

The Beef Controversy: Socio-cultural and Economic dimensions of consumerism

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Abstract- This paper will critically analyze the controversial status of beef eating behavior. In this paper I will examine that how socio-cultural aspect plays a crucial role in shaping societies norms. Further, I will examine the economical aspect of beef and its increasing demand in society. This paper will help to understand the whole picture of beef eating controversies in Indian social structure. In this paper I will see the beef controversy with the help of book called The Myth of Holy Cow written by Dwijendra Narayan Jha. In this book he has tried to trace the history of the holy cow and related controversies.-

Keywords- Food-eating behavior, Beef, Religion, Socio-cultural, Economy

Introduction-

Nowadays when we look at the society that on the one hand it is going to the path of religiosity but on the other hand it also countered by some new directions or some new phenomena. That's why it struck into my mind and then I wanted to see the co-relation between the religious aspect of beef and its consumption culture and why this counterpart emerges. In regard to socio-cultural and economical aspects, we have to look at that how socio-cultural behavior and economical aspect mutually correspond to each other in terms of religion and both of them have very broad area in itself to understand the whole scenario. That's why I have chosen very specific area, that how food eating behaviour affect religion and the economy both simultaneously. It means that I want to focus on the beef eating food culture because it has very powerful role to increases economy and then it affects other part of our development too. On the one hand, in Hinduism, the animal specially cow, consider as a very sacred but on the other hand it is not. So here I raise the question that is it really cow as sacred animal or it is a myth behind these phenomena that cow is sacred animal. So here I want to draw my attention that the myth of this sacred animal and what is the present situation in India about the sacred animal-“Cow”. So many people in India they prefer to beef in their parties and they are not feel like anti-religion or some like that. It means somewhere it produces beef industry in India and also reflects our economy. There are some data which

shows that India has become the third largest country to exporting beef outside. I want to focus on this controversial phenomenon with the help of book called *The Myth of Holy Cow* and author is Dwijendra Narayan Jha. He has work on that and tried to show that how a myth is created. In his book *THE MYTH OF THE HOLY COW*- he explained the growth of religiosity in India is symbolized by the existence of the Hindutva. Basically, they are trying to declare that the cow is a sacred, national animal so because of this, we should ban its slaughter. In the present era we can see that how the present government emphasized on the cow slaughter and some fundamentalism wants that we should clear Cow as a national animal. This illuminating work is a response to this crazed confessionism. It challenges obscurantist views on the sanctity of the cow in Hindu tradition and culture or we can say that it rejects the Hindu ideology. Dwijendra Narayan Jha argues that beef played an important part in the cuisine of ancient India and now also. It was very much a feature of the approved Brahminical and Buddhist diet. The evidence he produces from a variety of religious and secular texts is compelling. Religion is playing in the development and maintenance of a vital economy of India and outside also.

History of Indian cuisine (beef) - India is a country where so many various groups, culture and traditions interacting with each other and continue for some time with their people. In this reference we will see that in each period we have so many varieties in food culture. They came with their food culture and tradition but they left here and go back. India is considered as a country of diversity in its various forms. Culture is also one of them with so many different forms. But I want to pay attention on particular cuisine of India which is very controversial from history to present era. When we are taking about Indian food system that time we should not forget that meet is very crucial cuisine in our culture. But again when we are taking about meet, there are so many type of meet but some are with controversy and some are not. Here I want to focus on very controversial meet which cow's meet in present context. Here I need to trace the history of beef which is considered as very sacred. If I go through the history of beef eating behaviour in India so first of all I should trace the history of Indo-Aryans because they came first with their culture and tradition. Here I want to quoted Dwijendra-

“The Indo-Aryans or Vedic Aryans, migrated to India around the middle of the second millennium BC. They brought along with them several such traits of the Indo-European life as nomadic pastoralism, incipient agriculture and religious beliefs and practices including the

practice of animal/cattle sacrifice, all of which conditioned their dietary practice in India.”
(Jha, pp-27)

So we can see that animal sacrifice is not new of our society, even this legacy is come from ancient time period. In the above passage when we elaborate it then we find that all of this statement reveals that the pastoral basis of the economy inherited and also showed up prominent religious practices, especially with animal sacrifice and their dietary habits.

In tracing process of beef eating behaviour we should look another dimension of this myth. India, by constitution, is very secular kind of country. On this land there are so many religion and languages exist. But on the other hand according to data Hindu religion is in majority. And because of majority, minority faces such problem on the basis of their religion. This is very well known that in Hinduism Vedas and Dharmshastras are very sacred or basis of rules and regulations. In the consideration of these people do follow that for Moksha. Rig-Veda is very important religious text for Hindu people. So in the religious text cattle sacrifices are deal with the reference of God worship. In Rig- Veda, God INDRA, who has strong-armed and a destroyer of enemy strongholds, refers to the cooking of the flesh of animal (ox or cow) for offering to them. The practice of killing animal in Rig-Veda is continued in the naming of sacrifices. Jha explain further that a sacrifice of animal is very common in the name of religious rituals at that time. Again I want to quote that-

“A bull was sacrificed to Indra, a dappled cow of the Maruts and a copper-coloured cow to the Asvins. A cow was also sacrificed to Mitra and Varuna. In the most public sacrifices (asvamedha, rajasuya and vajapeya) flesh of various types of animal especially that of the cow/ox/bull was required.”(Jha, pp-30)

So with the help of this explanation now we are able in condition to say that any how animal are sacrifices for Gods which is great importance reference in Vedic and later Vedic texts. These refers to the verily food. There was some provision that some kind of animal should not be eaten or not for sacrifice, so though if prohibitions were actually effective in their life so on the basis of fact that out of 250 animals mentioned in Vedas 50 were considered fit for sacrifice and hence for eating. Jha raises question against this fact and try to confront this myth. So Jha is trying to explain that how myth takes place in religious sentiments and it produces some kind of violence against animal and environment.

After that we will see that how Hindu Dharmshastras, with passage of time, played an important role to continue this kind of myths. When we go through those texts I found some contradiction among those. On the one side these texts are in favour of ahimsa but on the other side they slaughter animal in the name of sacrifice. In Dharmshastras and also puranas, it is clearly mentioned that 'several puranic texts bear testimony to feeding Brahman's beef at funeral ceremony. There is another example of epics which show that how in the period of Ramayana and Mahabharata; they were also offering beef in their ceremonies. Here I want to give an example of Mahabharata in Vanaparvan, "Kshatriyas hunted wild life oftener for food than for sport." According to Vanaparvan, two thousand cows were slaughtered every day in kitchen of king Rantideva who achieved unrivalled fame by distributing beef with foo grain to Brahmins. But in contrary of this statement, they express their views and say that meat was only eaten by lower section of society. This discussion shows that eating of animal food including beef and other bovine flesh was fairly common among Brahmins and Kshatriyas. So Dharmshastras began to show their disapproval of the killing of cow. This change in the Brahminical attitude towards cow slaughter may be viewed against the general background of a transformation of rural society in early medieval times which saw an unprecedented agrarian expansion and shrinkage of trade. That time so many law books came up and it shows that beef is not food for Brahmins, but if they eat then this offence goes to worst hell. During this time period beef is include in "chandals" food. Till that time it excluded from Brahminical menu. Here Jha points out that the Brahminical rejection of cattle slaughter perhaps encouraged the establishment of cow shelters alongside temples, as can be inferred from several epigraphic records.

Now we look at the condition that cow is created as holy and so many provision to protect them. With time the government provides Acts for slaughtering of animals. After independence there are some parties who emerge and try to give another way to develop this democratic and secular country. Now I want to focus that how the banning on beef affect our economic growth? There are some reports which show us that in India beef is highly consume by native and also in huge amount exported to other country. According to some reports "Beef is the third most widely consumed meat in the world, accounting for about 25% of meat production worldwide, after pork and poultry at 38% and 30% respectively. In absolute numbers, the United States, Brazil, and the People's Republic of China are the world's three largest consumers of beef.

According to 2014 data beef is not only consumed by worldwide but it is exported at macro level. There are some countries who count as largest exporters of like-Brazil, India, Australia and the United States in that respective order. Beef production is also important to the economic growth of some countries- Uruguay, Canada, Paraguay, Mexico, Argentina, Belarus and Nicaragua. Beef itself includes two types of meat- cow's and buffalo's at the level of world. "Many Hindus consider killing cattle and eating beef a sin. Killing of cows and bulls (including calves) is considered to be an extremely great sin in Hinduism." But in Hinduism cow is only animal which is considered as sacred so what about bull?- this question is asked by many countrymen.

Nowadays, in this country, there are so many controversies among groups. Somewhere beef is banned but on the other side it is protested by a group of people who admitted this as their culture. In 'Thiruvananthapuram' - "Beef cooked in the open and Hindus and Muslims sitting together for a meal - this was how a section of people in Kerala protested today against the recent ban on the meat in Maharashtra." This is the example which shows that who's protested against it, those are eating with who are in favour of beef meat. We can take an example of south that they are in favour of beef- **'There are so many protests in Maharashtra against beef eating but despite of these they said that "this is the culture of Kerala".'** (In Kerala, a Beef-Eating Fest to Protest Against Beef Ban, March 10, 2015)

In the favour of banning beef there is some Vishwa Hindu Parishad people say that "the cow gives milk which is essential for rearing all of us, so the cow is our mother, and hence deserves to be protected from slaughter" to support this argument, Chaudhuri remarks caustically that the "relationship is expressed not in terms of economics or animal husbandry... but as a matter of ethics, as if one was speaking of a man's relationship with his wet nurse." This shows that banning on beef is a question of ethics not, religion.

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On the international level by some political parties it is tried to popularize. According to International Business Times on Wednesday, "some of the groups involved in the attacks allegedly have close ties to the ruling BJP." BJP leader, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had previously criticized the country's beef industry as a "pink revolution to butcher cattle and export meat."(Pakistan Ki Aawaj,Jan 6, 2012)

Some report shows that "Beef exports have increased by 16 percent since Modi came to power."here we should try to look at that it affects our economic growth to exporting beef but on the other hand this banning provision also affect the economic growth. Some exporters say that-"We are doing everything legally, but these people harass us and disrupt our work for no reason," MohammadShahid Sheikh, president of the beef transporters' group in Deonar, a suburb in northeast Mumbai said.India's beef industry claims to slaughter only buffaloes, which are not considered sacred under Hinduism.(The Economic Times- Industry Holy cow! Who moved my meat? Jan 6, 2012)

We see in above discussion that in India in regard of religion, cow slaughter is treated like sin because cow is sacred animal in Hinduism. But the counter part is "The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation UN (FAO) report titled Livestock Information, Sector Analysis and Policy Branch says the largest consumed meat in India is beef." They shows that the total consumption of beef in India per year is 26 lakh tonnes, as compared to 6 lakh tonnes of mutton and 14 lakh tonnes of pork. It is very much clear that "the common choice of meat for the Indian population." In fact after meeting the local consumption, a United StatesFood and Drug Administration (USFDA) data says India exports 1.28 milliontonnes of beef, making it the third largest exporter in the world.

"Most Indians eat beef, and Indians mostly eat beef. The principled non eaters of beef are a minority in India", says Chittibabu Padavala a Dalit Marxist scholar.

"The BJP has tried to justify such bills in the name of animal rights, but if it indeed wants to protect the rights of the animal, why protect only cow. "If animal rights is the argument, why not take care of them at our respective homes, and why not also protect snakes, goats and other animals that need help", says Ram Puniyani, Member of All India Secular Forum.

"This law is inhuman, and denies the right of food to a large section of beef eating population," says Puniyani. "This is yet another tactic to harass the Muslim and tribal population in MP, and saffronise the state"

In 2012, India became the world's largest exporter of beef, earning over Rs. 18,000 crore. The lower-priced halal beef has found markets in Africa, Southeast Asia, and West Asia. While a bulk of this beef is from buffalo (11 per cent of buffaloes are slaughtered for meat), a significant portion is also from cows (6 per cent of the cattle population is slaughtered). -Who moved my beef? November 18, 2013.

The politics of beef are portrayed as cultural, but the reality is shaped by economics. Not only Muslims, but many Hindus and Christians consume beef as part of their daily diet. Increased prosperity and greater consumption have made Indians the seventh-largest beef consumers in the world. The court in Kureshi had relied on statistics that suggested that beef consumption in Gujarat was low, but this is not true for the rest of India.

Conclusion- So here just want to say that I have analyzed the phenomenon emerged through history and then it becomes a controversy in present context. And now it is very popular and reveal the truth that cow should not be consider as sacred because now it become the choice of people because its huge demand has helped to increases the beef industry also. So somehow this industry will be very helpful for development of the country. As we discuss above that the beef become very demanding through worldwide particularly from India.

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