

# Beef, our life/ by Gogu Shyamala

By Anveshi Web Editor in Uncategorized on May 10, 2013.

Beef is our culture,

beef – our living green nature.

Life's diversity,

breath of our soul.

“Do not eat beef!” “But how?”

I ask you. Another question:

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

Where have you come from?

What is your relationship to me?

I ask.

To this day

have you reared a pair of bullocks?

A pair of sheep?

A buffalo or two?

Have you driven them to the forest to graze?

Have you at least reared a pair of fowl?

Have you once waded into the stream

to scrub and wash their bulk?

You've never plumbed a bullock's ear,

nor do you know the number of its teeth.

Don't know the medicine for its toothache,

don't know to trim its painful hooves!

Do you know of cattle fuzz?

What, in the end, do you know

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

For her daughter at whose breast

a newborn child sucks; for that

just-delivered mother,

fine cut and pounded beef

anxious Yellamma plans to get.

Scan the village length and breadth

for that elusive sac of bovine bile that hangs

maybe from Mala Sattemma's rafter or

Madiga Ellamma's beam.

To soothe a baby's gripe,

cure elders' ills and aches

they trust the bile sac's bitter nectar.

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

They will reach for their old chappals, take speed!

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

To plough the field, they nurture the forest  
they tame the buffalo  
and yoke the ox.

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

The culture of our cattle fairs  
every ten kilometres – across  
Dakkhan, (Telangana, Andhra, Maharashtra,  
Karnataka)  
Malnad, Mangalur, Chittoor, Nellore,  
Ongole and Aurangabad, stand  
and see the fair stretch in all directions,  
cows, calves bulls and oxen on every side.

The world knows of cowboys, what  
does it know of these fairs?

Behind them  
do you know who slogs and sweats?

Ongole bulls, killera-horned oxen,  
crescent horned cattle; splendid twelve footers  
proper to the Dakkhan  
do you know of these?

Have you heard of grazing cattle being driven off?

Do you know of bulls and cows

grabbed from those who reared them.

How could we forget that historic event when

ox-drawn carts replaced horse-drawn carriages?

We drive the cows and bulls to the woods

and meadows to graze.

We feed them to plough the land.

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

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

“You have abandoned the land, the pasture to eat beef.”

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

For all this, what do you do?

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

You milk it dry and make some sweetmeat.

Did you think to feed the calf?

We don't milk the cow.

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

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

We leave its scant udder to the baby

which must grow strong on its mother's milk.

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

For agriculture to grow and prosper

our cattle must be like bull-elephants.

We respect the cow that births the bull.

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

We don't make her work,

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

We graze her well so that her calves grow strong,

we nurture the cow with an eye to growing agriculture.

At times when we are happy and relaxed

and want to celebrate,

we gather a fund, go to the fair.

We select and buy a healthy, strong cow to

bring down, cut and share. That evening

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

The responsibility and respect due to the first-born son

go to the ox in our house.

We give it a name that pleases:

Ramagadu, Arjunagadu, Dharmagadu...

Cows, buffaloes and calves live with our families.

We call them pretty names too,

like Rangasani, Damaramogga, Mallechendu ...

Why, we have festivals for cattle –

there is a cattle festival called Yeronka – have you heard of this?

Do you know?

On that festive day,

In the clear streams and ponds

we scrub and bathe our bulls, cows, oxen,

he-buffaloes and young calves.

We print colored patterns on their hides to match

their myriad shades and patent hues;

we tie veils on their foreheads woven out

of brightly dyed strands of roselle hemp;

we adorn their necks with a garland of bells and rattles;

feed them cooked jowar and sweetmeats made of rice;

we pour raw eggs and liquor into their willing mouths, and

lead them through the village in a procession.

You speak always of the cow.

What is the cow to you?

You never speak of oxen.

You never speak of oxen ploughing land,

nor do you speak of their trampling clay to mortar our walls.

We remember a past when bulls and oxen  
stomped out enough clay to build whole forts.

With what authority do you say, "Don't eat beef?"

You say, "Don't kill an ox", but force us to eat its carcass.

You call us untouchable,

you make us landless,

you push us to do your dirty work,

you force us remove dead cattle from the village streets.

Nurturing cattle,

balancing their number;

*giving an ox or bull as a gift to the goddess*

*and feasting*

*is our culture.*

*What right have you to stop us?*

*You have copied Buddhism's stripes.*

*Don't we know Buddhism?*

*It said 'don't kill humans'.*

*You say 'don't eat mutton, beef, onions and garlic'.*

*Saying 'we don't eat meat' you are ready to slash and murder men.*

*Who are you to speak of animals – you*

*who have no humanity, no civilization?*

*The ox, the cow, the bull and buffalo*

*are members of our families.*

*What they need we know to grow,*

*what they suffer we know to treat.*

*Neuter them and make them work –we do this.*

*Go to the Mala Madiga wada and learn!*

*We have created civilization there.*

*Have you forgotten that*

*our country was born of this?*

*Ecology and civilization is our nature.*

*War and destruction, your culture.*

*Your relation to the cow is limited:*

*Milk, sweets, vegetarianism!*

*On our Ammavaru's festival day, we offer her a bull and ram.*

*We feast on them.*

*If you come in our way, you won't last long.*

*Our Maisamma, Ooredamma, Pochamma and Poleramma*

*will ask us, 'Orey, give me an ox'*

*'Arey, get me a bull, a goat'!*

*We mark them for our gods at birth and then nurture them to full growth.*

*We are obliged.*

*Who are you to come between us?*

*Maisamma will confront him that obstructs!*

*Beef is our culture. Beware.*

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

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**The many uses of beef by-products:**

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

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

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

**Intestines:** tennis racquet strings, musical instrument strings

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

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