Madan Mohan describes gaushala development schemes in Andhra Pradesh: “The *Goshalas* are serving as cattle-breeding-*cum*-milk production centers and are supplementing Government efforts for supply of good breeding bulls and increasing milk production in the state” (Mohan 1989, 85).

Gaushalas can be regarded as one of the oldest spaces of animal welfarism, a discourse that maintains that it is possible to use animals “humanely.” Discourses of humane animal production focus on highly select conditions of production that can be marginally “improved,” and obscures, exceptionalizes, and legitimizes *all* other violence (Francione 2010). In the anthropatriarchal structures of animal production, this inevitably includes gendered, sexualized, and reproductive violence. Examples of animal welfarism in production sites include the call for “cage-free” chickens or “enriched” cages, disregarding that debilitating reproductive problems persist for egg-laying hens in *all* conditions of “farming” (Davis 2017). Likewise, “humane” treatment of cows in gaushalas is made explicit through two acts only—no slaughter, and the anthropocentrism of their worship, negating moral obligations such as no forced impregnation, no removal of colostrum and breastmilk from the calves, and no mother–infant separation.

As institutions that celebrate milk, gaushalas have been unable to separate themselves from the conjoined twin of the dairy industry—the beef industry. An economically sustainable dairying sector must dispose of its unproductive male and spent female animals (Torres 2007). In gaushalas too, male calves are often “sold or traded” (Sharpes 2006, 215). Florence Burgat writes, “In many goshalas, where the duty to protect cows is interpreted to such a narrow extent that it corrupts the spirit, these animals are not sheltered but are sent to the abattoir without arousing the slightest indignation on the part of cow worshippers” (Burgat 2004, 238). In 2000, the Delhi High Court uncovered that out of 89,149 bovines that had been sent to the Delhi municipal *gosadan* (sanctuary for abandoned street ex-dairy cows), only 8,516 cows remained, with no accounting for the remaining animals (*Common Cause v. Union of India* 2000, paras. 1–2). In a 2004 case, *Jaigopal Garodia Foundations v. T.R. Srinivasan*, the Madras High Court noted that temple gaushalas were selling cows to slaughterhouses (*Jaigopal Garodia Foundations v. T.R. Srinivasan* 2004).

In September 2016, *India Today* showed footage of a gaushala operator in Uttar Pradesh agreeing to sell a calf for beef (India Today 2016). The “rescue” of these ex-dairy animals from Muslim or Dalit butchers and tanners to gaushalas becomes politicized as a communal issue. In the aftermath of the 2002 murders of five Dalit men in Dulina, Haryana, the People’s Union for Democratic Rights noted in their report that local gaushalas were using cow-protection politics to contribute to violent rioting:

For the Teekli Gaushala Committee members the location of the Gaushala and its role in protecting cows is lent a particular urgency by the fact that Mewat (where 4.6 per cent of the population is Muslim) is located immediately beyond the line of low hills behind the Gaushala. They constantly refer to the “border” with Mewat, a “border” almost represented as

a battle line between the lands of “cow-protectors” and “cow-slaughterers.” A segment of the dominant groups feel that Hindus could easily kill if they even “believed” that a cow had been slaughtered. There is also communal mobilisation based on concerted and deliberate representation of Muslims as “cow-slaughterers.” This is evident in the recent high incidence of posters and hoardings depicting Muslims slaughtering cows with sharp-edged tools across the state. The targeting of Mewat in this situation could have grave and ominous consequences. (People’s Union for Democratic Rights 2009, 164)

Oftentimes, cows are simply starved to death in gaushalas. When slaughter is prohibited, the number of abandoned ex-dairying animals needing rehabilitation far exceeds the limited capacity of gaushalas to house and feed them. As recently as 2016, some 8,122 cows died of starvation at the government-run Hingonia gaushala in Jaipur (The Tribune 2016). In August 2017, reports emerged of cows starved to death at a gaushala run by a leader of the Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party in Chhattisgarh (The Indian Express 2017a). A July 2017 report stated that at least twenty-five cows had died from starvation, illness, or getting stuck in mud after heavy rain at a government-run cow shelter in Mathana village, Haryana (The Indian Express 2017b). Private and government gaushalas—akin to the intensive, confined operations of factory farms—are so overcrowded that the animals exist in a state of confinement and high stress. Cultural anthropologist Naisargi N. Dave describes the total and lifelong incarceration of the cows after “rescue” in these ostensible spaces of “sanctuary”:

I had seen . . . cow shelters in which a cow will spend her entire life tied on a short rope to a stake in the ground in the darkness of a shed, periodically milked. Of all the things I have seen, the one thing I wish I could unsee was that. Saved from slaughter, yes, but for what? For life itself. For profit. To perform one’s humanity. (Dave 2017, 48)

Gaushalas continue to reflect the complex origins of Hindu nationalism, sectarianism, commerce, and theology (Lodrick 1981), founded upon diverse commodifications of bovine lactation. In the production spaces of a gaushala, a cow’s reproductive labor is repeatedly extracted as her dharmic duty to her Hindu progeny. My visits, conversations, and observations at different gaushalas in India illuminated the ways in which bovine motherhood and breastmilk are mobilized to serve the compatible discourses and practices of anthropatriarchy and Hindu patriarchy.

“COW IS OUR MOTHER, HER MILK IS OUR BLESSING”

The cow’s motherhood is a commercial commodity on a dairy farm. However, in a gaushala, where milk extraction and breeding are core production activities, the notion of *sacrificing* motherhood is an exceptional resource to naturalize, and even

sentimentalize, the inherent harms in these acts. Milk sourced from cows is not merely food, but *prasad* or sanctified food. When milk is elevated to an exceptional, sacred status, its consumption becomes an act of worship itself. A volunteer from the Sri Krishna gaushala in Hyderabad said, “Gaumata is our mother, her milk is our blessing.” A manager from the ISCKON temple in Mathura, the birthplace of Lord Krishna, explained: “By consuming her milk, we get to benefit spiritually and physically as her milk is the purest food source in the world.”⁴

At the Carterpuri Gaushala in Gurgaon, a thirty-five-year-old man drove up in a Toyota with a drum of *chappatis* (Indian wheat bread). As Hindus are specifically framed as having caring, loving interactions with the cow, the simultaneous contrast to the exploitative relations of “these people wanting beef” (implicitly Muslims) is almost inevitable:

I drink a big glass of milk morning and evening, I like it; these cows are like my mothers. I come every weekend to feed them. No, cow milk is not causing any harm to the cows, it's all these people wanting beef; beef is the issue. Milk is fine, for us milk is not only food, as Hindus we give it even more respect and use it for sweets and *prasad* [sanctified offering].⁵

The temple gaushala representatives explained that they also bought milk from commercial dairies for their “needs” as the pregnant and lactating cows of the cow shelters could not provide the thousands of liters of milk used weekly to make sweets. It was the broader symbolic value of milk as “sacred” that mattered, as the cow has a dharmic mandate, a religious duty to produce milk for humans. For an official of the ISCKON temple gaushala in Visakhapatnam, the cow is merely performing “God’s will”:

Every living entity is god’s creation and is cooperating with God’s plan. Every living entity has got its particular duty to do. Duty in the sense, it is to cooperate with the will of God. Like, that cow has got its own set of particular duties. *One of her important duties is, the cow is giving us milk. Now understand the role of the cow in society . . .* Let us say when the [human] child is very small, for six months or one year, he will depend on the [human] mother’s milk. But after that, the milk is still required. *Milk is an important part of human food.*⁶

The conflation of cows as the mother of calves and of homo sapiens is seen as having scriptural sanction based on the child Krishna’s depiction in the *Bhagvata Puranas* as drinking from the overflowing breasts and udders of women and cows (King 2012), alongside male calves. However, the parallels of baby Krishna and the calves go deeper than both enjoying multispecies lactation. The popular celebrations of Krishna’s childhood love of milk from his adoptive mothers, Yashodha and the cows, ignore the fact that, like the calves in dairy production, Krishna too was born to an incarcerated mother in a jail whose previous babies were slaughtered at birth, a destiny that was also planned for him. Krishna was separated from Devaki, his biological mother, even before he received his first suckle from her (Narayanan 2018b). In the

case of both the calves and baby Krishna, the uncomfortable presence of the biological mother is simply removed from the landscape of religious and political memories.

Instead, a shared motherhood between calves and humans is established by claiming the “mothering” status itself as exclusive to humans and cows. The Maan Mandir Gaushala website states, “No living creature on this planet calls its mother, ‘Maa’ except a calf (a baby cow) and a human being” (Maan Mandir Gaushala 2017). This speciesist appeal to motherhood underpins gaushalas’ refusal to shelter other mothers enslaved in dairying in India, such as buffaloes, goats, sheep, and camels. A gaushala manager in Thane, Maharashtra state, who also worked as a *gau-rakskak* (cow vigilante) told me, “Buffalo has no love for her calves, she is not refined like the cow. She has no motherly feeling, she is nothing, she is just a *ghati* [coarse] animal.” These categorizations of the depth of motherhood based on species or breeds are akin to assessing “quality” of motherhood in humanist worlds based on race, caste, or religion.

When I asked the ISKCON official about the political economy of the interlinked dairy and slaughter economies—that is, the fact that “unproductive” males and females must be slaughtered to sustain milk production—the response was a single-minded reinforcement of cow-protection discourse, in which only slaughter is exceptionalized as violence. He dismissed milk’s primary role in cow breeding, and subsequent cow slaughter in India as the “secondary point.”

Forget about the milk, milk is secondary; killing is bad. You have to go and educate those people that killing is bad. You are highlighting the secondary point. Whatever the reason for killing, killing is bad; you stop the killing! This has nothing to do with dairy! We will only continue to participate in educating that killing is bad.⁷

If cow slaughter is the *only* possible violence to the cow, then “cow protection” is understood as the abolition of *only* that violence. The temple gaushala’s advocacy for the cow’s welfare is wholly limited to the singular act of “not-slaughtering” the mothers. In fact, if the temple’s animal advocacy extended “cow protection” beyond the ambit of “no killing,” then its very identity as a Hindu sacred space would be threatened. Its patriarchal identity hinges upon female bovines’ reproductive labor and products derived from milk. The gaushala priest had no interest in considering the eschewal of dairy or veganism as an act of cow protection:

Okay, maybe, maybe, dairy is associated with cow killing. But you have to do something about them, who is actually doing the violence. We are associated with cow protection, not veganism! *Temple means cow protection. Otherwise, it is not a temple. Try to understand this basic point.*⁸

As such, the notion that exploitation of reproductive labor is violence is seen as irreligious. Veganism is construed as an ungodly act—by rejecting dairy, vegans are seen to be rejecting the will of God, who apparently intended that humans consume the breastmilk of infant calves:

Vegans are mixed devotees; they are not pure devotees. Pure devotees means surrender to god. In every aspect they have to surrender to God. "Pure devotees" means they have to dedicate their lives to the service of god.⁹

Most gaushalas have a bull, usually a large, high-milking native breed like the Gir or the Sahiwal, to mate with different breeds of cows, including the Jerseys and Holstein Friesians who are smaller in size. The bull has somewhat greater freedom of movement within the gaushala, so that he can select one of the chained cows *in estrus*. Pointing to a large young Sahiwal bull wandering purposefully for grass through the Kanpur gaushala, the manager said, "He decides. He can decide what he likes, he is the father of all the calves here, and we keep it natural." The image presented is of *natural* and happy courtships between the chained cows and the bull, resulting in *natural* and proud motherhood and fatherhood. This echoes Gillespie's analysis of the sexualization of bulls in US dairy farming. Gillespie describes how human intervention in bovine sexual intercourse is framed in ways that "shifts the responsibility for the act away from the farmers and on to the ... bull" (Gillespie (2014, 1332). Free-roaming bovines in natural herds, however, have courtship and mating rituals in which species-specific forms of selection and agency are present (Phillips 2002).

Bulls are not always present in gaushalas, and where "natural service" is not available or even possible because of the small, emaciated condition of the mothers, cows are often artificially inseminated by humans with bull semen from the state's animal husbandry department. The forcible and intimate sexual invasion of the cow's vagina is seen as a virtuous service to enable her to be a "mother," her ultimate purpose and fulfilment as a female "Hindu." "Cows have a mothering urge, they are really happy when they are mothers," I was told at the ISCKON gaushala at Mathura.¹⁰

However, is this happiness derived from being mothers of their calves, or of their human owners? As in commercial dairies, most cows have only a minute or even less with their calves when they are allowed to suckle to facilitate milk letdown in the udders. Even then, it is under human surveillance, to ensure that the mother-calf relationship does not go too far through "uncontrolled" suckling by the calf, lessening the milk supply for humans. After barely minutes, the infant is forcibly removed from the mothers, even as they bleat and strain toward the udder. "Calves don't need more than one liter in the morning and one in the evening," said the manager of Sri Krishna gaushala in Hyderabad. "They can have some desi grain mix which is better for them. Once they are older, after a couple of months, they don't need milk at all."¹¹

Infant calves in fact need *more* milk to sustain the growth spurt (Jasper and Weary 2002). Gaushalas, however, market this milk as the superior A2 milk sourced from native Indian-breed animals (as opposed to the "lower-caste" Jersey cows). This milk is sold for making sweets and dairy products, like ghee and butter, for both "food" for consumption and as *panchagavya* products (five items sourced from the cow and indispensable as offerings in Hindu rituals: milk, butter, ghee, urine, and dung). The dairy

products from Sri Pathmeda Godham Mahathirth in Rajasthan in fact have cult status, and are shipped throughout India (Pathmeda Online Store 2016).

As per human schedules, cows are milked twice a day and the calves receive replacement formula at the same time. However, calves should suckle every two to three hours (Phillips 2002, 147; RSPCA Victoria 2018), and cows are at high risk of mastitis or inflammation of the udder if they are not suckled for extended periods of time. Mastitis may also be a result of humans over-milking cows (Blowey and Edmondson 2010, 81), which is widespread in Holstein Friesian and Jersey cows, selectively bred over generations to produce milk in excess of calves' biological needs (Oltenucu and Broom 2010). Mastitis is an inescapable reality for cows trapped in dairying, and both the infection and the treatment is extremely painful for cows (Gillespie 2018). In Lisa Helen Amir and Judith Lumley's account of lactational mastitis in the case of human women, they quote a mother recalling, "I have never felt worse" (Amir and Lumley 2006, 746).

When probed as to how the calf might manage to live healthily—or live at all—if his/her mother's breastmilk is diverted for human consumption, the universal answer is that the cow "gives" milk in excess of the calf's needs, because the cow lactates to suckle both species of her progeny. However, the domesticated cow, regardless of whether she is on an intensive dairy farm or a gaushala, is a product of selective breeding over many generations (Gade 2000) to "give" milk in excess of what her calf needs. Article 48 of the Constitution of India itself directs the state to "organise agriculture and animal husbandry on modern and scientific lines and shall, in particular, take steps for preserving and improving the breeds" for dairy (*The Constitution of India*, art. 48). India's dairy development program from the 1950s onward has involved extensive knowledge-transfer and training from Western dairying countries such as New Zealand and Switzerland to "upgrade" bovine breeds for milk production (Kurien 2005). Bovine genetics scientist Ricardo Stockler explains that bovine reproduction for increased milk output is the most researched area of animal breeding:

Reproductive efficiency is one of the most important factors for successful cow-calf and dairy enterprises. Certainly, in the absence of reproduction, there is no cow-calf or dairy enterprise. During the 1950s, frozen bovine semen was developed and artificial insemination with progeny-tested bulls became recognized as effective in making more rapid genetic progress for milk yield and beef production. (Stockler 2015, 655)

The domesticated, genetically manipulated cow who lactates in excess of her infant's needs is, however, assumed to be part of the "system" of a prosperous Hindu universe overflowing with milk for her human progeny:

But the calf is getting its milk, na. So we can have the rest. The problem is you don't have proper knowledge. No one is taking the milk from the calf. The calf is properly getting its quota. Say the calf drinks three liters, and the cow is giving twenty liters ... okay let's say it is drinking that much in the morning. How much milk do you think the calf drinks in

the morning? The basic point is the cow gives milk in excess of what the calf needs. That is the system!

The “system” of gaushalas is identical to the production structures of dairy farms. In most gaushalas, the calves, including tiny babies who might be only days old, are penned off from their mothers, or sometimes completely separated. All gaushalas brushed off the need for the lactating mother and infant to spend more than a few minutes together during milking time. “We can’t let the mothers and infants together, the big bodies of the mothers will crush the little ones,” said the manager of the Carterpuri Gaushala in Gurgaon, despite the fact that these animals live in large herds in the wild. Moreover, stampedes are more likely in the intensive confined spaces of gaushalas and dairy farms, especially during feed time. “The mothers don’t need to be near the calves all the time, they only little bit (*sic*) need the calves for bringing down the milk. The calves’ need may be a liter in the morning and evening. Drinking too much [milk] will give them diarrhea.”

When I asked to see the calves at the Calcutta gaushala (see Figure 2), I was taken to a dark building where the stench of feces hit me even from the outside. Tiny, emaciated calves lay inside the hot, humid room in large pools of green, putrefying diarrhea, flies buzzing around their small heads and bodies. The calves jumped up in fear as soon as we entered and retreated, though a couple of thin babies, no bigger than a large dog, tentatively came forward to sniff my hand. “It is their feeding time anyway, let us let them out,” said the worker who had accompanied me. He opened the door wide, and a thudding stampede of calves of all sizes raced straight to the troughs outside that contained commercial formula, milled grains, and dirty water—presumably the real reason for the pools of diarrhea inside the dank room. Then the worker pointed out something I will never forget.

An extremely tiny calf, her ribcage showing starkly, had broken away from the rest of the calves, and shot back into another dark room in the building full of cows. Amid the fifty large bovine bodies crammed in that space, the elfin calf had managed to locate her own, chained mother. As I approached them slowly, the mother and child watched me fixedly, with palpable trepidation, standing absolutely still. “Let her stay, give them some time together,” I begged the worker. He agreed to give them thirty minutes until the feeding outside was over, before taking the sickly infant back into the dark, diarrhea-filled room.

In the final analysis, gaushalas emerge as spaces where Hindu cows are saved from “dishonor” at Muslim hands. The concept of “honor” carries with it an established set of violations, where the female compromises or is compromised, typically through “invited” or forced violations to her body, and brings dishonor to the male. Mark Moritz explains that during pogroms and riots, “men are prepared to use violence . . . to defend their reputation as honorable men . . . [and such violence] is institutionalized, regarded as legitimate by the society at large” (Moritz 2008, 101). The dishonor to the Hindu male in cow slaughter by a Muslim was explained by a cow vigilante at a national conference on cow protection that was held in Ahmedabad in February 2016:



Figure 2 Emaciated calves in the Calcutta gaushala, lying in pools of their own diarrhea. Photo credit: Yamini Narayanan. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com].

You understand, it is not the killing I am worried about. It is *not the killing* [emphasis his]. I myself would kill the cow before allowing Musalmans to kill her. Being in India, they think they can kill cows, disrespect Hindu dharma. They have to understand, they cannot kill cows.¹²

A gau-rakshak who had brought several hundred rescued cows to various gaushalas in Hyderabad and elsewhere in Telengana emphasized that he would not tolerate anyone—implicitly a Muslim—even looking at his “mother” with “bad intentions.” In his worldview, the cow herself pleads with her “son” to not exact revenge—murder—for her assault and dishonor. Rather, he explains, the virtuous mother is willing to patiently wait for the errant Muslim to seek her forgiveness and also become her “son”:

I just have one prayer, do not butcher a cow, *do not look at a cow with bad gaze/intention* [emphasis added]. As long as I am alive, I will save gauvansh [the bovine family] . . . in my heart, there is only *ek jasba* [one emotion], *ek junoon* [one obsession], only one thing—anyone who violates my gaumata [mother cow] will be destroyed. If anyone looks at my gaumata with bad intentions, it will not take me long to kill him. Only thing that stops me is the gaumata herself. She says, “Son, I am the one enduring it,

I am the one getting killed. I am not cursing him [the butcher/Muslim]. You also endure for just a bit longer. A day will come when they bow at my feet and say, ‘we made a mistake, Ma, please forgive us.’” You don’t take a wrong step.¹³

Gaushalas are overcrowded with cows to protect them from slaughter at Muslim hands, but are chained almost continuously to avoid territorial fights breaking out between stressed, frustrated animals in a state of zoo psychosis. Zoo psychosis refers to the “involuntary repetitive movements” that are “symptoms of the trauma of being kidnapped, displaced, incarcerated, alienated, bored to death” (Chaudhuri 2017, 162). A young bull bobbed his head repeatedly in the Thane gaushala in an effort to yank off his harness threaded painfully through his nostrils. In a Mumbai gaushala, a chained cow sat near her cement trough and repeatedly banged her horns on the rim of the trough, which had started to bear deep indentations from months of cage psychosis. The gaushala of the Maan Mandir Seva Sansthan Trust in Barsana district near Mathura holds over 40,000 rescued cows in overcrowded conditions. During my visit, many animals were emaciated, their hipbones and ribs sticking out at painfully sharp angles. Cows stood motionless, in spite of flies buzzing thickly around their eyes, the sign of a sick cow (Becker, Reist, and Steiner 2014). However, even here, stud bulls were used to impregnate cows when possible, and as with other gaushalas, a large penned-off area contained small calves.

FEMINIST VEGANISM AS RESISTANCE TO PATRIARCHIES

In 2017, Delhi-based photographer Sujatro Ghosh created a provocative visual project depicting Indian women in assorted spaces—on the road, in a classroom, on trains, and in their bedrooms—wearing cow masks, in a statement that bovines are ostensibly safer than women in the country (BBC 2017). He explained that his intention was to protest the violence perpetrated by extremist Hindu cow vigilantes upon Muslims and Dalits to protect cows, even as gendered crimes against human women, especially rape, continue to be widespread. This well-intentioned project, which sought to challenge extremist Hindutva patriarchy, involved a speciesist representation suggesting that the interests of women and cows were oppositional to each other. The positioning of the interests of specific casteized/racialized/gendered human groups as being in conflict with those of specific animal species diminishes and invisibilizes the violence perpetrated by humans against nonhumans.

Positioning animal bodies solely as landscapes for addressing entrenched and often violent human hierarchies also obscures or plainly negates the inherent violence to animals in such humanist identity politics. Shradha Chigateri correctly analyzes cow-slaughter prohibitions as ways of sustaining “graded hierarchies” between the “upper-caste” Hindu Right and the formerly “untouchable” caste,

Dalits. However, in the necessary attempt to disrupt Hindu patriarchy, cow slaughter for beef becomes a “cultural difference to be affirmed and even celebrated” (Chigateri 2008, 32). Even as she recognizes the violence involved in the consumption of an animal, Chigateri echoes Kancha Iliiah’s argument that “love towards animals and eating their meat for survival is not a contradiction but a dialectical process” (31). It is a dialectical process between two humans about human-to-human oppressions and subordination. Nonhuman animals are presumed “voiceless” with no stake in their own survival and lives, even as new interventions in more-than-human politics argue that animals do resist human violence and killing in species-specific modes, and that this resistance should be recognized as political (Wadiwel 2015).

The refusal to take speciesism seriously perpetuates real and intricate entanglements between speciesism and casteism/racism, speciesism and sectarianism/communalism, and speciesism and patriarchy, all of which need to be addressed together. In her study of white citizens protesting “cruelty” in the live chicken markets of Chinatown in San Francisco while ignoring the concealed harms of industrial chicken farms and slaughterhouses, Claire Jean Kim notes the taxonomy of power in the continuum of racism and speciesism. As Kim writes, the trinity of “[w]hite supremacy, male supremacy, and human supremacy” was maintained by racist, sexist, and speciesist narratives that reinforced one another (Kim 2015, 59).

In India, the milk-and-beef economy is scaffolded by combined narratives of Hindutva supremacy, male supremacy, and human supremacy. In a neoliberalized Indian economy where bovine industries have unprecedented value, the commodification and instrumentalization of the gendered/communalized/casteized *animal other*, and the gendered/communalized/casteized *human other* are interlinked. It is precisely the muddying of the interlinked human–animal oppressions, however, that enables Hindutva conceptualizations of danger and risk, whereby ideas of “security mask violence in the name of counter-violence, killing in the name of protection” (Anand 2007, 212). The Hindutva construction of “the Hindu” itself relies on othering Muslims, and “draws its legitimacy from the representation of ‘the Muslim’ as a danger to the Hindu body [human or bovine] and in turn legitimizes the use of ‘any means’ to protect and take revenge” (209).

Hitherto, feminism and animal rights have largely worked as distinct movements, “clouding” the nature of shared oppressions, and weakening resistance (Gruen 1993, 60). Neither the women’s movement nor the animal protection movement in India has strongly identified the common strands of oppression inherent in religious ultranationalism and fanaticism. The status of animals as economic, cultural, and religious capital is so deeply ingrained in human worlds that even the Indian animal movement is welfarist, advocating that humane exploitation of animals is possible, a stance that disregards gendered and sexual violence as species trauma. The animal-advocacy movement itself must deeply engage with feminist conceptualizations of violence and patriarchy, and the women’s movement, to form mutually strategic alliances.

In turn, the conjoining of the two social-justice movements requires that “feminist theory and praxis” radically expand their conceptualizations of gendered and sexual violence as against all vaginas, anuses, penises, uteruses, breasts/udders, parenthood, and infants, regardless of race, religion, or species (Cusack 2013, 24). To do less would be to endorse speciesism, invoking similar mechanics of biologized othering in racializing gendered violence. Speaking against all gendered violence calls upon the “deeply theorized feminist political commitments to respecting and retaining the integrity of ‘difference,’” the “erasure of difference . . . [which] works primarily to the advantage of the dominant class” (Seager 2003, 170)—or species. It draws upon “affective feminist practice that views animal others as grievable, vulnerable, and valuable” (Jenkins 2012, 505). A critical advantage to feminists in undertaking such reflexive “dangerous work” is a richly expanded understanding of how power and patriarchy operate (Twine 2010, 400).

Seen this way, feminist-vegan advocacy emerges as a more rounded resistance to right-wing ultra-nationalism and the interlinked sexual and gendered violence in both Hindu patriarchy and anthropatriarchy. A socially, politically, and historically contextualized feminist-vegan politics can more fully respond to intersections of sectarianism (and casteism), patriarchy, and speciesism that are present in right-wing ultranationalism throughout the world, and in this case, in India. “Total liberation” must rely on systemic reform throughout institutions (Pellow 2014).

How can insights from feminist and animal geographies politicize spaces of “sanctuary” and refuge for animals repatriated from incarceration, exploitation, and violence? In particular, how can we politicize gaushalas so that animals are not only saved from the gendered, sexual, and disposal (slaughter) violence of “farming,” but also from being coopted as political, sociocultural, and religious symbols? Sanctuaries must play advocacy roles *for animals* by politicizing and representing animal interests and by focusing on their vulnerabilities (Deckha 2015), which may be biological, ecological, psychological/emotional, sociopolitical, and cultural in nature. Sanctuaries must highlight that “the pre-legal moral right” not to be exploited is shared between nonhuman and human animals (Francione and Charlton 2017, 35). It is as vital for animal sanctuaries in India to reject speciesist religious nationalism as it is for women’s nongovernmental organizations to challenge gendered religious nationalism (Subramaniam 2014). As women’s groups need to be cognizant of how race, gender, and ethnicity intersect in order to challenge patriarchy (Subramaniam 2014), so too must animal groups be vigilant about the complexities of breed, gender, and age that are instrumentalized by extremism. Anthropatriarchy and humanist forms of patriarchy mutually reinforce each other and can be maximally dismantled only *together* through strategic alliances between the women’s movement and the animal civil-protection movement. To this end, it is important for animal advocacy in India to consciously frame itself as a civil-protection movement rather than unconsciously project itself as a cow-protection movement.

NOTES

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1. I recorded this ethnographic observation in my field notes during a visit to the Calcutta gaushala in February 2016; emphasis added.

2. This article uses “dairy” in quotes to acknowledge that this term is contested, as it indicates the purpose for which an animal is bred, rather than any “inherent” quality of a cow (Gillespie 2018).

3. The author cites Makhijani 1956.

4. Interview with ISCKON Vice President, ISCKON Temple, January 10, 2016, Mathura, Uttar Pradesh.

5. Interview with man in Carterpuri Gaushala, March 2, 2017, Gurgaon, Haryana.

6. Interview with gaushala manager, Krishna temple, November 13, 2014, Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh; emphasis added.

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*; emphasis added.

9. *Ibid.*

10. Interview with gaushala manager, ISKCON temple, January 12, 2016, Mathura, Uttar Pradesh.

11. Interview with manager, Sri Krishna Goshala, January 15, 2017, Hyderabad, Telangana.

12. Interview with a gau-rakshak [cow vigilante] at the All-India Gauseva Conference, February 9, 2016, Ahmedabad, Gujarat.

13. Interview with a gau-rakshak, January 14, 2017, Hyderabad, Telangana.

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