As with the previous chapter, I begin with an extract from an ancient Sanskrit text. But here, significantly, I draw it from a recent publication, the Go-seva (Cow Care) issue of Gita Press’ Hindi journal Kalyāṇa (January 1995, pp. 15–21). An article therein entitled “Cow’s Cosmic Form” (Gau ka viśvarūpa) compiles selected Sanskrit scriptural passages, beginning with one from the Atharvaveda (9.7), a hymn consisting of homologies between well-known Vedic divinities, other beings, or natural phenomena, and various features of bovines (initially of the bull, then later of the cow).  

For example:

Prajapati and Parameshthin are the two horns [of the bull], Indra is the head, Agni the forehead, Yama the joint of the neck. King Soma is the brain, Sky is the upper jaw, Earth is the lower jaw… (trans. Griffiths 1895, p. 453; see Fig. 3.1)
After providing a Hindi translation of the hymn, the article’s unnamed compiler expresses appreciation for the nineteenth-century British Sanskritist, Prof. Ralph T. H. Griffith, who regarded this hymn as “an example of how the bull and cow are eulogized.” The compiler then notes that in this hymn, in addition to several divinities, all different types of human and other beings are mentioned as having their places in this cosmic bovine. Thus, the hymn “shows our oneness with the body of mother cow.” “Therefore,” suggests the writer, “when a cow encounters harm, we also suffer; hence, with this understanding, cows and bulls should be

---

2Identification of various animals and plants with divinities is common in South Asia. For example, different tree types are regarded as embodying different divinities (Haberman 2013, p. 184).
cared for and protected.” Further, a person who thus suffers due to a cow’s injury “should endeavor to remove the harmed cow’s suffering by making a strong retaliation.” Implied is that thereby one’s own suffering will also be removed.

As this Atharvaveda passage is represented in its modern context, two opposing themes are juxtaposed. On the one hand, there is the image of human diversity finding its locus of unity and presumable harmony in the body of the cow. On the other hand, knowing cows to be vulnerable to abuse, conscientious human beings are called upon to not only care for them but also to protect them, even—presumably—by force that could be violent.³ This and many similar modern assertions of the importance of cow care and protection partake of the complex history of what began in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as the Cow Protection movement. This movement across northern India expanded rapidly as organizations for this purpose were created. Also, significant momentum for the movement was generated by prominent leaders such as Dayananda Saraswati and, later, Mohandas K. Gandhi.⁴ Popular support has led to legislation, and ongoing legal action and discourse have been integral to this history, including the inclusion of Article 48 into the Indian Constitution.⁵ Despite, but also because of, legal measures to protect cows and frequent lack of official enforcement, occasions of “communal” violence arise in India to the present day. These are typically acts of violence between persons identifying themselves as Hindus who regard themselves

³The original intent of the passage might well have been related to ritual: In the consecration of a king, he would have been anointed with liquids—especially milk—thought to be infused with the presence and hence the power of the various divinities. It could be the case that the identification of the cow’s body portions with various divinities would mean that the milk of the cow would be the concentrated liquid essence of their presence. See Inden (1998, p. 71).

⁴For a bibliography of the early Cow Protection movement, see Freitag (1980, Chapter 4). For an overview of modern political Hinduism, see Falk (2006, Chapter 11) and, although already slightly dated, see Ram-Prasad (2003). For an historiographical analysis of communalism’s rise in India, see Groves (2010). On increasing communal tensions related to cow slaughter in the twentieth century, see Copland (2005).

⁵See Copland (2017) for a detailed account, from a secularist perspective, of the political circumstances under which Article 48 was drafted and included in the Indian Constitution as a Directive Principle of State Policy. The Article reads: “That the State shall endeavor to organise agriculture and animal husbandry on modern scientific lines and shall, in particular, takes steps for preserving and improving the breeds, and prohibiting the slaughter, of cows and calves and other milch and draught cattle.” For a Hindu-oriented account, see Lodha (2002).
as duty-bound to protect and defend cows, and (typically) non-Hindus seen or (sometimes falsely) rumored to have slaughtered cows.

We need not delve into the complex and ongoing details of this troubled history. Suffice to consider essential contours, noting that in India the issue persists mainly whether and how Hindus’ deference for cows might or might not be respected by non-Hindus or, in a related inflection, whether and how secularity and religion are at cross-purposes regarding the restriction or ban on cow slaughter. At this writing, these issues persist in the Indian public sphere, sustaining the attention of politicians and media, energizing vigilante groups to patrol Indian state border areas to catch and punish cattle smugglers (Safi 2016), and perpetuating smuggling (subjecting bovines to horribly cruel conditions during transport) and illegal slaughter practices (Narayanan 2018, pp. 17–18). On the other hand, public concern for cows also inspires thousands of cow care homes (goshalas) to be financially and organizationally supported throughout India.6

The quoted Atharvaveda passage seems to be a vision of unity and cosmic coherence, one that would eventually come to be regarded as expressive of an ideal and practice of nonviolence. Yet in the quoted Hindi article, the author positions this vision as the basis for highlighting divisiveness, the opposite of unity and harmony embodied in the cosmic bovine vision. Going a crucial step further, the author seems to urge action that could involve violence, based on identification of the Atharvaveda’s cosmic bovine with actual, living bovines.

Modern divisiveness in relation to cows can be seen as latter-day versions of ancient contentions over cows’ ownership. From the previous chapter’s picture of Indian literary representations of bovinity, we encountered this trope. As objects of desire and ownership, cows in ancient times held, and cows today hold, special value. The Mahabharata story of Vasishtha’s cow of plenty, Nandini (discussed in Chapter 2), is paradigmatic of this notion, even as the story hints at the cow’s possessing agency (including giving her a name, suggesting subjectivity rather than mere objectivity). The king’s attempt to claim Vasishtha’s cow is foiled, as are other attempts to steal cattle (such as the Panis stealing and hiding cows) due to prevailing

6On the number of goshalas in India, see footnote 10 in Chapter 4.
higher powers (Vasishtha, as a powerful brahmin sage; and Brihaspati, a powerful brahmin priest, respectively).

In this chapter, we consider the contentiousness of bovine ownership in a different register, one that draws us into present-day controversies. Lines of faith tradition and politics have been drawn and group identities (not least caste identities and “Untouchable”/Dalit identities) forged out of the controversies arising from cultural and behavioral differences. This is a long story, going back to Vedic times when cows were prized and, apparently, also ritually sacrificed, as were (apparently) other animals. I say “apparently” because precisely this has been a contentious issue in modern times, whereby in recent years claims are made that ancient textual references to ritual slaughter are either misread or interpolations. And, to complicate matters about what was or was not done in ancient or later times, in early texts we find a distinction made between killing and sacrificing such that, despite appearances to the contrary, the ritual sacrifice of animals is regarded not only as not killing, but as rewarding them with a better afterlife (Houben 1999). Further, we encounter layers of interpretation—ancient texts interpreted in later texts, and even what may be layered within individual texts—all of which are further interpreted by modern writers with varying agendas. What is more, such layering takes place amidst changing economic and cultural influences linked, in turn, to shifting ideologies unfolding in diverse practices.7

Dispute over ownership of cows has thus also become dispute over ownership of the dominant narrative of cows. In this arena, cows hold center stage in a polarity of ideologies that interact with each other variously over time and region. At one end of this polarity is the ideology of ritual sacrifice, and the ideology of nonviolence (ahimsa) represents (or is assumed to represent) the opposite end of the polarity. We need to be aware of other polarities as well. There is the opposition between high-caste and low-caste identities and sensibilities, a binary that calls attention to the socially embedded character of ideologies and, importantly in relation to bovines, to dietary practices. And more broadly, there is the opposition between the relative permanence of tradition and the flux of change that characterizes

---

7As a comparison of the variety of attitudes regarding animal sacrifice in ancient India, one may note the likely variety of attitudes to animal sacrifice in ancient Israel (over a thousand-year period). See Rogerson (1998, p. 8).
South Asia’s present-day rapid transition into modern secular statehood (Larson 1995, pp. 4–6). One important expression of the aspiration for permanence in current Hindu thought is the notion of \textit{sanatana-dharma}, whereby \textit{sanatana} is an adjective denoting eternality, ever-existence, the everlasting. As we will see, in modern times cow veneration and protection are often identified as essential components of the constellation of notions and practices that constitutes \textit{sanatana-dharma}—“eternal law,” “ever-existing ethics,” or “everlasting cosmic order.” By contrast, in the flux of modernity, notions of unchanging dharma are viewed as archaic dreaming, best left to fade with secularization amidst a plurality of religious—particularly Abrahamic—traditions and the triumph of the marketplace. In this shifting landscape, among other loci of Indic veneration, cow sanctity becomes questioned, challenged, and spurned.

So, polarities abound in our field of inquiry. In addition to the value-meaning-polarities emerging in the previous chapter, and the sacrifice/nonviolence polarity to be discussed in this chapter, we will encounter in this and remaining chapters yet another, what might be called a “perception polarity.” On one end of this spectrum is the traditionalist perception that views cow protection as integral to \textit{sanatana-dharma} (generally conceived as having been ever innocent of animal sacrificial practices, while also regarding cow milk use as sanctioned by dharma). On the other end of the spectrum is a modernist view that perceives cows as either objects for commodification and unrestricted consumption or (to be discussed in Chapter 5), alternatively, as rights-bearing subjects with moral status but no religious status.

This chapter has two parts. In the first part, “Hindus’ Modern Concern for Cows,” I introduce four modern figures of important and differing perspectives in relation to cow care, namely, Dayananda Saraswati (1824–1883), M. K. Gandhi (1869–1948), Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891–1956), and Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada (1896–1977). Since each of these thinkers and activists make reference to early sacred texts, in the second part, “Ancient Texts, Modern Controversies,” I revisit some of the texts discussed in Chapter 2 and also look at or refer to additional early texts. The additional texts are the Manusmriti (Sanskrit: \textit{Manusmṛti})—the best-known of Hindu “law books,” Dharmaśastras—and the Bhagavad Gītā. Regarding the Bhagavad Gītā, we will revisit Gandhi and Swami
Prabhupada in their differing and, in some ways, common interpretations of this text. Finally, we will note Swami Prabhupada's claim, drawing from the Bhagavata Purana, that ahimsa is a “subreligious” principle. In this chapter as a whole, the aim is to show how the sacrificial and nonviolence worldviews collide today, as they seem to have collided in early Indic texts. The difference is that, unlike in ancient and premodern times, today prevails a consumer worldview served by industrial systems of animal “husbandry” (agribusiness) that are utterly removed from both sacrificial and nonviolent worldviews.

Hindus’ Modern Concern for Cows

In the previous chapter, we considered how cows were regarded as centrally positioned and valued in three conjoined spheres of concern, namely, the sphere of nature, the sphere of humanity, and the sphere of divinity. This scheme emerged from a survey of mainly Sanskrit literature, stretching in time from the second millennium BCE to the present, with only minimal effort to assign approximate dates for specific texts. Now, as we turn to relatively recent writing on cow care and cow protection, we can keep this conceptual triangle in mind to see how writers elaborate on this cosmic scheme, with cows holding a key role.

Two prominent modern writers and activists of pre-independence India, Dayananda Saraswati and Mohandas K. (Mahatma) Gandhi, are well known as reformers with broad concerns for Indian national mobilization. Both explicitly identified themselves as Hindus, and they both tied this identity closely with their concerns in relation to cows. Seeing systematic development of cow care and protection as integral to their wider aims, both were notably active in promoting this cause, for which they both expressed their ideas in forceful writings. Following a brief look at relevant writings of these two, we turn to consider a similarly forceful—but very differently valenced—counterpoint in the person and writings of Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, who raises the disturbing issue of “untouchability” as a product of Hindu casteism, an issue that impinges directly on the subject of cow protection as linked with the dietary taboo against eating beef. Then, as a response—albeit indirect—to Dayananda, Gandhi
and Ambedkar, we look briefly at the worldwide missionizing project of Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, who established farm communities featuring cow care in locations as far-flung as America, Europe and Australia, operated by Westerners, which is to say persons altogether outside the caste system of India and for whom Hindu identity is typically irrelevant.

**Dayananda Saraswati: “Cow—Reservoir of Compassion”**

Swami Dayananda Saraswati, a *sannyasi* (renunciant) from Gujarat, would become known mainly for the Hindu reform movement he founded in 1875, the Arya Samaj (Noble Society). Five years later, Dayananda published a fifteen-page Hindi tract entitled *Gokarṇanidhi* (Cow—Reservoir of Compassion). It seems that his writing and organizational efforts were quite effective in awakening considerable sympathy and support for his cow protection cause. Peter van der Veer (1994, p. 92) notes that “Dayananda’s … efforts to ban cow slaughter, found wide support beyond the circle of his followers.” This support led to the creation of many cow protection societies throughout India, giving momentum through organization and further use of the printing press to what would become known as the Cow Protection movement from the 1880s.

In the introduction to *Gokarṇanidhi* (Saraswati 1993, p. 15) Swami Dayananda declares his purpose:

> … that animals such as the cow be protected as far as possible and, with their protection, agriculture and supply of milk and butter may increase and thereby the comfort and happiness of all may grow more and more. May God grant us success in this goal at the earliest.

---

8Quotation and page numbers referred to here are from a 48-page English edition. The translator from the original Hindi, Khazan Singh, renders *Gokarṇanidhi* as “Ocean of Mercy for the Cow,” adding what he considers a better accommodation to English with “In Defense of the Cow: With all Compassion.” The writer of this edition’s “Introduction,” Tulsi Ram, further proposes “Compassion for the cow, (deep and vast) as the ocean.” I prefer to render it as “Cow—Reservoir of Compassion,” highlighting the sense that it is the cow that is the locus of compassion upon human society, made so by divine arrangement.
In the first of his two-part tract, Dayananda presents reasons why cows in particular are to be protected, beginning with an anthropocentric teleological argument of divine purpose (pp. 18–19): All things created by God have a purpose; if used for their purpose, all is well; nothing should be destroyed instead of being put to its purpose. In particular, cows and other animals have a purpose, by which “the whole world enjoys numerous comforts and pleasures.” He then suggests a utilitarian argument against the killing of cows. He calculates that a single cow can provide, in her natural lifetime, some 25,740 persons with one full serving of khir (rice pudding made with milk and sugar), and that the grain produced by six oxen (by plowing and threshing) over eight years can feed 256,000 people with a full meal. In contrast, “the flesh of one cow can feed only an estimated eighty beef-eating persons.” Then he asks rhetorically, “Why should it not be regarded as a gigantic sin to kill lacs [1 lac/lakh = 100,000] of creatures for a petty gain and thereby deprive countless people?”

In the remainder of the tract, Dayananda makes clear that he regards the unnecessary killing of animals for food—especially cows—as sinful and thoroughly reprehensible. He includes in the first part of his tract an imagined dialogue between a “killer” (himsaka) and a “protector” (rakshaka), arguing the latter’s position by highlighting differences between humans and nonhuman animal carnivores, and by assorted other points (pp. 23–29). In their last exchange, the “killer” agrees that those who kill animals and eat their flesh are sinners, but to purchase meat or to offer meat to Bhairava (a fearful form of Shiva) or Durga (the goddess regarded as Shiva’s consort in fearful form), or to accept meat that has been offered in a sacrificial rite as prescribed in sacred texts, is surely not a sin. To this argument, Dayananda replies with an extract from the most prominent of the Dharmashastra texts, the Manusmriti (5.51; Saraswati 1993, p. 29): “One who permits the slaughter, the butcher, the slaughterer, the purchaser of the animal for slaughter, the seller of the animal, the cook who

---

9Dayananda bases his calculation on an average daily milk yield of 11 seers (ca. 10 kgs.), an average milking season of 12 months, an average calving number of 13, and an average satisfying meal of khir made from two seers of milk. He makes similar calculations for oxen and grain production. Obviously, a more comprehensive calculation would have to include several factors, including time and energy for maintaining the cows, as well as the cow breed and climatic conditions: More discussion on the economics of cow care awaits in Chapter 4.
cooks the meat, the one who serves the meat and the one who eats the meat—these are (all) killers.”

Coming to the end of the tract’s first part (pp. 32–33), Dayananda insinuates a challenge to Queen Victoria, citing a proclamation of hers to the effect that mute animals should not be subjected to the pain to which they had been at that time subjected. He asks rhetorically, “If the intention (of this provision) is not to give any pain to the animals, then can there be any greater pain than that caused by slaughter?” Further, he chides,

The ruler receives taxes from his people only to protect them properly and not to exterminate cows and other animals which are a source of happiness both for the ruler and for his subjects…[P]lease keep your eyes open and commit no harmful deeds nor allow such deeds being done by others.

The second part of Gokarunānīdhi is a document setting out the aims, purposes, and rules for membership and decision-making of his newly created organization, the Assembly for the Protection of Cows and Agriculture (Gokṛṣyādirakṣini Sabhā). Here we see Dayananda’s practical thinking for implementing the principles of animal protection he espouses, in particular the protection of cows (indicated by his designating all members of the Assembly as gorakshakas—cow protectors).

A striking feature of this pamphlet is Dayananda’s employment of ideas from both tradition and modernity to develop his argument. On the side of tradition, the text begins with an invocation from the Yajurveda, followed by two Sanskrit verses (possibly of Dayananda’s own composition); similarly, he concludes the work with Sanskrit verses. Within the text, he quotes a stanza from the Sanskrit lawbook, the Manusmṛiti; he refers to the ancient Aryans as having always regarded violence to animals as a sin; and he longs for a time, some seven centuries prior, before “many flesh-eating foreigners who kill the cow and other animals have come to and settled in this country” (p. 22). The implied resentment in this last comment fixes attention on changing, modern times, in which the current ruler, the foreign Queen Victoria, is challenged in only slightly veiled terms for allowing the killing of cows without restriction in India, while professing
compassion for animals. Nor is Dayananda’s application of utilitarianism to argue against cattle slaughter without ironic significance, as utilitarianism was James Mill’s famous ethical justification for British rule in India. Even so, Dayananda shows readiness to adopt modern ways by setting up a modern-style organization of volunteers (the Gokṛṣyādirakṣa Sabhā), with a markedly western-style documentation of the institution’s rules. All of this was set out in Hindi language (for Dayananda, this was a concession to the language’s predominance in the north, despite his preference for writing in Sanskrit); and finally, he then had his tract printed, thus acknowledging the usefulness of modern Western technology for disseminating his ideas. Significantly, framing his ideas and mission was Dayananda’s tradition-laden profile as a Hindu renunciant. This identity served to win him respect while he took the itinerant renunciant’s prerogative to travel, enabling him to widely propagate his mission of cow protection along with his broader mission, the Arya Samaj (van der Veer 1994, p. 91).

Mahatma Gandhi: “The Law of Our Religion”

Like Swami Dayananda Saraswati, Mohandas K. Gandhi, later to be honored as Mahatma (great soul), was born and grew up in the northwestern Indian state of Gujarat. Like Dayananda, Gandhi would show great concern for cows, and like him Gandhi would write and speak forcefully on the subject and would make efforts toward implementing his vision of cow care on a national scale.

The name Mahatma Gandhi has become almost synonymous with nonviolence, a key principle on which he based his personal and political life. Less known in the West is that he viewed nonviolence as comprehending human relationships to animals as well as to other human beings. Cows

---

10 An Indian central government report on cattle cites M. K. Gandhi as contrasting the number of cattle killed during Muslim rule as approximately 20,000 annually, against 30,000 cattle killed daily during British rule (Lodha [2002, pp. 10–11], citing Gandhi [CWMG vol. 14, p. 80]).

11 The irony is compounded further, in that it was Jeremy Bentham’s utilitarianism that inspired Mill, the same Bentham who became known for his early championing of animal rights.

12 See Groves (2010, especially from p. 111) on Dayananda Saraswati’s cow protection society and interactions with the British colonial government over cow slaughter.
in particular he regarded as representing all animals, especially deserving to be protected because of the benefits they render human society, and he felt that it was for this reason that ancient sages had singled out cows for special protection. In a letter to Asaf Ali, a fellow activist in the Indian independence movement, Gandhi wrote:

I have no right to slaughter all animal life because I find it necessary to slaughter some animal life. Therefore if I can live well on goats, fish and fowl (surely enough in all conscience) it is sin for me to destroy cows for my sustenance. And it was some such argument that decided the rishis [sages] of old in regarding the cow as sacred, especially when they found that the cow was the greatest economic asset in national life. And I see nothing wrong, immoral or sinful in offering worship to an animal so serviceable as the cow so long as my worship does not put her on a level with her Creator.13

That Gandhi’s letter to Ali suggests animal options for human consumption in preference to cows has to do with his interlocutor having been a Muslim. From early on in the independence movement, Muslims were seen by Hindus as cause for concern, partly due to their apparent readiness to slaughter cows which, aside from there perceived inherent sanctity, Hindus were increasingly seeing as a symbol for national unity. In his 1909 tract on Indian independence, Gandhi had written explicitly on this subject, responding to a hypothetical reader’s query (in Chapter 10 of Hind Swaraj, “The condition of India: The Hindus and the Mahomedans”). First Gandhi notes the cow’s practical value, as a “most useful animal in hundreds of ways,” and that “Our Mahomedan (sic: Muslim) brethren will admit this.” For this reason, Gandhi considers the cow “the protector of India because, being an agricultural country, she is dependent on the cow” (Gandhi 2003, p. 38). He then expounds on how he regards Muslims, namely, as reasonable human beings of whom he holds out the possibility that they may be persuaded to desist from harming cows.

Am I, then, to fight with or kill a Mahomedan in order to save a cow? In doing so, I would become an enemy of the Mahomedan as well as of the

13CWMG vol. 19, p. 349 (Letter to Asaf Ali, January 25, 1920).
cow. Therefore, the only method I know of protecting the cow is that I should approach my Mahomedan brother and urge him for the sake of the country to join me in protecting her.

Gandhi was convinced that the importance of cattle as animals to be protected rather than slaughtered was a non-religious, non-sectarian matter. His hope was that his countrymen and countrywomen could become similarly persuaded, whatever their religious convictions and identities. But what if the Muslim would not listen to Gandhi’s plea? He continues,

I should let the cow go for the simple reason that the matter is beyond my ability. If I were overfull of pity for the cow, I should sacrifice my life to save her but not take my brother’s. This, I hold, is the law of our religion.14

Here the phrase “law of our religion” is a translation of the term dharmic (“having to do with dharma”), the early Indic expression we have referred to in the previous chapter as “right behavior,” a central concern of the Mahabharata (and of the Manusmriti, mentioned previously in connection with Dayananda Saraswati). As we will see shortly, Gandhi admits his own inability to practice such a perfect level of dharma; yet he does hold it forth as an ideal to be acknowledged, and it is highly suggestive of his conception of nonviolence, a theme that will command our attention later in this chapter.

Gandhi, like Dayananda, was deeply concerned to see cow protection implemented in India. Yet the next point in his Hind Swaraj discourse is a striking critique of the cow protection societies existing in India at that time:

When the Hindus became insistent [by confronting Muslims engaged in cow slaughter], the killing of cows increased. In my opinion, cow protection societies may be considered cow-killing societies. It is a disgrace to us that we

14Although it is unlikely that Gandhi would have been aware of it, there is a reference, in the Southern Recension of the Mahabharata, to the exhaltation to “meritorious worlds” of a kshatriya who sacrifices his life “for the sake of cows and Brahmans or for the sake of the afflicted; even so he obtains meritorious worlds out of regard for non-cruelty (anrismyavyapeksayā)” (Hiltebeitel 2016, p. 112).
should need such societies. When we forgot how to protect cows I suppose
we needed such societies.

It may be said that Gandhi held Hindus more blameworthy than Muslims
for mistreatment of cows. Despite professions of high regard for cows, he
found that many Hindus were in fact neglectful of aged cows, over-milking
lactating cows, or over-working and harshly treating bulls and oxen. And
worse, Hindus were selling unproductive cows for slaughter.\textsuperscript{15}

Thus, the level and extent of reform that Gandhi envisioned for realiz-
ing his ideal of nonviolent life and livelihood, centered on cow care, was
to begin with teaching and learning by example. Gandhi is known for the
ashrams (hermitages) he established in Gujarat, places meant to facilitate
a self-sustaining way of life based on principles of nonviolence, by main-
taining “a strict regimen of vegetarian food, manual labor, social service,
celibacy, and sleep” (Thompson 1993, p. 107). Although the economic
focus in these ashrams was the production of hand-spun and handwoven
cotton products (\textit{khadi}), cows were also maintained. The ashrams were to
serve as incubators for training persons who could teach both skills and
the ethics of nonviolence in the villages. Further, for developing a nation-
wide cow care program that would be economically viable, Gandhi gave
considerable attention to articulating how cow shelters (\textit{goshalas}) could
function by maintaining both dairies and tanneries (leather processing
facilities) (Burgat 2004, pp. 224, 227).\textsuperscript{16}

Gandhi’s concern for cow protection may best be understood in light
of his view of an Indian ancient past unsullied by what he regarded as the
ravages of “Western civilization.” In \textit{Hind Swaraj} (p. 45), Gandhi shows

\textsuperscript{15}Gandhi could be caustic in his collective self-criticism: “How can we say anything whatever to
others so long as we have not rid ourselves of sin? Do we [Hindus] not kill cows with our own hands?
How do we treat the progeny of the cow? What crushing burdens do we not lay on bullocks! To say
nothing of bullocks, do we give enough feed to the cow? How much milk do we leave for the calf?
And who sells the cow [to the butcher]? What can we say of the Hindus who do this for the sake of
a few rupees? What do we do about it?” (Gandhi 1999, vol. 24, p. 121, “To the People of Bihar,”
August 22, 1921). Quoted in Valpey [forthcoming].

\textsuperscript{16}We will discuss the economics of goshalas in Chapter 4. Suffice to say here that Gandhi’s idea
to attach tanneries to goshalas in which only naturally dying cows would provide skins was rather
unorthodox, as generally those who maintain cow shelters would consider it highly disrespectful to
the dead cow not to leave the animal whole for burial.
a deep aversion for the supposed amenities of modernity, rather giving all
credit to Indians’ “forefathers” for purposefully rejecting them:

It was not that we did not know how to invent machinery, but our fore-
fathers knew that, if we set our hearts after such things, we would become
slaves and lose our moral fibre. They, therefore, after due deliberation
decided that we should only do what we could with our hands and feet.
They saw that our real happiness and health consisted in a proper use of
our hands and feet.

One may be inclined to read Gandhi’s accounts of India’s village-centered
past as idyllic and his hope to recover such a past as utopian. As Richard
King points out (quoting Richard G. Fox), one can discern behind his
rhetoric the “Orientalist image of India as inherently spiritual, consensual
and corporate.” Yet Gandhi also effectively inverted an image of Indian
material powerlessness into one of positive mobilization: “The backward
and parochial village became the self-sufficient, consensual and harmo-
nious center of decentralized democracy” (King 1999, quoting Fox 1992,
pp. 151–152). Moreover, King observes (p. 134),

Gandhi, quite self-consciously it would seem, inverted colonial presuppo-
sitions about Bengali effeminacy, otherworldly spirituality and the passivity
of the ascetic ethics of non-violence (āhimsa) and reapplied these cultural
symbols in terms of organized, non-violent, social protest.

We can add to this picture of politically efficacious nonviolent activity
Gandhi’s image of the cow, as “a poem of pity” (Gandhi 1999, vol. 24,
p. 373). In effect, by virtue of their vulnerability, cows could become
powerfully mobilizing symbols for positive change. Thus, we begin to
see that for Gandhi cows and their protection formed an integral part
of his vision for an enlightened society in which human beings would
govern themselves and relate to all creatures on principles of nonviolence—
principles, he believed, like Dayananda Saraswati, that were rooted in
India’s ancient and glorious past.
Both Swami Dayananda Saraswati and Mahatma Gandhi strongly identified reverence for and protection of cows with Hindu tradition; Dayananda made this identification implicitly, but Gandhi made the connection quite explicitly, even while he hoped for resolution of differences with non-Hindus regarding cow care. For some, however, the picture of Hindu unity over cow care was not as simple as such champions for cows would have it. In particular, Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, Gandhi’s contemporary and sharply opposed sparring partner in Indian politics surrounding matters regarding Hinduism and the abolition of “untouchability,” was outspoken in calling attention to untouchability as being deeply at odds with Hindu ideology. 17

In his book *The Untouchables: Who Were They and Why They Became Untouchables?* (1948), Ambedkar offers an extended analysis of untouchability, especially as he sees it to have emerged and been preserved in India. Important for his argument is to consider ancient India in historical terms, in contrast to the prevailing tendency of Hindus to view ancient India as an undifferentiated past that remains alive and relevant in the present. Thus, a significant element of his argument is that untouchability may be traceable to the ascendency of Buddhism in India after which, according to his analysis, non-Buddhist brahmins during the Gupta Empire (fourth—sixth centuries CE) made cow killing a crime and became themselves (for the first time) vegetarian. This was, he argued, the brahmins’ way of regaining lost power and prestige, both at the royal court and among the people (Ambedkar 1948, p. 116). He writes,

---

17Dr. Ambedkar, who became Chairman of the newly independent Indian constitution drafting committee, identified himself with his caste of origin, the “untouchable” Mahars of Maharashtra. His official conversion to Buddhism shortly before his death was a strong statement of his rejection of Gandhi’s plea that untouchables, if they would be properly respected, would be inclined to identify themselves as Hindus. Indeed, he forcefully rejected the notion that there existed a “Hindu Civilization,” in light of the existence of what he identified as three classes of “abomination,” namely “Criminal Tribes,” “Aboriginal Tribes,” and “Untouchables.” And the culprits for this condition, he felt, have been the self-interested brahmins, who failed to “produce a Voltaire”—a courageous intellectual willing to challenge the brahmins’ supposed superiority (Ambedkar 1948, pp. i–iii).
In this connection it must be remembered that there was one aspect in which Brahmanism suffered in public esteem as compared to Buddhism. That was the practice of animal sacrifice which was the essence of Brahmanism and to which Buddhism was deadly opposed. That in an agricultural population there should be respect for Buddhism and revulsion against Brahmanism which involved slaughter of animals including cows and bullocks is only natural.

Ambedkar then sets up his main argument with the question, “What could the Brahmins do to recover the lost ground?” His reply:

To go one better than the Buddhist Bhikshus—not only to give up meat-eating but to become vegetarians—which they did. That this was the object of the Brahmins in becoming vegetarians can be proved in various ways.\(^\text{18}\) (Ambedkar 1948, p. 117)

Leading up to this statement, Ambedkar refers extensively to Vedic and post-Vedic texts to conclude that brahmins were, in early times, eating meat, including beef. Aside from brahmins, among others eating meat, those who were involved in any treatment of dead bovines, such as tanners, shoemakers, and so on, were understood to also eat beef, and it is these people, according to Ambedkar, who became demarcated as “untouchables.”

But the claim that brahmins were eating meat, including beef, has been, to say the least, a controversial claim. We will explore this in greater detail later in this chapter. What is to be noted here is that Ambedkar offers a plausible, if not historically verifiable, explanation for the connection of beef-eating with untouchability.\(^\text{19}\) Without assessing the argument’s

---

\(^\text{18}\)Part of Ambedkar’s argument is that early Buddhists were not vegetarians, \textit{stricto sensu}, as they merely rejected the animal-sacrificing practice of the Brahmins (see pp. 118–119). Thus, to gain respect, in effect the brahmins decided to go one better than the Buddhists by becoming strict vegetarians. For this, he seems to argue, the first step was to declare cow killing to be a sin on the same level as that of killing a brahmin. Ambedkar quotes at length from one D. R. Bhandarkar, referring to copper-plate inscriptions dated to 412 CE and 465 CE as explicitly referring to the killing of a cow as a \textit{mahapataka}—a mortal sin (Ambedkar 1948, pp. 120–121).

\(^\text{19}\)In the beginning of his book (1948, p. vi), Ambedkar recognizes the lack of historical evidence, arguing that in such cases where there are such gaps in the historical record, the historian is called upon to use imagination.
viability, the point here is simply to note that an important voice against a pervasive social violence in India—of upper-caste Hindus against lower or “outcaste” persons—calls attention to a significant problematic condition that persists to the present day in India. On the one hand, the ideal of cow care and cow protection has been strongly voiced from certain Hindu quarters who associate the preservation of bovine sanctity with the practice of nonviolence. But on the other hand, the orthodox brahmanical culture from which this ideal seems largely to spring is also seen as the purveyor of institutional violence in the form of harsh oppression and social exclusion of a substantial portion of India’s human population.20

**Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada: Cow Care for the World**

Thus far our sketch of modern Hindu voices concerning the importance of cow care has been confined to pre-independence India. We have also noted an important counter-position in Ambedkar’s concern for the untouchables’ plight as one that has been perpetuated and exacerbated by the social exclusion resulting directly, in his view, from the high-caste Hindu rejection of cow slaughter and beef-eating. But now we turn attention to one important figure in post-independence Hindu missionizing, in particular because his mission, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), would take up, with varying degrees of success, his challenge to establish farm projects worldwide in which a central community occupation should be cow care. To this end, the ideological framework invoked by Swami Bhaktivedanta Prabhupada (1896–1977) would be markedly different from that of Dayananda or Gandhi, or indeed of Ambedkar:

20See Chigateri (2008) for further discussion on this issue of the connection between cow sanctification and violence/oppression against non-Hindus or lower-caste Hindus. Here she discusses the “injustice of the dominant-caste Hindu ethic against cow slaughter and the attendant taboo against the consumption of beef in India by engaging with the associations made between the consumption of beef and the violence of ‘untouchability’, as well as the arguments that Dalit (downtrodden) communities use to disrupt and subvert such violence” (p. 11). See further, her reference to Nancy Fraser’s typology of four strategies for “affirmation” and “transformation” of socioeconomic and cultural/symbolic injustices (p. 14). For a look at a specific present-day relevant situation of Dalits whose profession is skinning dead cattle, see Lahariya (2018).
Cow care should not at all be about so-called Hindu or non-Hindu identity. Rather, it should be rooted in the understanding that cows—whatever their breed—are dear to Krishna, and that they are to be regarded much as one regards one’s mother, namely, with care and respect. Further, cow care should be rooted in an understanding of dharma in its deepest, non-sectarian sense—considerate of dharma’s outward social dimension, called *varna* and *ashrama* dharma, but not encumbered by any oppressive dynamics of casteism. Such understanding could, according to Prabhupada, be comprehended from the Bhagavad Gita and Bhagavata Purana, in which the term “Hindu” is entirely absent. In these texts, to which Swami Prabhupada would often refer, are important indications that anyone, whatever one’s background, may become a practitioner of the highest spiritual caliber while living a life of honest labor, ideally centered in agriculture and cow care.

Swami Prabhupada traveled from Kolkata to the United States in 1965, bringing with him printed copies of his own English translation and commentary to the first of twelve parts or books (“cantos”) of the Sanskrit Bhagavata Purana. In the course of his meeting Americans—especially

---

21 It bears mentioning that Swami Prabhupada, like Ambedkar, subscribed to the narrative of the Buddha having stopped animal sacrifice. However, Prabhupada’s understanding of this narrative derived from the Bhagavata Purana account, which briefly refers to Buddha as an *avatara* of Vishnu whose specific and central mission was to curb animal sacrifice.

22 In Chapter 4, we will consider the distinction made by many champions of cow care in India between “*deshi*” cows—Indian indigenous breeds—and foreign breeds. To be noted here is that, as he made no distinction between Hindu and non-Hindu regarding the potential to practice Krishna-bhakti, similarly Swami Prabhupada made no distinction between different bovine breeds, indigenous Indian and non-Indian.

23 *Varṇa* refers to a fourfold scheme of occupational proclivity, including brahmins—priests and teachers, kshatriyas—administrators and rulers, vaishyas—farmers and business people, and shudras—employees and artists. *Aṣṭraṁ* refers to a fourfold scheme of life stages, including brahmacharin—celibate student, grihastha—householder, vanaprastha—retiree, and sannyasin—renunciant. Although cow care would be specifically the province of vaishyas, Swami Prabhupada emphasized the connection between cow care and what he called “brahminical culture”—a way of life that fosters the cultivation of spiritual (non-temporal) values.

24 Swami Prabhupada would frequently call attention to a particular verse in the Bhagavata Purana, 7.11.35. In his translation, “If one shows the symptoms of being a brahmana, kṣatriya, vāisyā or śūdra, as described [in previous verses], even if he has appeared in a different class, he should be accepted according to those symptoms of classification” (Prabhupada 2017, Vedabase: Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 7.11.35).
young people, initially in New York City—Prabhupada gradually introduced the rudiments of bhakti practices, including strict adherence to a vegetarian diet. By this and other regulations and practices, he urged his followers to imbibe the culture and worldview of the particular branch of the complex of Indic tradition to which he belonged. Essential to Prabhupada’s self-presentation was his connection, through formal initiation, to the Hindu Vaishnava teaching tradition (sampradaya) known as Gaudiya Vaishnavism, traceable through its succession of teachers (gurus) to its sixteenth-century founder, Sri Chaitanya (1486–1534). Prabhupada, prompted by the example of his own guru, Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati (1874–1937), eventually began to offer formal initiation (diksha) to young Americans, bestowing on them the mantras and external markers of the traditional Vedic brahmin. In so doing, he emphasized that this initiation rite was to be transformative, changing individuals’ lives, and through them gradually building a society that could recover dignity for human beings as it affirmed dignity for animals, centered in care for cows. In a letter to one of his students, Prabhupada reaffirmed the strict lifestyle standards he had set for all his students (in 1972, while visiting India):

The four sinful activities which one must avoid if there is to be any hope for spiritual advancement are the eating of meat, fish and eggs, the use of intoxicants, illicit connection with women, and gambling. So these are the first four sins which I ask all of my students to strictly avoid committing. Practically the entire population of the world is entrapped by these four sinful activities. In our Krishna Consciousness Society we are training our students up to the standard of brahminical culture. So the great respect we are getting here in India and throughout the rest of the world is due to these restrictions. Actually our students have surpassed the category of brahmana because they are Vaisnavas which means they are transcendental to any material position, and brahmana is a material order of life, part of the

---

25 Swami Prabhupada preferred the term “Vedic” to “Hindu,” several times pointing out that the term Hindu is not found in the sacred texts upon which the tradition is built.

26 As we will discuss in Chapter 6 in more detail, according to Chaitanya’s early seventeenth-century biographer Krishnadas Kaviraja, in the course of Chaitanya’s rich life of proselytizing his message of Krishna-bhakti, on one occasion he met and spoke with a Muslim government administrator (Qazi) on the subject of cow slaughter. According to the author, Chaitanya successfully persuaded his interlocutor to respect the Hindu regard for cows (Prabhupāda 2017, V edabase: Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Ādi-līlā 17.161–164).
Swami Prabhupada had counted himself a follower of Gandhi in his college days in the early 1920s. But as Prabhupada took up the devotional path (bhakti) in earnest as a young man, he became disappointed in Gandhi, considering him to be too much absorbed in temporal politics when he should better devote his energy to spread the non-temporal message of the Bhagavad Gita. Prabhupada aimed to show that Krishna’s teachings were meant for all people at all times, not just for Hindus, and not just in India. What was most important was the upliftment of souls, whatever political and social conditions might be current. But Prabhupada was convinced that to best facilitate spiritual elevation, the social system outlined in Krishna’s teaching to Arjuna—the Bhagavad Gita—should be acknowledged. This was the social system of varna, based not on one’s birth in a particular family as had come to be generally (mis)understood, but rather on individuals’ qualifications and propensities. And since, according to the Gita, one of the naturally appropriate activities of those who show the propensities of the vaishya varna is to take care of and protect cows (go-rakshya—Bg 18.44), it followed—Prabhupada would emphasize—that cow care should be included as a component of implementing the Gita’s teachings—not just in India, but throughout the world.

But for the varna system to be successful, there would need to be persons qualified as brahmans to lead the society. And to be a qualified brahmin meant, first of all, to be self-controlled. Self-control, in turn, meant to strictly renounce the four types of indulgence already mentioned—meat-eating, gambling, intoxication, and illicit sexuality—activities that are associated in the Bhagavata Purana (as we noted in the previous chapter) with degrading influences of Kali, namely, loss of mercifulness, loss of truthfulness, loss of austerity, and loss of purity.

To develop such a society where all these ideals and practices could be fostered, the best would be to have places in the country where cows could be maintained, and agriculture could be practiced with the help of trained oxen. Such an opportunity came for Prabhupada and his followers initially in 1968. Writing from America to an Indian acquaintance about
a recently acquired farm near Moundsville in West Virginia, Prabhupada explained:

This site situated in the midst of the beautiful West Virginia mountains provides an ideal setting for demonstrating the simplicity of naturalistic living based on brahminical culture and cow protection in Krṣṇa consciousness. Cow protection practically solves the problems of sustenance and the greater portion of time of the devotees, being not engaged in the frantic scramble of materialistic competition for food and shelter, is kept engaged in the pursuit of spiritual perfection. (Prabhupada 2017, Vedabase: Letter to Nevatiaji, 16 July 1970)

Prabhupada’s idyllic picture of “naturalistic living” that should free people from the kinds of struggle characteristic of modern city life drew considerably on pastoral imagery of the Veda that we considered in the previous chapter. The more immediate sources of this vision—the Bhagavad Gita and the Bhagavata Purana—were taken as blueprints for a way of life that would focus entirely on devotion to Krishna, the divine cowherd. Such devotion was to unfold naturally, through practical activities, including the herding of cows (to be regarded as Krishna’s cows) and preparing vegetarian food, including milk products, from the cows thus cared for—food preparations to be ritually offered to Krishna in a regular manner as part of one’s daily routine.27

Following Prabhupada’s Gaudiya Vaishnava teaching tradition, such daily routine consisting in service to Krishna was to be understood as service directly to bhagavan, the supreme person. And taking this to be the case, the problem of determining what is dharma (as we saw in Chapter 2 in relation to the Mahabharata) becomes largely solved: From the Bhagavata Purana’s bhakti perspective, dharma is fully comprehended in the practice of “unmotivated and uninterrupted” devotion to this supreme person, Krishna (Bhagavata Purana 1.2.6). Thus, with devotion to Krishna as the center of meaningful human pursuit, the prescriptive aspect of dharma

---

27Considering his early admiration for Mahatma Gandhi, a more immediate influence on Prabhupada for establishing farm communities may well have been Gandhi’s ashram experiments. On the theology and practice of daily ritual service to Krishna in the Gaudiya Vaishnava tradition and the challenges of translating this tradition in the West, see Valpey (2004, 2006).
would become clear and practically applicable in light of its descriptive aspect. As description, Prabhupada emphasized, dharma should be understood as the essential and perpetually existent, inalienable feature of all living beings, namely, that of service. All prescriptions for action—all ethical guidelines—were then to be understood and adjusted to facilitate the full comprehension of one’s identity as servant of God, bhagavan, beyond all temporal identities such as gender, race, caste, ethnicity, or nationality. The upshot of this bhakti-centered questioning of temporal designations was that, ironically, anyone could become qualified as a true brahmin (as one who comprehends, or lives in, brahman, or atemporal reality). Thus, anyone could become a custodian of dharma (in both descriptive and prescriptive senses) and, as such, anyone could become favored by Krishna, for whom (following the Bhagavata Purana) brahmins and cows were particularly objects of affection and protection.

In Chapter 6, we will look at two of ISKCON’s existing cow care projects in some detail. Here we can conclude the present sketch of Hindu cow care and cow protection ideology in its modern contexts by reviewing commonalities and differences in perspective. Dayananda, Gandhi, and Prabhupada seem to have held in common a marked valuing of hoary Indian tradition as the basis for belief in the importance of cow care as sacred duty. Gandhi’s references to tradition are highly generalized, whereas Dayananda and Prabhupada base their ideas on specific sacred texts, or selected extracts from these texts. Yet all three have, ironically, a similar investment in modernity, either by use of modern (utilitarian) reasoning, or of technology (grudgingly used by Gandhi, especially for transportation; welcomed by Prabhupada, who applied a principle found in his tradition that accommodates such use in a positive way). And, of course, all three embraced print technology to propagate their ideas.

---

28A key prooftext for this notion of identity in eternal service is found in Chaitanya Charitamrita (CC), a definitive sacred text for the Gaudiya Vaishnava tradition: “It is the living entity’s constitutional position to be an eternal servant of Kṛṣṇa because he is the marginal energy of Kṛṣṇa and a manifestation simultaneously one with and different from the Lord, like a molecular part of sunshine or fire” (Prabhupada 2017, Vedabase: CC Madhya 20.108–109, Sri Chaitanya speaking to Sanatana Gosvami, Prabhupada’s translation).
Ambedkar’s writing may be seen as challenging all three of these activists with his concern for the plight of untouchables. Perhaps the most challenging question has to do with the place and proper understanding of ahimsa, nonviolence. According to Ambedkar’s reading of ancient sacred texts, not only was cow sacrifice practiced routinely by ancient brahmins, but also meat-eating—including beef—constituted some of their standard diet. Beyond these claims is his charge that the entire Hindu system of social stratification, which is thought to be based on ideas of purity and pollution, amounts to a system of exclusion and violence against the disenfranchised classes. And this state of affairs would seem to directly implicate the ethos of cow care and cow protection as widely understood and practiced today.

Ancient Texts, Modern Controversies

“Sacrifice and murder, offering and killing: a conundrum from the very beginning, which history cannot unravel. Indeed, history will be marked by failures to unravel it” (Calasso 2015, p. 258). Robert Calasso pauses to make this trenchant observation in his study of the ancient Sanskrit text on sacrificial ritual, the Shatapatha Brahmana. The question that drives his study is simple: Why is killing considered necessary in the Vedic sacrifice?29 His answer is that it is a conundrum, one that forces us to consider the paradoxical nature of the human condition, and to reflect on a similar, pressing question for today: Why it is that our species routinely kills millions of animals daily. The Shatapatha Brahmana is a long work that has confounded and largely repelled scholars for its exasperating sacrificial ritual detail and seemingly far-fetched stories that explain the rituals. For us to note is, as Calasso shows, the deep discomfort the text maintains about killing, even as it insists on its necessity.

Here we want to attend to the matter of ritual killing (in sacrifice) and its apparent opposite practice, that of ahimsa or non-harming, especially

---

29Calasso’s question is actually about killing and ritual sacrifice in general, and he finds the Vedic sacrifice and its treatment in the Shatapatha Brahmana to be the most elaborate and detailed, hence most conducive for applying his reflections (2015, pp. 279–294).
as the subject has been treated from the late nineteenth century in relation to cows and special regard for cows.\textsuperscript{30} Since modern concern for cows has been predicated largely on passages in the ancient Vedic and post-Vedic texts that are regarded as more or less revelatory, it becomes imperative to clarify the meaning of these texts as thoroughly as possible, preferably such that all ambiguities are removed. To complicate matters is the question of qualification and authority to interpret. We find ourselves treading in areas that have surely been well charted, but in radically different ways by different map-makers.\textsuperscript{31} And although “map is not territory,” one naturally seeks competent guidance to traverse this rugged terrain.

In 1881, the year after Swami Dayananda Saraswati published his cow protection tract \textit{Gokarunānidhi}, the librarian of the Asiatic Society, Rajendralala Mitra (1824–1891) published a collection of his own previously published articles (all in English) in a two-volume work \textit{Indo-Aryans: Contributions towards the Elucidation of their Ancient and Medieval History}. Therein, amidst articles on relatively innocuous subjects such as “Principles of Indian Temple Architecture” or “Dress and Ornaments in Ancient India” Mitra included in volume I, as the sixth chapter, an essay entitled “Beef in Ancient India,” an article he had published nine years earlier in the \textit{Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal}. Mitra opened his essay with this observation (Mitra 1881, p. 354):

\begin{quote}
The title of this essay will, doubtless, prove highly offensive to most of my countrymen … The idea of beef—the flesh of the earthly representative of the divine Bhagavatī—as an article of food is so shocking to the Hindus, that thousands over thousands of the more orthodox among them never repeat the counterpart of the word in their vernaculars, and many and dire have been the sanguinary conflicts which the shedding of the blood of cows has caused in this country.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{30}See Bryant (2006) for an excellent discussion of textual evidence of animal sacrifice in India and the development of an ethos of avoiding the same, with detailed references and clear account of a historical trajectory toward nonviolence.

\textsuperscript{31}See Leslie (2003, pp. 17–23), for a discussion titled “Fact, Text and Religious Meaning,” relevant to the present issue, as she deals with conflicting views of Hindu practitioners and Indologist textual scholars over a controversy having to do with the identity of a contemporary Hindu tradition and differing views of their founder, the sage Valmiki.
And yet, he writes, the texts he will refer to “are so authentic and incontrovertible that they cannot, for a moment, be gainsaid” (p. 355). He then proceeds to provide several references from ancient and medieval texts that indicate the practice both of sacrificial cow slaughter and the eating of the slaughtered meat. Especially extensive are references from the Taittiriya Brahmana (TB, associated with the Black Yajurveda): Oxen or bulls of particular color or markings, or with drooping horns; cows of one or two colors, barren or able to conceive, or having suffered miscarriage—each are to be immolated and offered to particular divinities, including Vishnu, Vayu, Indra, Agni, Pushan, Rudra, and Surya, at appropriate times in appropriate sacrifices. Most such sacrifices would have involved the immolation of single animals; according to the texts, however, some required the immolation of dozens of animals. In the case of the grand ashvamedha sacrifice, writes Mitra (citing TB 2.651), 180 animals should be sacrificed, including horses, bulls, cows, and goats. That the sacrificed bovine’s meat would have then been eaten is indicated, Mitra argues, by the detailed injunctions on how the carcass should be cut up. Further, the Gopatha Brahmana text specifies to which of the sacrificial priests and assistants which of the cut pieces should then be distributed for eating (Mitra 1881, pp. 373–375).

One Vedic ritual Mitra reports on concerns hospitable reception of an honored guest, which includes an offering called the “honey mixture” (madhuparka), regarded as a simplified version of more elaborate sacrificial rites. According to the author’s summary of the Ashvalayana Sutra, an early ritual text, after some preliminary gestures of welcoming (including providing a drink of yogurt mixed with honey), Mitra writes (p. 381),

A cow was next brought forward and offered to the guest; whereupon he [the guest] said, “My sin is destroyed, destroyed is my sin,” and then ordered the immolation of the animal with the words Om kuru, “accomplish, Amen.”

---

32 See also Denny (2013) for a brief examination of similar Vedic/post-Vedic textual prescriptions in the context of Christian reflections on sacrifice. See also Knipe (2015, pp. 209–218) for descriptions of current Vedic sacrifices, including a goat sacrifice, by an orthodox brahmin community in Andhra Pradesh.
In other words, according to Mitra, the guest was to consent to having the animal slaughtered for his, the guest’s, meal. But the guest could, alternatively, order the cow to be released, a gesture for which he should intone the appropriate Rigvedic mantra: “This cow is the mother of the Rudras and the daughter of the Vasus, the sister of the Adityas, and the pivot of our happiness; therefore I solemnly say unto all wise men, kill not this harmless sacred cow. Let her drink water and eat grass” (pp. 381–382).  

But then Mitra tells his readers that the ritual text in question, with further emphasis by its traditional commentator Ganganarayana, insists that even if the guest orders the cow released, the ensuing feast must nonetheless include meat acquired by some other means.

As it happens, though, the commentarial tradition continues after Ganganarayana, with different ideas. One later ritual text, Mitra informs us, quotes the Ashvalayana Sutra on the method of offering the honey mixture to an honored guest, but then quotes from Upapuranas—regarded as less authoritative, much later texts—to the effect that in the present age, the kali-yuga, the rite should be done without slaughtering a cow. Finally, coming to the end of his essay, Mitra notes further steps taken in later times by the brahmanical orthodoxy to enjoin avoidance of ritual animal slaughter, recognizing that times had changed, such that animal slaughter was strongly disapproved by the public. Mitra suggests (somewhat similar to Ambedkar), that the public referred to must have been such that Buddhist presence, with its strong rejection of brahmanical sacrificial practices, had prevailed. In Mitra’s estimation, by the influence of the Buddhists, “… [the Brahmans] found the doctrine of respect for animal life too strong

---

33The Ashvalayana Sutra (1.24.32) here refers to a Rigveda verse, 8.101.15. Jamison and Brereton’s translation (2014, p. 1213): “Mother of the Rudras, daughter of the Vasus, sister of the Adityas, navel of immortality—I now proclaim to observant people: do not smite the blameless cow—Aditi.”

34Mitra (pp. 384–385) gives the relevant reference from the Aditya Purana and the Brihannaradiya Purana (without verse numbers), both of which would be counted as Upapuranas, or supplementary Puranas. The Aditya Purana citation is part of a longer list of several activities prohibited in consideration of the present age. Notably, the list concludes (Mitra’s translation), “[these practices] have been abstained from by noble [mahatmas] and learned men at the beginning of the Kali Yuga for the well-being of mankind. The practice of revered persons is proof [sādhūnāṁ prāmāṇam] as potent as that of the Vedas.” The Brihannaradiya reference, Mitra notes, includes some additional items to be rejected in the present age, including horse sacrifices and cow sacrifices (asvamedha and gomedha).
and too popular to be overcome, and therefore gradually and impercep-
tibly adopted it in such a manner as to make it appear a part of Śastra [scripture]” (p. 387).\(^{35}\)

Although we don’t know to what extent there may have occurred the
sort of reaction Mitra anticipated to his article, the book *A Review of
‘Beef in Ancient India’*, written by an unidentified author, was published
by Gita Press ninety years later, in 1971, as an explicit critical response
to it.\(^{36}\) For its refutational purposes, the book makes considerable use of
extracts from ancient and medieval ritual and other sacred Sanskrit texts,
though the author also ranges over other types of argumentation.\(^{37}\) And
while the book addresses some specifics of Mitra’s article, it also raises and
challenges related issues and claims for ancient practices of cow sacrifice
and beef-eating from other sources.

The Gita Press book devotes seventy pages—almost one-third of the
work—to one topic that Rajendralala Mitra discusses in his article, namely,
the “honey mixture” (*madhuparka*) rite of hospitality. Martialing numer-
ous references from a wide variety of post-Vedic texts, the author first shows
that the ingredients of the *madhuparka* drink surely include no meat, what
to speak of beef (although Mitra never argued that the drink was expected

\(^{35}\) See Stewart (2014) for a discussion of Buddhist anti-sacrificial attitude in relation to Hindu
practices.

\(^{36}\) Like the article it reviews, this book is in English. The title page includes reference to two editions, of
5000 and 1100 copies respectively, and invites its readers to freely share its content: “(No permission
is required to publish, reproduce or translate the whole or any part of this book by anyone in any
language).” The first edition was published by Gita Press and the second, with additional material
included by “the compiler” (p. 2), was published as noted in our “References”; page references here
are to the latter edition. Further investigation has indicated to me that the author was the late
Haridas Shastri (1918–2013), a Gaudiya Vaishnava scholar of Vrindavan, respected for his extensive
knowledge of Hindu sacred texts and his prolific writing and translations. I refer to his cow care
practices in Chapter 4.

\(^{37}\) One notices a possibly well-justified post-colonial resentment to foreign influence: The
author/compiler clearly aims to cast suspicion on Western Indologists with an early chapter, “Western
Indologists: A Study in Motives,” for which an author attribution is provided, “Pt. Bhagawad
Datt (with minor additions).” Whatever Western Indologists’ motivations, we may also note the
meticulous research done in the mid- to late nineteenth century by German Indologists, some of
whom focused specifically on the details of Vedic textual accounts of ritual procedures for animal
sacrifice. It is unlikely that Indian critics of Western Indology would have had access to these German
writings (one of which has just been made available as a facsimile in 2018. See Schwab [1886] n.d.).
For an overview of scholarship on the issue of beef-eating in ancient India, followed by his own,
expanded scholarship on the same, see Jha (2009).
to contain meat). Next are several references from the later Ramayana and Mahabharata epics, indicating that a cow has been merely gifted to the honored guest immediately after the guest has received and drunk the _madhuparka_ (Review 1983, pp. 94–110). The author then reviews the relevant Sanskrit passages of the particular text to which Mitra refers, the Ashvalayana Sutra, examining quite technical issues of translation, multiple meanings of words, and also comparison of similar passages in another, similar text. Essentially, the claim is that it is either a mistaken reading or an interpolation that a cow might be offered for slaughter to a guest. An analogy is suggested: As a host will show hospitality to a guest by saying “My house is yours, do feel at home,” it is never expected that the guest will then actually behave as if it is indeed his or her own home. Similarly, a cultured host will offer a cow as a gift to an honored guest, but it would not be expected that the guest would actually accept the cow, much less order it to be killed (p. 138).

Or would he? At a certain point we run up against the limiting wall that unavoidably looms when dealing with ancient texts—the difficulty or impossibility of seeing through the texts to the practices of actual persons of ancient times: To what extent are the ancient injunctive texts of India practice-descriptive, or to what extent are they ideal-prescriptive? The Gita Press’s Review does not consider the prescriptive Taittiriya Brahmana passage referred to by Mitra (which, we recall, quite explicitly enjoins various types of cows to be selected for immolation in specific sacrifices). Assuming that these injunctions were to be taken literally (and the Review author would likely question this, considering his arguments on other texts), one wonders where and when and for whom these injunctions were intended. As far as the Gita Press’s Review is concerned, the primary, broader point to be understood is the intent or spirit of the Vedic corpus as a whole. The Review declares, “The primary principle of the Veda is to view all beings in friendly compassion” (p. 163), providing a few short passages

---

38 An intriguing reference that could indeed have historical significance comes from the Chinese Buddhist visitor to India, Hsuan T’ang (Xuanzang, fl. c. 602–664): Indians “are forbidden to eat the flesh of the ox, the ass, the elephant, the horse, the pig, the dog, the fox, the wolf, the lion, the monkey, and all the hairy kind. Those who eat them are despised and scorned, and are universally reprobated.” The word for “ox” (niu) can also mean “cow” (Beal [1884] 1983, p. 89; quoted in Wedemeyer 2007, p. 400 and note).
from diverse texts as support for this claim. It is through this hermeneutic lens, the Review urges, that it becomes easy to accurately interpret all questionable passages (those seeming to indicate animal immolation or cow immolation) as something other than violence to animals, especially given the multiple meanings of many critical terms.

And yet even if one accepts a reading of the Vedas’ primary principle as being “friendly compassion” for all beings, one cannot ignore the pervasive presence of sacrificial language in the ancient texts, nor the mention of sacrificial animals. Clearly a sacrificial cult existed, rooted in the Veda, and it is not unreasonable to suppose that animals—including bovines, precisely because they were highly regarded—were immolated in certain sacrificial rites at some early period. But there also appears to have been a current of discomfort with the sacrificial cult that nonetheless would not, unlike such movements as those of the Jains and Buddhists, dare to reject the Veda outright. This current can be seen in later, post-Vedic literature, beginning with the Hindu “law books,” the Dharmashastras.

**Nonviolence Preferred in Dharmashastra**

As we have seen in Chapter 2, it bears repeating that the ancient Vedic and later post-Vedic religious culture—which regarded various divinities as integral actors in the cosmos—revolved around the practice of *yajna* or sacrifice (with or without the immolation of animals). The three spheres of existence—nature, humanity, and divinity—found their connecting point in sacrificial rites performed by humans, as the core practice for realizing dharma—the principle of cosmic sustenance and order. Providing what may be called “legal affirmation and support” of the dharma of sacrifice are the genre of texts called Dharmashastras, several—but predominantly four—prescriptive works that cover a wide range of topics, with emphasis on observances in terms of *varna* and *ashrama*—occupation and life stages. Among these texts, the Manusmriti (Ordinances of Manu) came to be
regarded as most important and the most representative of brahmanical orthodoxy.\textsuperscript{39}

We are concerned with the first part of Manu’s fifth chapter, which delineates proper and improper food, in particular for “twice-born” (\textit{dvija}) persons—those of the brahmin, kshatriya, and vaishya \textit{varnas} who have undergone a “second birth” initiation into Vedic study in their youth. Famously, this section shows apparent ambiguity, with some statements sanctioning the eating of meat, and other statements forbidding or condemning it. Commentators, beginning already with Medhatithi in the tenth century, have puzzled over it. We will view Medhatithi’s comments in Chapter 5, but here we can see how Manu shows a preference for nonviolence and abstention from meat, while still honoring the Vedic sacrificial principle and practice.

Manu’s fifth chapter begins with a list of foods, identifying them as either pure or impure (5.5–21).\textsuperscript{40} Then, at the end of this list (v. 22–23), is a reference to practices of earlier times—obviously prior to this particular text—as sanctioning animal sacrifice:

To perform sacrifices Brahmins may kill sanctioned animals and birds, as also to feed their dependents; Agastya did that long ago. For, at the ancient sacrifices of seers and at the Soma offerings of Brahmins and Kṣatriyas, the sacrificial cakes were prepared with the meat of permitted animals and birds. (transl. Olivelle 2005, p. 139)

\textsuperscript{39}The Manusmriti, also known as the Manavadharmashastra, is generally dated from 200 BCE to 200 CE (Rocher 2003, p. 110). For a broad theoretical discussion of animals in Dharmashastra, see Gutiérrez (2018).

\textsuperscript{40}Noteworthy here is the \textit{non}–inclusion of bovine animals as forbidden food, while the specification of certain forbidden animals (such as single-hoofed animals, and several types of birds) suggests that other animal flesh—of animals \textit{not} listed—was permitted for such persons’ consumption. Countering the idea that the absence bovines in the list of forbidden food indicate its allowance, I have heard the argument that there is no mention of cows because no one would have dared even think of slaughtering a cow. However, verse 26 concludes the passage with the statement, “I have described above completely (\textit{aśeṣataḥ}) what foods are forbidden and what permitted to the twice-born.” Further, Heesterman points out that the list is based on purity/impurity identifications of animals, and therefore cows, which are considered pure animals, could hardly be expected to be included in a list of animals forbidden to be eaten (because they are impure) (Heesterman, in Alsdorf 2010, p. 91).
The next section introduces nonviolence with exceptions for sacrifice, conditions under which the eating of permitted meat is sanctioned. These conditions have mainly to do with requirements to perform prescribed sacrificial rites in which the animal(s) to be eaten would be ritually immolated. Although Manu seems to waver here by including statements suggesting divine sanction for unrestricted flesh consumption (vv. 5.28–30), he clearly wants to set boundaries (v. 5.31):

“The sacrifice is the reason for eating meat”—this, the tradition says, is the rule of gods. Doing it for any other purpose is called the rule of fiends [rakshasas—man-eating ogres]. (Olivelle, p. 139)

Conforming to the law regarding meat-eating assures that one remains sinless, whether one has bought the meat or directly killed the animal. However, Manu warns (v. 5.33), “Except in a time of adversity, a twice-born man who knows the rules must never eat meat in contravention of the rules; if he eats meat in contravention of the rules, after death he will be eaten forcibly by those very animals.” And again, we see affirmation of Vedic sacrificial authority when Manu enjoins, quite surprisingly (v. 5.35),

If a man refuses to eat meat after he has been ritually commissioned according to rule, after death he will become an animal for twenty-one lifetimes. 41 (Olivelle, p. 140)

And then, just two stanzas later, appears an intriguing shift toward ahimsa with a suggestion to make a substitution (Manu 5.37–38):

---

41 Jan Heesterman’s (in Alsdorf 2010, p. 92) explanatory surmise may be helpful: The Vedic ritual system is comparable to the social system (particularly in early Buddhism) wherein the monk, who does not kill, can remain sinless thanks to the sin of the layman, who kills and offers to the monk. Within the Vedic ritual system, the one who is “ritually commissioned” (in Manu 5.35) refers to a priest, who is commissioned by a sponsor, a sacrificer (a householder, usually a kshatriya), who must abstain from the meat of the sacrifice. Thus, there is a sort of sacrificial “division of labor” that, by its own logic of cosmic order and affirmation of life, must include affirmation and enactment of death, but in such a way that both victims and priests (who are simultaneously regarded as guests at the “banquet” of the sacrifice along with the gods) are guaranteed elevation after death (provided—and this is crucial—that the priests perform the rituals and pronounce the mantras correctly).
If he gets the urge [for meat], let him make an animal [replica] out of butter or flour; but he must never entertain the desire to kill an animal for a futile reason \[vrthā\].\(^{42}\) When a man kills an animal for a futile reason, after death he will be subject in birth after birth to being slain as many times as the number of hairs on that animal.\(^{43}\) (Olivelle, p. 140)

One might well ask what Manu would consider to be the crucial difference between lawfully sacrificed animal flesh eating and unlawful, not ritually sacrificed animal flesh. This is hinted in verse 44, which assures that the mantras of the Vedic texts have the power to consecrate an animal for sacrifice, thus inoculating it from actual harm: “When a killing (hiṃsa) is sanctioned by the Veda and well-established in this mobile and immobile creation, it should be regarded definitely as a non-killing (abhiṃsām eva); for it is from the Veda that the Law (dharma) has shined forth.” Further, verses just prior to this explain what makes prescribed sacrifices so much different from non-sanctioned animal killing (vv. 5.39–40, 42):

The Self-existent One himself created domestic animals for sacrifice, and the sacrifice is for the prosperity of this whole world. Within the sacrifice, therefore, killing is not killing. When plants, domestic animals, trees, beasts, and birds die for the sake of a sacrifice, they will in turn earn superior births … When a twice-born man who knows the true meaning of the Veda (veda-tattvārtha-vit) kills animals for these purposes, he leads himself and those animals to the highest state (uttamaṃ gatim). (Olivelle 2005, p. 140)\(^{44}\)

\(^{42}\)Vṛthā means “at will, at pleasure, at random, easily, lightly, wantonly, frivolously” (Monier-Williams 1995).

\(^{43}\)To “make an animal out of butter or flour” would be an example of “double substitution” according to Brian K. Smith, who extensively discusses substitution as a central concept in modern theories of sacrifice (Smith [1989] 1998, pp. 172–193). The substitution of butter or flour for an animal, when properly done (presumably by making a form resembling the animal in some way—samanya—pp. 183–184) would be entirely within the fold of the Vedic procedure, whereby the exact same mantras and actions would be performed “as if” the actual animal were offered. And yet, Calasso (2015, pp. 285–286) warns, one should not think that an offering of rice and barley as substitute for animals is not killing. The Shatapatha Brahmana (11.1.2.1) states: “Now when they lay out the sacrifice, celebrating it, they kill it; and when they press King Soma, they kill him; and when they obtain the victim’s consent and cut it up, they kill it. It is by means of a pestle and mortar and with two millstones that they kill the offering of grain.”

\(^{44}\)This and similar statements of Hindu sacred texts may be the inspiration for some later Hindu traditions maintaining the idea that ancient Vedic sacrificial priests had the power, through correct recitation of mantra, to in effect bring sacrificial animals back to life immediately after immolation.
Thus, in this section of Manusmriti, the propriety of Vedic ritual animal slaughter would seem to be strongly affirmed at the same time that an alternative to it (involving self-restraint and substitution of butter or flour for animals) is suggested. And the clear distinction between ritually sanctified meat and non-sanctified meat points strongly to the value of restraint from meat-eating. And yet, here there seems to be suggested a coexistence of two moralities—a ritual morality (in which “time and again life has to be rewon out of death”) and an ascetic morality (in which “death is no longer periodically conquered, but permanently eliminated”) (Heesterman, in Alsdorf 2010, p. 92). 45

A third section of this Manusmriti passage most strongly affirms ahimsa and vegetarianism, showing an almost—but not entirely—unambiguous endorsement of complete abstention from animal flesh. Stanzas in this last phase appeal to a consideration of negative consequences and a sense of disgust at the slaughtering process (vv. 5.48–49). It also includes the grave declaration quoted by Swami Dayananda that we previously encountered (5.51). In Olivelle’s translation (p. 140):

The man who authorizes, the man who butchers, the man who slaughters, the man who buys or sells, the man who cooks, the man who serves, and the man who eats—these are all killers.

And then, to highlight the contrast between the sacrificial culture and the culture of abstention (without rejecting the former), the text equates the benefit of entirely abstaining from meat to the benefit of performing an annual horse sacrifice for one hundred years (a sacrifice in which, according to prescriptions found in other texts, many animals are immolated). I have said almost completely unambiguous because stanza 56, the last in this

45“Ritual morality”: Nicholas Sutton uses this phrase in reference to the Mahabharata, noted by Hiltebeitel (2016, pp. 27–28). “Coexistence” may be too mild. Sutton (2000, pp. 317–325) notes the sharp critique of ritual morality in the Mahabharata, Moksha-dharma Parva, to be discussed in the next section.
passage, holds out that “There is no fault in eating meat, in drinking liquor, or in having sex; that is the natural activity of creatures. Abstaining from such activity, however, brings great rewards” (Olivelle, p. 141).

There is a sense in which, because these three sections of Manusmriti are back to back, the text as a whole is offering a spectrum of positions from which persons or groups from varied dispositions might find acknowledgment of their propensities and direction for human fulfillment. Seen in this way, it reflects the inclusivism of the tradition—retaining all layers of culture in a multidimensional present. At the same time, the Manusmriti seems to appeal to one’s reason to choose the way of abstention as the best, even if only for selfish reasons. Further, that we find such an appeal to reason within an ancient Hindu lawbook is important, showing—in our context of Hindu dietary regulation—that its rules, regulations, and laws admitted of the human capacity and demand for reasoning, in turn rooted in the necessity to find and uphold value and meaning beyond immediate, selfish desire.

**Thinking Aloud in the Sacrifice of War**

The Manusmriti is one of several law texts concerned largely with prescriptive dharma. In contrast to these Dharmashastras in terms of genre are the great Sanskrit epics, the monumental narratives, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, the latter of which we have examined briefly in the previous chapter. As already noted there, the Mahabharata shows “a sense of increasingly pressing need to establish clearly the principles and practices

46Ludwig Alsdorf expounded his theory that these three sections betray three layers of diachronic development (Alsdorf 2010, pp. 17–22). In his review of Alsdorf’s text (Alsdorf 2010, pp. 90–93), Heesterman voices reservations about the theory to the reality of India where, much as today, one can expect to see simultaneous differing attitudes and practices in ancient times. In any case, while there may be some truth to chronological progression of the text’s development, the final redaction’s inclusion of all three perspectives suggests a concern to be inclusive and to show the existence of options within the law. Olivelle (2005, p. 279) see the passage as having two positions—a traditional one that regards meat-eating as the natural order of creation—and an ethic of vegetarianism and noninjury that nonetheless acknowledges restrictive parameters of the Vedic sacrifice. The latter view, he suggests, may be taken as Manu’s, considering that it follows the first (unfavored or rejected—pūrva-pākṣa—view), and does so in much more elaboration. In Chapter 5, we will see how the traditional commentator Medatithi deals with the passage, coming to much the same conclusion.
for human well-being, due to a felt acceleration of time’s degrading influence.” This story of fratricidal war is no less concerned with dharma than the Manusmriti. Indeed, as Vishwa Adluri writes (2017, p. 386), “Next to the Manusmrti (which it frequently invokes), there is no other work as central for the formulation of dharma in the Indian tradition.”

The epic’s context in cosmic time—of a fast-approaching Kali age—conjoins with its occasional rendering of the story’s tragic fight between the two sides of a family as a cosmic battle, one that is occasionally represented in the text as a grand “sacrifice of war” (<i>rana-yajna</i>). It thus tells of one episode in the perpetual battle between the gods and anti-gods, of dharma and <i>adharma</i> (acts in opposition to or negligent of dharma) as they collide on the plane of the temporal world. And as they collide, questions arise as to what constitutes dharma, the questioning frequently unfolding in the form of stories, typically presenting a dharma conundrum, as we saw with the story of King Nṛgī, whose generosity in gifting cows got him into trouble by no fault of his own. There is another story in the Mahabharata involving correct performance of ritual sacrifice that concerns our present issue, the development or unfolding of the ahimsa concept and ethos in Hindu literature. This story is about the elevation, degradation, and again elevation to heaven of an important figure in the Mahabharata, King Vasu. As summarized by Simon Brodbeck (2009, p. 387, from MBh 12.324),

> The rṣis [rishis—sages] and devas [gods] argued about whether sacrificial offerings should be vegetarian (thus the rṣis) or not (thus the devas). Vasu, asked to arbitrate, decided in favour of the devas, and the rṣis expelled him. The devas arranged for him to be fed while in his hole (12.324:23-5), and eventually Nārāyaṇa [identified as Vishnu] sent Garuḍa [his eagle carrier] to fetch him to Brahmaloka [the divine abode].

The point of contention between the sages and the gods is the interpretation of one word in a Vedic ritual text, namely, the word <i>aja</i>. Does it mean “he-goat,” as the gods contend, or does it mean “a kind of rice,”

47One might even argue that the Mahabharata comes prior to the Manusmriti in centrality for matters of dharma, in terms of popularity and familiarity for contemporary Hindus.

48One instance of calling the battle a <i>rana-yajna</i> is MBh 5.57.10–18, noted by Feller-Jatavallabhula (1999).
as the sages insist. The fact that Vasu is otherwise known in the text for his nonviolent behavior complicates the story. And it is this narrative complexity that serves as one expression of the tradition “thinking aloud” about sacrificial ethics and the problematic of killing supposedly for the sake of maintaining dharma.

Mahabharata’s strongest pronouncements on the virtue of ahimsa are undoubtedly those in the so-called Ahimsa-Phalam, “Fruit of Nonviolence” section of the Anushasana Parva (13.115–17). In this section, the dying grandsire Bhishma instructs Yudhishthira that nonviolence should be practiced in speech, thought, act, and eating; then he speaks extensively on the evils of meat-eating, citing the Seven Rishis and others. Yet even after elaborating on the evils of meat-eating, he still allows for it at Vedic sacrifices and in hunting. Despite this concession, he concludes unambiguously (13.117.37–38; Hiltebeitel 2016, p. 136),

*Ahimsā* is the highest dharma, *ahimsā* is the supreme restraint, *ahimsā* is the highest gift, *ahimsā* is the highest penance, *ahimsā* is the highest sacrifice, *ahimsā* is the supreme force, *ahimsā* is the highest friendship, *ahimsā* is the highest happiness, *ahimsā* is the highest truth, *ahimsā* is the highest revelation.

It will be helpful to appreciate the richness of the Mahabharata’s approach to nonviolence and to dharma in general by recognizing its clear emphasis on a twofold typology of dharma, namely, that of worldly engagement (*pravritti dharma*) and that of disengagement from the world (*nivritti dharma*). As Adluri notes (2017, p. 387), the Mahabharata never claims that *pravritti dharma* can lead to freedom from suffering. Rather, the human world of activity for which ritual sacrifice is considered integral will always be such that the best one can hope to achieve is a modicum of propriety that will, ideally, lead one to question and finally reject this

---

49 *A Review of ‘Beef in Ancient India’* (N/A 1983, p. 178) quotes this Mahabharata verse (compiler’s translation, 12.337.4–5; 12.324.4–5): “*Yajñas* should be performed with seeds—this is the Vedic tradition. *Aja* are a variety of seeds, therefore it is not proper to slaughter he-goats. Wherever there is animal-slaughter in *yajñas*, that is not the way of good men.”

50 See Adluri (2018) for a detailed discussion of this episode.
orientation in favor of renunciation. And the Mahabharata gives ample representation of nivritti dharma followers who overtly challenge those engaged in acts of pravritti dharma, specifically in relation to the latters’ engagement in ritual acts of animal sacrifice. One example is in the Ashvamedha Parvan (14.28, summarized by Sutton [2000, p. 323]):

Kṛṣṇa recounts a conversation between a priest and a renunciant (adhvaryu and yati). Seeing a goat about to be slaughtered in a yajña, the yati condemns the priest by saying, ‘This is an act of violence’ (v. 7). To this the priest replies that the goat will not cease to exist and will benefit from being offered; this is the version of the Vedas which approve of the ritual he is about to perform. The ascetic responds by sarcastically asking whether, as the whole performance is for the goat’s benefit, he has the support of the animal’s parents and relatives (vv. 12-15). He then asserts that not harming is the highest of all types of dharma, before moving on to an exposition of Śāmkhya philosophy.

In concluding for the present our discussion of the Mahabharata, there remains for our attention its most quoted portion, the Bhagavad Gita. This seven-hundred verse interlude in the Mahabharata’s dramatic story consists of Krishna’s famous dialogue with his friend and devotee, the warrior Arjuna. The Bhagavad Gita is of particular concern with respect to the issue of violence versus nonviolence that bears directly on our present subject of modern Indian controversy related to cows and cow care.

---

51Adluri (2018, p. 59n3) offers an apt definition of ahimsa to highlight its function in the Mahabharata: “Ahimsā is the vantage point from which pravr. tti [worldly engagement] is critiqued.” Thus, ahimsa is more than “non-harming” or “noninjury.” Rather, it is the key term for “a hermeneutic that hints at and enables the transition to a peaceful nivr. tti [disengagement from the world] register…”

52The celebrated Bengali author Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) portrayed a similar debate over the right versus wrong of ritual animal sacrifice in his 1917 English play, Sacrifice. See Burley (2019) for a summary and analysis of the play. Burley calls attention to its complexity and its occasional echoing of the Bhagavad-gita’s Vedantic expressions of time and the indestructible self.
Violence, Nonviolence—and Cows in the Bhagavad Gita and Bhagavata Purana

Aside from its long commentarial tradition (running back to the eighth century CE), in the last 150 years the Bhagavad Gita has enjoyed prominence in Indian public discourse. Both Mahatma Gandhi and Swami Prabhupada had high regard for the “Gita” and both considered Krishna’s teachings therein to be important or foundational to their views on proper regard for bovines. And yet, Gandhi and Prabhupada appear to have had entirely contradictory interpretations of the work in important respects, specifically regarding its teachings about nonviolence. Before examining this divergence, let us note briefly that “cow” appears thrice in Krishna’s Gita discourse, in each case included in lists of different contents. The first instance concerns the way a pundit—a learned person—perceives other beings: Whether a learned brahmin, a cow, an elephant, a dog, or a “dog eater,” the true pundit sees them all with “equal vision” (Bg. 5.18). The second instance is a passing reference to the celestial Kama-dhuk (“Wish-yielder,” 10.28) cow with which Krishna identifies himself, in relation to all cows. The third instance is within a list of qualities and duties for members of the four varnas (social-occupational orders—see footnote 23 in this chapter), simply stating that a vaishya may engage in farming, cow protection (go-raksha), or business (Bg 18.44). These references all relate to different aspects of dharma. No less so, they are related to the Gita’s major theme of bhakti—devotion—with important ramifications that we will consider here and in Chapter 5.

Gandhi’s first encounter with the Gita, in 1889, was in Sir Edwin Arnold’s English verse translation The Song Celestial (1885). The Gita would come to occupy a central place in his reading life, and he would come to consider himself as a dedicated practitioner of its tenets. Indeed, he would consider himself qualified to expound on the Gita’s meaning because of his experience in its practice, which led him to find within its pages, despite appearances to the contrary, a central place for the principle of ahimsa (Clough 2002, p. 68). One way he arrives at this understanding is by an allegorical reading:
I regard Duryodhana [the arch-enemy of Arjuna, the main antagonist in the Mahabharata] and his party as the baser impulses in man, and Arjuna and his party as the higher impulses. The field of battle is our own body. An eternal battle is going on between the two camps and the poet seer has vividly described it. Krishna is the Dweller within, ever whispering in a pure heart. (*Discourses on the Gita*, pp. 12–13; quoted in Clough 2002, p. 73)

Gandhi’s allegorical reading allows him to, in effect, shift the violence of battle from the external world in which Krishna urges Arjuna to fight, instead making of the conflict a battle within, of opposed “baser” and “higher” inner impulses. By this hermeneutical move, he can argue that the practice of self-control—which Krishna surely also advocates in the Gita—is the pivotal teaching. For Gandhi, from this perspective, the assiduous yogi (yoga practitioner) becomes naturally nonviolent in the outer world. Such a person, guided by the “whispering” of the “Dweller within,” will always act beneficently in all circumstances.

In contrast to Gandhi, whom he explicitly criticized for his allegorical interpretation of the Gita, Swami Prabhupada was, in many respects, a literalist. Indeed, as suggested in the title of his English Gita translation and commentary—*Bhagavad Gita As It Is*—he urged readers to take the dialogue of Krishna and Arjuna as historical—though surely very ancient—reality, that had occurred on an actual battlefield in present-day northern India. And whereas Gandhi claimed qualification for interpreting the Gita on the basis of his own lifelong experience practicing the Gita’s tenets, Prabhupada insisted that full qualification comes only if one submissively receives the teaching through Krishna’s recognized representative. And such a representative would need to be connected to Krishna by an unbroken succession of teachers (*guru-parampara*) extending back in time to Vyasa, the original writer of the text (who, it is understood, had directly audited Krishna’s dialogue with Arjuna) (Prabhupada 1983, pp. 3–4).

Thus, for Swami Prabhupada, the salient message of the Gita can hardly be considered nonviolence, since throughout the dialogue Krishna marshals reasons for Arjuna to take up weapons and fight in the ensuing battle. Rather, the core message is to be realized by recognizing the special, devotional (bhakti) relationship between Krishna and Arjuna—between the
supreme, divine person, and the human devotee. To be sure, the virtue of ahimsa is extolled in the Gita, as one of several virtues of the self-controlled yogi (which Arjuna is advised to become); and surely it is a virtue of great importance, both for self- and world-maintenance. However, Prabhupada would insist, one cannot ignore the fact that Krishna commands Arjuna to fight. Rather, one does well to take all of Krishna’s instructions in the Gita into account, one of which is the simple method Krishna prescribes for pleasing him. In Prabhupada’s translation,

   If one offers Me with love and devotion a leaf, a flower, a fruit or water, I will accept it. (Bg. 9.26)

For Prabhupada, aside from the simplicity and inclusivity that this verse suggests, it also suggests dietary restriction, which is to say that Krishna is vegetarian, and therefore a Krishna-bhakta—one who is dedicated to the life of service to Krishna—will necessarily be likewise vegetarian. Prabhupada wrote in his commentary to this verse,

   One who loves Kṛṣṇa [Krishna] will give Him whatever He wants, and he avoids offering anything which is undesirable or unasked. Thus meat, fish and eggs should not be offered to Kṛṣṇa. If He desired such things as offerings, He would have said so. Instead He clearly requests that a leaf, fruit, flowers and water be given to Him, and He says of this offering, “I will accept it.” (Prabhupada 1983, p. 488, Bg. 9.26 Purport)

Such vegetarian offerings to Krishna are to be understood as sacrificial practices, as an aspect of the ritual component to the devotional form of sacrifice outlined by Krishna in the Gita, especially in its third chapter. Based on this devotional context of Krishna-bhakti, the pundit previously mentioned is understood to have such vision by which one views all

---

53 In emphasizing the necessity to act, Krishna distinguishes “ignorant” from “learned” persons in terms of attachment to and detachment from results, respectively. Those who are detached are enjoined to act for the benefit of the world, by showing example of detached action (Bg. 3.25). This is a different concept from the dichotomous engagement/disengagement typology mentioned previously (pravritti/nivritti), as Krishna insists that it is not possible for anyone to desist from action (nivritti) for even a moment (Bg. 3.5); rather, a self-controlled person must act out of duty, without attachment (Bg. 3.19). Such duty could, as in the case of Arjuna, call for violent action, but certainly never against innocent creatures.
humans—cultured or otherwise—and animals of all varieties as “equal” (*sama*): Because Krishna “stands in the heart of all beings” (Bg. 18.61), Krishna’s devotee is pleased to remember this by treating all beings appropriately. Similarly, Prabhupada would explain, in a spirit of service and sacrifice to Krishna and adherence to his directions in the Gita, Krishna’s devotees (especially those with the propensities of the *vaishya*) care for cows: Taking cues from descriptions in the Bhagavata Purana that we have seen in the previous chapter, devotees who follow this Vaishnava Hindu tradition regard the cows they care for and protect as Krishna’s cows.

Further, such understanding of equality would mean that anyone, anywhere in the world, could be a Krishna devotee and that all the cows they would care for—not just Indian indigenous cows—would be regarded as Krishna’s cows. Both Mahatma Gandhi’s and Swami Prabhupada’s Gita interpretations show a strong faith in the text’s universal applicability. Thus, both found in the Gita essential ideological foundations for their respective lives and for the ethical visions they sought to share for making worldwide well-being possible. For both Gita spokesmen, this would call for positive action in the world rather than withdrawal from the world. For Gandhi, his own political engagement would be his positive action. For Prabhupada (who, in letters, twice urged Gandhi to withdraw from politics to focus on spreading the teachings of the Gita), action in the world would mean developing a worldwide mission as a network of devotional communities that would include cow care among their activities. Finally, both saw themselves as grounded in tradition, one that Gandhi identified with as Hindu and that Prabhupada identified with as Vaishnava, although both would also regard their traditions as *sanatana-dharma*, as an ever-present ethical principle that urgently called for its recovery, preservation, and renewal in current times.

As an addendum to this discussion of the Bhagavad Gita with respect to violence, nonviolence, and cow protection, a few words remain to be said about these issues in relation to the Bhagavata Purana. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the Bhagavata Purana enjoys high regard throughout India, and especially Vaishnava Hindus take it as the final word of sacred literature. Therefore, the Bhagavata’s clear affirmation of nonviolence with respect to sacrificial practice conjoined with its message of bhakti becomes decisive. By describing various tortures an animal slaying ritualist should expect to
experience after the present life, as Edwin Bryant puts it, the Bhagavata “supplies the fine print of the Vedic contract—violence performed in the pretext of sacrifice produces temporary benefits, but at a horrible price” (Bryant 2006, p. 201). Further though, in relation to Ambedkar’s comments on Buddhism and Brahmanism, the Bhagavata Purana refers twice to a Buddha as an avatar of Vishnu. In the second reference (2.7.37), Buddha is referred to as one who propagated *upadharma*—supportive religious principles. Relevant for us to note here, in connection with his differences with Mahatma Gandhi on Gita interpretation, is Swami Prabhupada’s comment to this Bhagavata verse:

Lord Buddha incarnates at a time when the people are most materialistic and preaches common-sense religious principles. Such *ahimsa* is not a religious principle itself, but it is an important quality for persons who are actually religious. It is a common-sense religion because one is advised to do no harm to any other animal or living being because such harmful actions are equally harmful to him who does the harm.

Prabhupada’s calling *ahimsa* “common-sense” religion suggests that it should be taken for granted by people claiming to be religious that they must be grounded in nonviolence. Whereas Gandhi, following Bhishma in the Mahabharata, considered nonviolence the highest principle of *dharma*, Prabhupada, following the Bhagavata Purana, considered it an essential but secondary, “common sense” principle, supportive of the all-encompassing principle of *bhakti*, devotion to the supreme person who, as we have noted, the Bhagavata insists, is the primordial cowherd, Krishna.

Before closing this chapter with concluding reflections, let us summarize: Cows in modern India are situated in “contested fields” of differing convictions about their proper place in ethical discourse and practice. Champions of the Cow Protection movement in early and later forms insist on bovines’ integral position with respect to traditional Hindu ethics, *dharma*. Counter-voices are heard, saying that (1—Ambedkar) Hindu *dharma*’s protection of cows comes at the cost of oppression for lower-ranked people, and (2—Mitra) Hindu *dharma* in the past has not been the nonviolent, non-meat-eating tradition it is claimed to be. A learned attempt to refute the latter claim has taken us back into ancient texts, there
to see how the Manusmriti and the Mahabharata indicate preference for ahimsa on the basis of a distinction between the way of worldly engagement (pravritti), which may call for violent sacrificial rites, and the way of disengagement from the world (nivritti), which calls for renunciation of such rites. Then we noted how the Bhagavad Gita seeks to bring these two ways, or worldviews, together in detached action, as the basis for a society of care, in which cows are protected as a matter of course. Finally, revisiting the Bhagavata Purana, we are reminded of its bhakti message as the encompassing principle, in which cow protection as a negative practice of avoiding harm becomes a positive practice of cow care.

Concluding Reflections

In revisiting early texts (and in considering additional texts that we bypassed in Chapter 2), we must recognize the extreme limitations of our ability to comprehend the tradition as a whole, due to the vast expanse of time and breadth of geographical space. We should also see that what we are calling Hindu tradition is multidimensional and multi-vocal—in the past as it is very much so in the present. But given these considerations, we can also see a strong voice persisting from earliest times, that cows in particular, and animals more generally, call for special consideration by humans. The “special consideration” is typically articulated negatively in terms of “nonviolence,” but nonviolence is closely linked to regard for

54 It is surely useful to consider present-day theories of sacrifice—many of which have given special attention to the Vedic model—to gain a sense of the bigger picture in which these texts and practices are situated. But whichever of the several contemporary theories of sacrifice one might favor, the point for us to keep in mind is the Vedic and post-Vedic culture’s sense of the necessity and centrality of ritual sacrifice and the presence of a strong, eventually predominating, moral impulse to remove violence from the sacrifice. See McClymond (2008, pp. 3–17) for an overview of six major approaches to sacrifice in contemporary scholarship. See Calasso (2015, pp. 251–252) for a discussion of two major divisions in theories: Either sacrifice is “a device used by society to ease certain tensions or to satisfy certain needs … or it is an attempt by society to blend with nature, taking on certain irreducible characteristics, in which case it must be seen as a form of metaphysics put into action, celebrated and displayed in a formalized sequence of gestures.” I am inclined toward the latter view, though “to blend with nature” may not adequately describe the impulse of Vedic sacrifice, which certainly comprehends a vital divine dimension. See also Calasso (2015, p. 245) on the sacrificial vision originating in “the recognition of a debt contracted with the unknown and a gift that is bestowed upon the unknown.”
humans as possessing the rare opportunity to elevate themselves spiritually, especially by conscientious practice of self-restraint and thus minimizing of violence. The opposite applies as well: The slaughter of cows for human consumption is regarded by many present-day Hindus as an abomination in defiance of a cosmic order that requires human vigilance, particularly in the form of cow protection. This is hinted in the Bhagavad Gita, with its reference to the same (go-raksha) as the duty of vaishyas. But even if it is granted that animal sacrifice, including cow sacrifice, has been practiced in earlier times, the texts suggest by virtue of their attention to detail and by occasional allusion to the animal victims’ subjectivity, that these sacrifices were done—or were supposed to be done—with “special consideration” for the animal victims. More broadly, sacrificial animals were considered to be “special” as fulfilling a role in the cosmic order of dharma, such that by their sacrifice, if properly performed, that order would be sustained.

Economic and political forces impacting cow care in modern India have been deeply affected by the shifting landscape of circumstances that we identify as globalization. This has been the case throughout the time of European presence and domination in South Asia. To better grasp the complexity of our subject, it may be helpful to draw on Gerald Larson’s notion of historical “layers,” whereby the Indian landscape we have considered in the first part of this chapter is that of the “Indo-Anglian layer,” dated from c. 1757 to the present.55 In the second part (“Weighing Texts, Debating Cows”), we revisited (from Chapter 2) what Larson would call the “Indo-Brāhmanical layer” (c. 1500–600 BCE), the “Indo-Śramanical layer” (c. 600 BCE–300 CE), and the “Indic (Hindu-Buddhist-Jain) layer” (c. 300–1200 CE). Looking back on these earlier layers, we are attempting to do what concerned Hindus have been doing over the last two centuries—to discern the voice of a continuous tradition from ancient times, even as globalization has brought in so many other voices.

55Larson (1995, pp. 52–53) notes the geological character of this imagery, such that one can speak of major changes as the shifting of tectonic plates. He identifies six “layers,” all of which color the present to varying degrees. These are, from earliest to latest, the Indus Valley layer (c. 3000–1500 BCE), the Indo-Brāhmanical layer (c. 1500–600 BCE), the Indo-Śramanical layer (c. 600 BCE–300 CE), the Indic (Hindu-Buddhist-Jain) layer (c. 300–1200 CE), the Indo-Islamic layer (c. 1200–1757), and finally the Indo-Anglian layer (c. 1757–present).
Indians experienced British rule as increasingly oppressive in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, responding with intensified agitation for independence. The accompanying growth of national identity was thereby increasingly associated, for many, with being Hindu, and this identification was to play a major role in the story of how India's eventual political independence (officially assumed in August 1947) would unfold. This complex story, as well as that of post-independence India (with the concomitant creation of the Islamic State of Pakistan), is marked by pronounced efforts to articulate a generic Hindu identity that might subsume and include the widely diverse ethnic, caste, and other groups more or less considered as Hindu—groups that nonetheless would invariably privilege more immediate markers of identity among themselves (Larson 1995, pp. 176–177). Such a generic identity would necessarily look back to and emphasize the importance of earlier “layers” of India's past, back to the Indo-Brahmanical layer and even, occasionally, to the prior Indus Valley layer. And this renewal of tradition involved a considerable blending of these layers, such that what was described in ancient texts (but only those considered authentic) were by no means outmoded; rather they were seen to express eternal truths of right living, cosmic order, and divine law—sanatana-dharma. But, much as reinterpretation of earlier texts is evident within later texts, so present-day efforts to reinterpret the early texts have at times yielded creative strategies that have partaken, perhaps unwittingly, of Western historical-critical methods of analysis.

Cows served as a vital, unifying symbol to fuse Hindu identity with Indian nationhood. With the deep and enduring associations of cows with sanctity, piety, and selfless motherly giving, their lifelong protection from harm would come to be seen as essential. In particular, the cow was thought to embody the unchanging truth of sanatana-dharma. And quite the opposite of cows as embodiments of dharma were the overbearing, beef-eating, British Raj administrators, seen as veritable embodiments of adharma. Implicated as well in notions of adharma were non-Hindu Indians—especially Muslims, for whom the slaughter of cows for meat and leather seemed to hold no taboos.

Again, of great importance in modern Indian cow semiotics has been the symbol of cow-as-mother, woven closely together with the image of the
Indian nation-as-mother. We have noted (in the previous chapter) the association of the female cow with the earth in the Bhagavata Purana’s allegory of Kali’s torturing the earth-cow. Increasingly in the modern period, “earth” would become reconceived as a geographically defined area of earth, Bharata Bhumi—the land of Bharata (India), the Indian nation. And as the Indian independence movement gained momentum, continuing after independence to the present day, it would not be difficult to sustain in the public mind a connection between “mother cow” and “Bharat Mata” (Mother India).

Yet also to be noted, in the logic of Indian feminine symbolism and Hindu nationalist iconography, popular counterparts to mother cow imagery have been those of the dark goddess Kali and the fierce tiger-riding Durga. As mother cow has embodied India’s sheltering and nurturing nature, the centuries-long tradition of Shaktism—reverence for a feminine divinity as ultimate—became an important resource for articulating a wrathful and destructive feminine counterpart to the submissive and easily victimized cow. Indeed, Durga, in her divine wrath, would fuel the impulse of some Hindus to show “strong retaliation” for the killing of cows, even showing readiness to kill human beings for the sake of protecting cows (van der Veer 1994, p. 89).

As Mukul notes (2017, p. 290) and Peter van der Veer (1994, pp. 86–88) identifies four levels of cow symbolism: (1) related to brahmanical ritual, wherein the cow symbolizes earth, nourishment, wealth and good fortune (lakshmi), as well as the vehicle for crossing beyond death and yielder of substances essential for devotional worship; related to this last; (2) the cow’s substances—milk, dung, and urine—carry sacredness for their benefits to humans (more on this in Chapter 4); (3) the association of cow with Krishna links her to the tradition of devotional (bhakti) culture; and (4) cow as mother associates her with family and community.

Even well after independence was gained, the 1957 Hindi film Bharat Mata (Mother India) became one of the highest-grossing films of Indian cinema history (D. Smith 2003, p. 108). Although no explicit connection is made in this film between its heroine Radha (implicitly the instantiation of “mother” connected to India) and the cow, when she shoulders the plow of the family farm following the death of the family’s buffalo, one can easily make this identification.

Ironically, most Durga iconography shows her killing the buffalo demon Mahisha with her spear. Domestic water buffalo, widely found throughout South Asia, though providing richer milk than cows and providing traction for plowing and transport, by no means enjoy the same degree of regard as the cow in religious terms.

Peter van der Veer refers to the first agitation against cow slaughter during British rule in India as having taken place in Punjab in 1871, following British victory over the Sikhs. A Sikh reform group, the Namdharis, killed Muslim butchers in Amritsar and Ludhiana. Although the immediate victims were Muslims, van der Veur notes (p. 91), “It is important to note that from the start cow
In modern times, all these cow-related considerations have been within a context of consuming public attention in which a pivotal factor has been the Indian state. From the late nineteenth century through independence and into the present day, appeals have been continuously made for legislation on various levels of government to ban bovine slaughter, to tighten ban enforcement, or to impose greater punishment on offenders. Since the Indian Constitution was ratified in 1949, all Indian provincial governments except Kerala, West Bengal, and the northeastern provinces have enacted laws restricting or prohibiting bovine slaughter in varying ways and degrees. More recently, attempts to institute a national ban have been made and then defeated by appeal to minority rights and secularism. Yet all such measures and appeals are grounded in a certain mindset that is, as Donald Davis observes, a “hopelessly exceptional” notion of law as legislation in the form of codes (Davis 2007, p. 243). As Kelsy Nagy aptly observes (Nagy 2019, p. 254),

To someone outside the dairy, leather, or meat industries, the perception of the cow as a sacred symbol combined with the existence of anti-slaughter laws may contribute to the illusion that cattle are cared for and protected, which may contribute to the prevalence of cattle welfare problems remaining hidden in plain sight.

I have several times mentioned the Hindu notion of dharma, and we have seen that it is often with an appeal to dharma that Hindus argue for cow care and protection. Since one important meaning of dharma is “law,” what may be called for is a careful examination and cautious, nuanced application of the traditional, arguably non-sectarian, notion—or notions—of dharma to present conditions.

But let us recall that, in considering the Hindu imaginaire of bovinity as a whole (in Chapter 2), a major impulse for its composition and endurance is to be found in the bhakti dimension, or bhakti paradigm, of Hindu religious thought and practice. Further, we noticed a polarity of values constituted of dharma at one end and bhakti on the other—what we termed a “values polarity.” Thinking of dharma as law in a broader sense
than in modern usage as “legislation,” it may be useful to consider insights from the bhakti tradition, as the complementary counterpart to dharma in the Hindu calculus of cultural meaning. Thus, the important bhakti texts show deep concern with dharma; at the same time, the sense of rigidity often associated with dharmic injunctions is mitigated by the fluidity of emotion and the sense of humble care that bhakti celebrates. In bhakti texts, “dharma as law serves this baseline function” of “giving meaning and connection to broader religious and theological patterns” (Davis 2007, pp. 248–251). Bhakti is seen as the full blossoming of dharma’s purpose and meaning.

With this connection in mind, we may again recall the episode in the seminal bhakti text, the Bhagavata Purana, discussed in Chapter 2: While inspecting his kingdom, King Parikshit confronts the personified current age, appearing as a *shudra* disguised as a king (BhP 1.16–17). Despite Kali’s deplorable crime against the earth embodied as a cow, Parikshit restrains himself from slaying the offender. Instead, he assigns for him restricted places of residence, namely, where specific types of degraded and degrading activities are practiced. The message would seem to be that ignorance and degradation have their rightful place in this world, even—or especially—in the present degraded age. They have a place, but it should be a limited, circumscribed place, one that is set by a widely understood grasp of law as dharma which is, in turn, tempered with bhakti. How such a place should be circumscribed is by the firm but wise actions of truly qualified rulers, whose grasp of dharma is such that they exhibit the highest caliber of virtue that rulership demands—virtues understood to show forth as a result of rulers’ humble spirit of dedicated devotion (bhakti) for a supreme divinity. Krishna summarizes this point in the Bhagavad Gita: “Whatever the greatest one does, common people do just the same, following the standard he sets” (Bg 3.21).

Aside from political mobilization for cow protection in India, there is, like nowhere else in the world, a widespread practice of cow care and protection, or sheltering, in a wide variety of settings, including but not limited to institutional *goshalas* and similar establishments. Not only Hindus, but also Sikhs and Jains are involved in these projects, as are various non-religious animal activist organizations (Nagy 2019, pp. 254–257). One often hears the expression *go-seva* (Sanskrit/Hindi: *go-sevā*)—care or
service for cows—and one may be reminded of the bhakti principle of seva to a divinity. The many persons in India who dedicate themselves to go-seva may be regarded by Hindus as such exalted persons as Krishna mentions in the Gita, and by their practices one can get a sense of just how bhakti, rooted in dharma, is understood as a way of practically caring, day by day, for cows. In the next chapter, we will meet some of these people and their cows, to understand something about the ethos and the practicalities—and the practical challenges—of cow care. Yet we must also face the harsh reality of wretched conditions for the vast mass of bovines in India today. We must wonder and bemoan the gaping disconnect between the culture of cow reverence on one side and the reality on the ground: India is the world’s top dairy producer, and since modern dairy production is an extension of the bovine meat industry, India is also one of the top producers of meat and leather in the world. How these two realities collide yet persist in India will concern us in the next chapter.

References

Adluri, Vishwa. 2017. Ethics and Hermeneutics in the Mahābhārata. International Journal of Hindu Studies 20: 385–392. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11407-016-9200-y.

Adluri, Vishwa. 2018. Abhinas in the Mahābhārata: Sacrifice, Violence, and Salvation. Journal of Vaishnava Studies 26 (2, Spring): 45–75.

Alsdorf, Ludwig. [1962] 2010. The History of Vegetarianism and Cow-Veneration in India. Translated from the German by Bal Patil, edited with additional notes, a bibliography and four appendices by Willem Bollée. London: Routledge.

Ambedkar, B.R., Dr. 1948. The Untouchables: Who Were They and Why They Became Untouchables? New Delhi: Amrit Book Company.

Beal, Samuel. [1884] 1983. Buddhist Records of the Western World. New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

Brodbeck, Simon Pearce. 2009. The Mahabharata Patriline: Gender, and the Royal Hereditary. London: Routledge.

Bryant, Edwin. 2006. Strategies of Vedic Subversion: The Emergence of Vegetarianism in Post-Vedic India. In A Communion of Subjects: Animals in Religion,
Burgat, Florence. 2004. Non-Violence Toward Animals in the Thinking of Gandhi: The Problem of Animal Husbandry. *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 14.

Burley, Mikel. 2019. ‘Mountains of Flesh and Seas of Blood’: Reflecting Philosophically on Animal Sacrifice Through Dramatic Fiction. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 85 (3, September): 806–832.

Calasso, Roberto. 2015. *Ardor*. London: Penguin Random House.

Chigateri, Shraddha. 2008. ‘Glory to the Cow’: Cultural Difference and Social Justice in the Food Hierarchy in India. *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 31 (1): 10–35. https://doi.org/10.1080/00856400701874692.

Clough, Bradley S. 2002. Gandhi, Nonviolence and the *Bhagavad-gītā*. In *Holy War: Violence and the Bhagavad Gita*, ed. Steven Rosen. Hampton, VA: A. Deepak Publishing.

Copland, Ian. 2005. *State, Community and Neighbourhood in Princely North India c. 1900–1950*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Copland, Ian. 2017. Cows, Congress and the Constitution: Jawaharlal Nehru and the Making of Article 48. *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*. https://doi.org/10.1080/00856401.2017.1352646.

Davis, Donald R., Jr. 2007. Hinduism as a Legal Tradition. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 75 (2, June): 242–267.

Denny, Christopher. 2013. Christians and Vedic Sacrifice: Comparing Communitarian Sacrificial Soteriologies. *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies* 26 (Article 8). https://doi.org/10.7825/2164-6279.1547.

Falk, Nancy Auer. 2006. *Living Hinduisms: An Explorer’s Guide*. Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth.

Feller-Jatavallabhula, Danielle. 1999. Raṇayajña: The Mahābhārata War as a Sacrifice. In *Violence Denied: Violence, Non-Violence and the Rationalization of Violence in South Asian Cultural History*, ed. Jan E.M. Houben and Karel R. van Kooij, 69–103. Leiden–Boston–Köln: Brill (Brill’s Indological Library 16).

Fox, Richard G. 1992. East of Said. In *Edward Said: A Critical Reader*, ed. Michael Sprinker, 144–156. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Freitag, Sandria B. 1980. Religious Rites and Riots: From Community Identity to Communalism in North India. Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

Gandhi, Mohandas K. [1909, 1938] 2003. *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule*. Translation of “Hind Swaraj,” Published in the Gujarat columns of Indian
Opinion, 11 and 18 December 1909. Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House.

Gandhi, Mohandas K. 1999. *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (CWMG) (Electronic Book). New Delhi: Publications Division Government of India.

Griffiths, Ralph T.H. 1895. *The Hymns of the Atharva Veda*, vol. 1. London: Lazarus.

Groves, Matthew. 2010. Law, Religion and Public Order in Colonial India: Contextualizing the 1887 Allahabad High Court Case on ‘Sacred’ Cows. *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 33 (1): 78–121. https://doi.org/10.1080/00856401003592495.

Gutiérrez, Andrea. 2018. Embodiment of Dharma in Animals. In *Hindu Law: A New History of Dharmaśāstra*, ed. Patrick Olivelle and Donald R. Davis, Jr., 466–479. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Haberman, David L. 2013. *People Trees: Worship of Trees in Northern India*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Hiltebeitel, Alf. 2016. *Nonviolence in the Mahābhārata: Śiva’s summa on Rṣidharma and the gleaners of Kurukṣetra*. London: Routledge.

Houben, Jan E.M. 1999. To Kill or Not to Kill the Sacrificial Animal (*yajñapaśu*)? In *Violence Denied: Violence, Non-Violence and the Rationalization of Violence in South Asian Cultural History*, ed. Jan E.M. Houben and Karel R. van Kooij, 105–183. Leiden–Boston–Köln: Brill (Brill’s Indological Library 16).

Inden, Ronald. 1998. Ritual, Authority, and Cycle Time in Hindu Kingship. In *Kingship and Authority in South Asia*, ed. J.F. Richards, 41–91. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Jha, D.N. [2001] 2009. *The Myth of the Holy Cow*. New Delhi: Navayana.

King, Richard. 1999. *Orientalism and Religion: Post-Colonial Theory, India and the “Mystic East”*. London: Routledge.

Knipe, David M. 2015. *Vedic Voices: Intimate Narratives of a Living Andhra Tradition*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Lahariya, Khabar. 2018. Cattle-Skinners in Bundelkhand Are Looking for an Out. *The Wire*, April 18. https://thewire.in/caste/cattle-skinners-in-bundelkhand-are-looking-for-an-out. Accessed 13 November 2018.

Larson, Gerald James. 1995. *India’s Agony over Religion*. Albany, NY: SUNY.

Leslie, Julia. 2003. *Authority and Meaning in Indian Religions: Hinduism and the Case of Vālmiki*. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate.

Lodha, G.M. (ed.). 2002. *Report of the National Commission on Cattle* (Chapter 1 Introduction). New Delhi: Department of Animal Husbandry, Ministry of
Agriculture and Farmers’ Welfare, Government of India. http://dahd.nic.in/related-links/chapter-i-introduction. Accessed 25 September 2017.

McClymond, Kathryn. 2008. *Beyond Sacred Violence: A Comparative Study of Sacrifice*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Mitra, Rajendralala. 1881. *Indo-Aryans: Contributions Towards the Elucidation of Their Ancient and Medieval History*, vol. 1. Calcutta: W. Newman & Co.

Monier-Williams, Monier. [1899] 1995. *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*. New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

Mukul, Akshaya. 2017. *Gita Press and the Making of Hindu India*. Noida: Harper-Collins.

N/A. [1971] 1983. *Review of ‘Beef in Ancient India’*. Mathura, UP, India: Shri Krishna Janmasthan Seva-Sansthan.

Nagy, Kelsi. 2019. The Sacred and Mundane Cow: The History of India’s Cattle Protection Movement. In *The Routledge Handbook of Religion and Animal Ethics*, ed. Andrew Linzey and Clair Linzey. London: Routledge.

Narayanan, Yamini. 2018. Cow Protection as ‘Casteised Speciesism’: Sacralisation, Commercialisation and Politicisation. *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*. https://doi.org/10.1080/00856401.2018.1419794.

Olivelle, Patrick. 2005. *Manu’s Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Prabhupāda, A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami. 2017. *The Complete Teachings of His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda*. Vedabase CD-ROM Version 2017.2. Sandy Ridge, NC: Bhaktivedanta Archives.

Prabhupāda, A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami. [1972] 1983. *Bhagavad-gītā as It Is*. Los Angeles: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust.

Ram-Prasad, C. 2003. Contemporary Political Hinduism. In *The Blackwell Companion to Hinduism*, ed. Gavin Flood, 526–550. Oxford: Blackwell.

Rocher, Ludo. 2003. The Dharmaśāstras. In *The Blackwell Companion to Hinduism*, ed. Gavin Flood, 102–115. Oxford: Blackwell.

Rogerson, J.W. 1998. What was the Meaning of Animal Sacrifice? In *Animals on the Agenda: Questions about Animals for Theology and Ethics*, ed. A. Linzey and D. Yamamoto. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

Rosen, Steven J. 2004. *Holy Cow: The Hare Krishna Contribution to Vegetarianism and Animal Rights*. New York: Lantern Books.

Safi, Michael. 2016. On Patrol with the Hindu Vigilantes Who Would Kill to Protect India’s Cows. *The Guardian*, Thursday, October 27. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/oct/27/on-patrol-hindu-vigilantes-smuggling-protect-india-cows-kill. Accessed 13 August 2017.
Saraswati, Maharshi Dayanand. 1993, original Hindi 1881. Gokarunānidhi (In Defence of the Cow: With all Compassion). Translated by Khazan Singh. Ajmer: Paropkarini Sabha—Dayanand Ashram.

Schwab, Julius. [1886] n.d. Das altindische Thieropfer, mit Benützung handschriftlicher Quellen. Zürich: Zentralbibliothek Zürich. www.books2ebooks.eu.

Smith, Brian K. [1989] 1998. Reflections on Resemblance, Ritual and Religion. New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

Smith, David. 2003. Hinduism and Modernity. Oxford: Blackwell.

Stewart, James. 2014. Violence and Nonviolence in Buddhist Animal Ethics. Journal of Buddhist Ethics 21. http://blogs.dickenson.edu/buddhistethics/.

Sutton, Nicholas. 2000. Religious Doctrines in the Mahābhārata. New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

Thompson, Mark. 1993. Gandhi and His Ashrams. Mumbai: Popular Prakashan.

Valpey, Kenneth. 2004. Krishna in Mleccha Desh: ISKCON Temple Worship in Historical Perspective. In The Hare Krishna Movement: The Postcharismatic Fate of a Religious Transplant. New York: Columbia University Press.

Valpey, Kenneth. Forthcoming. In the Service of All that Lives: Gandhi’s Vision of Engaged Nonviolent Animal Care. In Animal Theologians, ed. Andrew Linzey.

Valpey, Kenneth Russell. 2006. Attending Kṛṣṇa’s Image: Caitanya Vaiṣṇava mūrti-sevā as devotional truth. London: Routledge.

van der Veer, Peter. 1994. Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Wedemeyer, Christian K. 2007. Beef, Dog, and other Mythologies: Connotative Semiotics in Mahāyoga Tantra Ritual and Scripture. Journal of the American Academy of Religion 75 (2, June): 383–417.
Open Access  This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter’s Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.