



## Why the Prohibition of Cow-Slaughter has been Integral to Indian Culture: The Buddha's Observation

by

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Once, during the age of the Buddha, bewildered with the newly increased diseases, once a group of wealthy Brahmins approached the Master and asked him, "Sir, **why the three-fold diseases of the Primordial Age**, namely, *desire, hunger* and *old-age* have become so many ?

In response to that the Buddha gave the following explanation. He said that, in the past, the Brahmins (The term 'Brahmin' according to the Buddhists, originally signify the philosophers, who are truthful to the values of *vijja* (or knowledge) and *charana* (or conduct) led a simple life by following strict moral codes based on the knowledge of the merits of *virtues, viz., non-violence, forbearance* and so on:

“ब्रह्मचरियञ्च सीलञ्च, अज्जवं मद्दवं तपं।

सोरच्चं अविहिंसञ्च, खन्तिञ्चापि अवण्णयुं॥

Later on, in course of time, some of those meritorious Brahmins recommended *yajna* by the use of rice, ghee, cloth etc. for special and efficacious rituals for spiritual expediency. Nonetheless, they strictly refrained from **slaughtering of a cow** for any ritualistic expediency as they treated it as the most valuable asset. They therefore often compared it with “**parents, relatives or friends**” for the unique utility of its products for “medicines; food, strength, beauty and happiness”.

“तस्स वत्तमनुसिक्खन्ता, इधेके विञ्जुजातिका।

ब्रह्मचरियञ्च सीलञ्च, खन्तिञ्चापि अवण्णयुं॥

“तण्डुलं सयनं वत्थं, सप्पितेलञ्च याचिया।

धम्ममेन समोधानेत्वा, ततो यञ्जमकप्पयुं॥

“उपडितस्मिं यञ्जस्मिं, नास्सु गावो हनिंसु ते।

**यथा माता पिता भ्राता, अञ्जे वापि च जातका।**

**गावो नो परमा मित्ता, यासु जायन्ति ओसधा॥**

Yet, as long as the people practised those philosophical and moral codes signifying genuine Brahmanism by way of symbiotic relationship of knowledge and moralities there was happiness on the planet.

Unfortunately, *by and by*, a section of Brahmins deviated from moral codes and flung themselves to all kinds of immoralities and sensuous indulgences. They were tempted to amass wealth and cattle. Thus a new set of life style and values prevailed in the society resulting in social re-structuring based on *jati* signifying birth or lineage to protect the property. This is how those Brahmins, who were inclined to legitimise their superiority as being a Brahmin despite possession of wealth and immoral life style redefined the term Brahmanism, too. The new definition of Brahmin was thence not based on the *karma* or the dynamic philosophy founded on the values of *vijja* and *charan*, ; but on the basis of mere *jati* or birth. In due course of time, these neo-Brahmins then convinced king Ikshvaku to resort to greater donations (dan) of the most valuable asset, namely, the cows to the priest and emphatically recommended the large number of cow-slaughter in sacrificial rituals or *yajna*. This is because the cows were the most valuable asset in those days. Convinced by the neo-Brahmins, the **king thence began to slaughter 'not just one, but lakhs of cows'** - the animals *which do not hurt anyone by their horns, legs or any limb; but give us pot full of milk* -

“ततो च राजा सञ्जत्तो, ब्राह्मणेहि रथेसभो।

नेका सतसहस्सियो, गावो यञ्जे अघातयि॥

“न पादा न विसाणेन, नास्सु हिंसन्ति केनचि।

गावो एल्लकसमाना, सोरता कुम्भदूहना।

ता विसाणे गहेत्वा, राजा सत्थेन घातयि॥

All beings, human or divine; and even the demons then decried and condemned the senseless and heinous act of the cow-slaughter and condemned: “**This is unholy! This is adharm!** A beginning of *adharm*” -

“ततो देवा पितरो च, इन्दो असुरकखसा।

**अधम्मो इति** पक्कन्दुं, यं सत्थं निपती गवे॥

Thus, the Buddha explained the cause of the **three-fold diseases**, namely, **desire, hunger** and **old age of the primordial age multiplying** into **ninety-eight by his time** with myriad of astounding symptoms due to the philosophers' deviation from *vijja* and *charana* :

“तयो रोगा पुरे आसुं, इच्छा अनसनं जरा।

पसूनञ्च समारम्भा, अट्ठानवुत्तिमागमुं॥

We thus see that it is because of the Buddha's observations on senseless cow-slaughter in the name of *yajna* the prohibition of the cow slaughter has been integral to the Indian culture; and perhaps, that also prevailed upon the Hindus to treat cow-slaughter “unholy”.

**You may, now pause to ponder, “Why some diseases like mad cow & swine flu have appeared in umpteen number in recent days !” in light of Buddha's observation ?**