



# 6

## “These Cows Will Not Be Lost”: Envisioning a Care-Full Future for Cows

An early seventeenth-century account of what might today be called an interreligious dialogue includes a brief discussion on scriptural justifications—or lack of justifications—for cow slaughter. Krishnadasa Kaviraja, the author of the hagiographic Bengali language *Chaitanya Charitamrita* (*The Ambrosial Exploits of Sri Chaitanya*), tells of an encounter between his hero, the young ecstatic saint Vishvambara (later to become known as Shri Krishna Caitanya), and the local Muslim magistrate (*Qazi*). In the course of their conversation, according to Krishnadasa, after Chaitanya challenges the Qazi about Muslim bovine killing practices, the Qazi concedes that Muslims are ill-justified in slaughtering bovines, considering the many benefits they bestow on humans.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Prabhupada (2005 [1974], pp. 630–686); *Caitanya-caritamṛta* *Adi-lila* 17.124–226. In the course of the conversation, Chaitanya provocatively, though politely, asks (in Swami Prabhupada’s translation), “You drink cows’ milk; therefore the cow is your mother. And the bull produces grains for your maintenance; therefore he is your father. Since the bull and cow are your father and mother, how can you kill and eat them? What kind of religious principle is this? On what strength are you so daring that you commit such sinful activities?” (vv. 153–154).

Whatever the historical accuracy of this account might be, for us to note is that the story was part of an early vision of possibility, one of tolerance and coexistence between the two communities, Hindu and Muslim. What begins as a sharp confrontation between Chaitanya's followers and the magistrate over the latter's banning of the former's public religious demonstrations concludes amicably: The Qazi safeguards what he had previously banned. There is no suggestion that the Qazi resolves to change his own dietary habits, but neither is this represented as a problem for the Hindus, who are now assured freedom to openly perform their demonstrations of *nagara-hari-kirtan*—singing divine names in the town streets. Krishnadasa here describes what might be called a “moderate heart change,” whereby no dramatic conversions or transformations occur, but through dialogue a “live and let live” agreement is reached.<sup>2</sup> And embedded in this agreement is an implied agreement of mutual tolerance of the other community's dietary practices and consequent dealings with animals, specifically cows.

As we have seen, there are competing narratives about bovines in India, narratives that either look toward the past or, alternatively, ignore the past and imagine a future of ever-expanding economic growth afforded by ever-increasing technical efficiency in colonization of bovine bodies. In this chapter, the aim is to sketch, even if only in rough outline, an alternative future for bovines. At the core of this alternative future is the sense that the root of any outward change must be a change of heart—to be sure, a gradual and generally moderate change of heart—of individuals and expanding communities. Yet practical action is equally necessary, action that is energized by vision, inspiration, and knowledge. As a first step in developing vision, we here look at two out of several existing intentional communities in which cow care is an important feature. As “anticipatory communities,” one in northeast India and one in southwest Hungary, we look at them as models-in-the-making of a possible future for cow care.

We then examine the issue of care and natural death for bovines, with two cases of conflict with officials in the UK over demands for euthanasia. This points to one area of challenge for cow care expanding outside India,

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<sup>2</sup>In Krishnadas' Chaitanya Charitamrita account (Adi-lila 17.178–217), in fact the Qazi does show what we could call a change of heart. To be noted is that this episode follows a key “conversion” story, namely, that of Vishvambara/Chaitanya, who had recently returned home from pilgrimage as a changed man, having met and received mantra initiation from his guru, Ishvara Puri.

where differing conceptions of animal welfare (and in one case public health concerns) collide. Returning to India, an account of a “glorious death” of a much-beloved ox calls our attention to the notion of bovines’ afterlife futures.

Since we may think of a positive cow care future as calling for public activism, we then examine how certain types of activism may be causing more harm than good. Why this is so needs to be understood in order to avoid such mistakes and develop a broad-based culture of genuine care. I suggest that this aim can be served by awareness of an important teaching of the Bhagavad Gita, namely a threefold typology of action in terms of the three “qualities” of Samkhya (mentioned briefly in Chapter 4). Finally, I offer six positive *affirmations* based on action predominated by *sattva-guna*—the quality of goodness and illumination. These affirmations respond to and embrace six “moral foundations of political life” as a way of exploring how cow care would be able to find place and expand in the wider world. This may be seen as a thought experiment rooted in a notion of dharma as an ongoing process of balancing for the purpose of sustaining cosmic well-being and a moral landscape in which bhakti can thrive. It is one way of affirming for the future the phrase from the ancient Rigveda that we encountered in Chapter 2, “These cows will not be lost.”

## Anticipatory Communities

As intentional communities, it will be appropriate to regard Mayapur Chandrodaya Mandir (MCM) and New Vraja Dhama (NVD) as “anticipatory communities” in three ways. First, they function as extensive, long-term, multifaceted experiments, *anticipating* specific sorts of outcome while learning from mistakes and building on successes. Cow care is considered integral to these experiments because, as noted earlier, Swami Prabhupada, ISKCON’s founder, put so much emphasis on the practice. This engenders a sense of resolve: Somehow or other it must be possible to demonstrate that, with cow care properly practiced, the ideal of sustainable country living is both possible and preferable to modern ways of life that depend on an industrial economy. This is not to say that one day these communities expect to “breathe easily” in confidence that the goal of

fully sustainable self-sufficiency has been reached. Rather, the anticipation is for increasing experience and skill in facing the countless challenges that come up in such communities.

Second, MCM and NVD aspire to function as models that can be, at least theoretically and in certain ways, replicated, and thus they *anticipate* a broad application of their principles in the development of more such communities. Larry Rasmussen, from whom I borrow the phrase “anticipatory community,” notes that clearly the global environmental destruction and climate change trends call for systematic changes (large scale—national, regional, international). But such changes “usually don’t materialize if they are not already present in anticipatory communities, even if those communities are modest in size and number” (Rasmussen 2013, p. 121).

Third, MCM and NVD may be regarded as anticipatory specifically with respect to their cow care programs, in that they show a viable direction of practice conducive to imagining bovines as both “family members” and “citizens,” in meaningful, even if figurative, ways. After looking briefly at these two communities, we will discuss this further, in relation to five “basic rules” of cow care rooted in animal rights and care ethics (Meyer-Glitza 2018, pp. 193–194).

## Mayapur Chandrodaya Mandir, West Bengal

130 kilometers north of Kolkata along the Bhagirathi-Hooghly River (a tributary of the Ganges) is Shri Mayapur Dhama, an area that Chaitanyaite, or Gaudiya, Vaishnavas celebrate as the birthplace of their founding figure, Sri Krishna Chaitanya (1486–1533). Just south of the temple commemorating Chaitanya’s birth is the Shri Mayapur Chandrodaya Mandir, a large and increasingly bustling development with more than 4000 residents, some 30% of whom are foreigners (Fahy 2018, p. 2). In recent years, there has been an explosion of construction, inspired by the community’s main project, the massive under-construction Temple of the Vedic Planetarium (TOVP). Initially established in the early 1970s by Swami Prabhupada, as the community expanded, he designated Mayapur as the world headquarters for his mission, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON, which we first encountered

in Chapter 3). The complex includes a goshala with some 360 bovines, mainly of mixed breed, and further breeding is strictly controlled under pressure of limited land—some 12 acres for the goshala proper, plus 80 acres for grazing and growing of fodder, out of some 700 acres in total held by the Mayapur Chandrodaya Mandir.

There are two points to note regarding the future of cow care in connection with Mayapur. The first concerns the present numbers of visitors to the project, hundreds of whom on any given day make the extra effort to seek out the goshala, several hundred meters back from the main areas of attraction (the present temple, gardens, guesthouses, and restaurant). Present visitor numbers are expected to multiply many-fold when the TOVP is anticipated to open, in 2022. On the positive side, for many visitors the goshala serves an awareness and educational purpose, exposing people to the alternative to cow slaughter. Mayapur is in the State of West Bengal, where bovine slaughter restriction or prohibition laws are minimal.<sup>3</sup> As a showcase of cow care, Mayapur Chandrodaya Mandir can have a significant impact on people to simply recognize that there is such an alternative. But while this is the hope, one may wonder if the goshala will serve more as a simulacrum of cow care than as a place of genuine care: It might be argued that the cows are subjected to too much contact with humans, as in a zoo. Being “on exhibit” several hours each day could be seen as compromising their quality of life while instrumentalizing and objectifying them.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>There are no slaughter prohibition laws in seven of the eight northeastern Union Territories. Of the twenty-nine States and Union Territories, eleven prohibit slaughter of all bovines, including cows, calves, bulls, and buffaloes (Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Chhattisgarh, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, New Delhi, Goa, and Daman and Diu). Another ten states prohibit only slaughter of cows and calves; and one (Madhya Pradesh) prohibits slaughter of cows, calves, and buffaloes, but not bulls. Further details, including various exceptions and punishments for offenses, can be found here: <http://www.dahd.nic.in/dahd/reports/report-of-the-national-commission-on-cattle/chapter-ii-executive-summary/annex-ii-8.aspx>.

<sup>4</sup>Concerns were recently expressed by some MCM residents about neglect of aging and dying cows. Clearly an institution of this size must guard against the tendency to allow its missionizing priorities to prevail at the cost of its principles of care rooted in bhakti, meant to be the very foundation of the mission. Mayapur Chandrodaya Mandir’s 13-point mission statement includes (as the fifth statement), “The cows and bulls are kept happy, protected, worshiped, and fully engaged, setting a standard for cow protection all over the world” (Unpublished document, “Sri Mayapur Project—Articulating Srila Prabhupada’s Vision: References, version 4.2”).

Reinforcing this concern would appear to be Mayapur Chandrodaya's current managerial priorities. As Mayapur Chandrodaya Mandir anticipates a major influx of visitors, the main source of attraction for them will be the massive TOVP. As a multi-million-dollar construction project, understandably, almost all fund-raising attention goes toward temple construction, leaving the goshala as a lesser priority for the MCM management team. Despite the reasonable justification that the end result will be much greater attention to the goshala, there lurks—for this observer—a sense of irony in the juxtaposition of this globalizing construction project, dubbed by another observer as “a colossal monument to hybridity” (Fahy 2018, p. 15) with the project's goshala (see Fig. 6.1). Practically in the temple structure's massive shadow, the cows may appear like mere tokens of the world of “plain living and high thinking” that Prabhupada so much emphasized as the aim of the project to showcase.



**Fig. 6.1** Mayapur goshala cows ruminate in a field before the (under construction) Temple of the Vedic Planetarium

In a sense, the second noteworthy feature of Mayapur Chandrodaya Mandir regarding cow care similarly highlights the contrast between village life and cosmopolitan globalized mission. This feature is a nascent effort to establish a community-supported agriculture (CSA) program with local village dairy farmers.<sup>5</sup> At present, following the pattern of the Indian dairy industry as we have seen, when the greater Mayapur (Nadia District) farmers' cows reduce or no longer give milk, they are typically sold. In this locale, it means that the cows are either slaughtered locally or, more typically, smuggled to the neighboring country, Bangladesh, for slaughter. To create an alternative to this scenario, Pancharatna Das, an American resident of ISKCON Mayapur for 28 years, prepares to launch a CSA program that would attract local Hindu farmers (and possibly even Muslim farmers),<sup>6</sup> to arrange for the retired cows' upkeep through subscriptions. The idea is that since the Western population of Mayapur is growing, it can support an "ahimsa added value" dairy system.<sup>7</sup>

A first step in such a scheme is to convince the local dairy farmers to cooperate by not selling their retired cows or young bulls for slaughter. They would be rewarded in various ways for their self-restraint, such as by building for them better cow shelters than they presently have.<sup>8</sup> The retired bovines would then, ideally, be cared for by the same villagers, motivated by their culturally, and religiously ingrained understanding that human beings should be protecting, not killing, cows.<sup>9</sup> But, says Pancharatna, their capacity to care for these cows, even if subsidized, may be limited:

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<sup>5</sup>For an explanation of community-supported agriculture, see, for example, Lamb (1994).

<sup>6</sup>The majority of dairy farmers in this area are Hindus, although there is a high Muslim population. Those dairy farmers who are Muslim may, Pancharatna hopes, also take part in the scheme if they see that it is economically viable.

<sup>7</sup>Many westerners (including several hundred Russians, but also an increasing number of Chinese) settle in Mayapur, staying for a few months, alternating with a few months in the West where they earn sufficient funds to live comfortably in Mayapur, where they may have also regular *seva* (service) in one of several departments where their skills are well engaged.

<sup>8</sup>Other benefits that could be offered to the farmers are help in improving yields, help in getting loans, medical support for their cows, help with making biogas facilities, and guidance in growing organic food for which a market would be guaranteed at higher prices.

<sup>9</sup>Again, as mentioned in Chapter 4, because grazing land has become so scarce, even if dairy farmers want to, economically they cannot sustain nonproductive bovines. The village dairy farmers generally own very little, if any, land for grazing.

The fallback plan is that our Vaishnava community would have a place for the cows. We envision a (Indian) nationwide system of regional cow shelters [connected to the several other ISKCON projects around India], in places where land is less expensive, and ideally where there are forests nearby, so that the cows can get at least some of their needs from the forest, national forest ... I'm in dialogue with government officers, about possible available land that the government is willing to offer. And those places would be able to accept our retired cows. That is the long-term plan.

With all the financial and other managerial requirements for such a scheme, we can see that it would function within an essentially modern framework of rational organization, and it would function because of its positioning as an added-value dairy that has, as its appeal to a wider (especially, but not exclusively Western) public, the assurance that, in addition to milk quality monitoring (presently completely absent), the bovines in the system are all under lifetime care and the farmers' lives are benefited. Of course, it remains to be seen if this scheme will work, and questions arise whether and how it will be properly managed in the face of the inertia of current local village practices. The question will be whether Western presence, money, influence, and organizational style will bring about the desired standards of cow care.<sup>10</sup> Will such a program serve to realize the aims of "familization" and "citizenship" for bovines that are hoped?

## **New Vraja Dhama, Hungary**

A striking example of a farm community outside India with a strong emphasis on cow care which is sustained with little or no support of an Indian diaspora is the New Vraja Dhama (NVD) community in Hungary, central Europe, some 150 kilometers southwest of Budapest. Residents of NVD engage their oxen in farmwork on its 280 hectares of rolling hills, and a few cows supply milk to the temple for making dairy-based food

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<sup>10</sup>Pancharatna Das notes that the scheme has many details yet to be worked out, such as whether farmers would continue caring for old bovines supported by the scheme, or whether the old bovines would be bought by the scheme and taken to its (ISKCON's) own regional shelters set up for the purpose. In any case, monitoring—with its additional costs—would be required in all aspects of the scheme.



preparations for the elaborately served temple images of Krishna and his consort Radha (see Fig. 6.2).

New Vraja Dhama is also affiliated with ISKCON, about which we have already discussed in Chapter 3 with respect to the mission’s founder, Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. NVD is a highly structured community, with some fifty organizational departments, each closely monitored for numerical sustainability indexes.<sup>11</sup> The cows and agriculture departments in particular watch very closely their productivity, as the aim is to eventually come to the point where sustainability and self-sufficiency



**Fig. 6.2** The New Vraja Dhama goshala aims to showcase cow care for increasing numbers of visitors

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<sup>11</sup>As currently calculated (by its own managers), based on a detailed set of factors, NVD as a whole is rated at 33% self-sustaining. The cow department has been rated at 50% self-sustaining (Interview with Radha Krishna Das, 27 January 2019). These are considered relatively high percentages compared with other departments and previous years, but of course the aim is to continue to increase the percentages as far as possible, where “possible” is taken to be 80%. Yet managers contend that “when push comes to shove” (if the general surrounding economy would collapse), NVD can run completely self-sufficiently in terms of basic necessities.

become substantial realities.<sup>12</sup> And yet, even though there is concern for rational efficiency and “productivity” in daily cow care, there appears to be a strong sense that the cows are Krishna’s (mainly Brown Swiss breed) cows, and hence they must not be regarded or treated in instrumental terms.

An essential principle of sustainable cow care in NVD is maintaining the herd at a sustainable number of bovines. Of course, this is *not* done by “culling”; rather, it is done by paced breeding, the pace being determined by the amount of land available for maintaining each animal. Reckoning one hectare per cow or bull—young or aging—as required for full maintenance, including pasture and winter fodder growing, the current herd number of 44 bovines is expected to be increased to 60. Having seen that the average natural lifespan of these cows is 15 years, the cow care program’s managers are allowing four cows to become pregnant each year. In rotation, this means that any single cow may bear a calf twice in her life.

Lactating cows at NVD are milked, but the goshala does not function as a dairy. All milking is done by hand, and the milk goes to the temple kitchen. Ghanashyam, a Hungarian Krishna-bhakta who has been tending the cows at New Vraja Dhama since the project’s beginning twenty-two years ago, describes his experience in milking the cows:

I try to always remember that Krishna says [in the Bhagavad-gita] that we should always remember him. I try to milk with Radhe Shyam (the temple images of Radha and Krishna) in my mind. When I teach someone to milk, I never speak about this, but I teach only such devotees who have the same mood. The cows enjoy it very much: We usually milk outside, where the

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<sup>12</sup>The main expense for maintaining the bovines would normally be the cost of fodder, but at NVD, this cost is entirely eliminated by having sufficient land for both grazing and fodder for the full year. At this writing, there are 20 cows, 24 oxen, and one bull, and two cows are pregnant. 10 of the animals, mainly oxen, are “retired”; three sets of two oxen are trained and able to do traction work. The milk quantity, presently from four cows, may be some 40 liters per day, most of which goes to the farm’s temple kitchen, where the milk is used in various preparations offered to Radha and Krishna. Some milk is used for making ghee, some small amount of which is sold in the temple shop. So essentially there is no income from the cow products. There is, however, regular income from donors who “adopt” a cow. There is a waiting list of people wanting to sponsor cows. The main expense in maintaining the cow care program for NVD is the cost of maintaining the cowherds—the resident community members who oversee and care for the cows, of which there are currently 12.

cows are free. They actually line up to be milked, and some, even after being milked, come back in the line as if wanting to be milked again.<sup>13</sup>

As already noted in Chapter 4, for Vaishnava Hindu cowherds, seeing Krishna as the owner of the cows is conducive for them to feel that by serving the cows, they are serving Krishna.<sup>14</sup>

Ultimately both the devotional mood and good productivity are seen as important by the NVD residents. Both principles are seen to complement each other in such a way that community members feel satisfaction in their work, so that they also experience a sense that they are appropriately honoring principles of dharma. Importantly, here dharma is strongly bhakti-inflected, such that the other three human aims previously mentioned (*purusha arthas*), namely satisfaction of desire (*kama*); pursuit of wealth (*artha*); and pursuit of freedom (*moksha*), are regarded as becoming fulfilled through devotional (bhakti) activity or work. What Christopher Fici (2018, p. 7) calls "embodied and transembodied flourishing" is what is sought. It is such flourishing that frames the sense of satisfaction in residents' devotional activity.<sup>15</sup> Integral to such satisfaction is confidence in being able to show to the wider world progress toward becoming a viable

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<sup>13</sup>When I visited NVD in summer 2018, Ghanashyam told me that one cow, Radhika, gives 6 liters of milk per day, although her last calving was three years ago. Antardvip also told me of one unusual, no longer living cow, Rati. Rati was a heifer (a cow that has not had any calves), yet she gave milk every day for several years, up to 11 liters per day in one summer (she was kept from becoming a mother due to having a birth defect in one leg that was also present in her mother).

<sup>14</sup>Narayanan (2018a, p. 10) calls attention to the danger of "objectification" as a result of sacralization, citing Martha Nussbaum's theory with seven indicators of objectification among humans, namely instrumentality; (denial of) autonomy; inertness; fungibility; violability; ownership; and denial of subjectivity. Narayanan writes that "In the case of bovines, instrumentality is triply applied through their designation as economic, political and sacred resources." In New Vraja Dhama, one point to be made indicating that this tendency does not apply is the strong sense that, in terms of ownership, it is Krishna who is the owner of the bovines. Thus, all sense of their being "resources" accrues to the divinity. This heightens the sense of responsibility among the cowherds (and administrators of the community) for the bovines to be well cared for. Indeed, regarding Krishna as the supreme *subject* reminds carers of the bovines' subjectivity, for they understand that Krishna is present as *paramatman*, as the supreme sentient self, in the core of each bovine's self.

<sup>15</sup>The biggest challenge to sustainability at NVD, Shivarama Swami (Interview, 13 February 2019) explains, is in the social dimension. Residents here accept considerable physical inconvenience (such as hand-pumping water and having to make wood fires to heat the water for bathing, etc., and living almost entirely without the use of electricity). The present second and third-generation residents do not feel the same fervor to accept the austerities and make the project succeed as the more missionary-spirited first generation. Moreover, Hungary's continental European climate, with its

model of cow-based farming. Thus, my observation was that community members here see themselves as being well positioned to draw a wider public to appreciate cow care practice.<sup>16</sup>

Although not explicitly stated up to now, it should be clear that cow care practice, as we are presenting it, assumes the carers to be at least vegetarian, if not vegan. In NVD, to be vegetarian is an absolute prerequisite for community membership and residency. While not required as yet, members are strongly encouraged to follow the example of the project's founder and main spiritual guide, Shivarama Swami, in keeping an "ahimsa vegetarian" diet. "Ahimsa vegetarian" as defined in this community means abstaining from all dairy products unless they come from lifelong cared for cows. Following a vegetarian diet at the very least is regarded as a crucial step toward understanding the importance of cow care, a key step toward ahimsa vegetarian life, which is regarded as a necessity for what might be called "ethical sustainability," or moral consistency, with the aim of caring for cows in the best possible way.

And yet, conscientious Vaishnava Hindus will say that ultimately no kind of diet restriction frees one from responsibility for suffering, for any food consumption, including non-animal foods of any kind, involves the killing of living beings. As the Bhagavata Purana observes, *jivo jivasya jivanam*, "a living being is the life of (another) living being" (BhP 1.13.47). Far from being a justification for eating anything and everything, the point is to reduce suffering as far as possible. The bhakti principle is to restrict one's diet to only those foods that have been offered in a prescribed devotional manner to the source of all life. Such food is regarded as "remnants" (*prasada*—literally "graciousness" or "kindness") of the divine, sanctified food that is experienced as strengthening and illuminating for the spirit as well as purifying for the body and mind.<sup>17</sup>

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single annual crop cycle and heavy winters, means that NVD faces numerous challenges that, for example, ISKCON Mayapur in India does not face.

<sup>16</sup>NVD currently receives some 25,000 visitors per year, up 15% from five years previous.

<sup>17</sup>Ideally, all food that is offered to Krishna (through a formal ritual procedure in Krishna's temple) would be grown and harvested or gathered either directly by Vaishnavas or under their direction, avoiding chemical fertilizer, pesticides, and machines such as tractors. More strictly, food offerings for Krishna are to be cooked, especially in temple worship, only by Krishna-bhaktas who have received formal initiation as brahmins. In NVD, this latter standard is strictly maintained, and

For NVD community members, *prasada* sharing is of crucial importance in their outreach efforts. The idea is that if people are to give serious consideration to accepting the radical change in diet that is being proposed, with all the implications for their social lives, and so on, they need to experience directly a "higher taste."<sup>18</sup> They have to literally taste such sanctified food, and by experiencing its rich flavorful quality, they can be more easily open to the ethical reasoning that includes, of course, the care of cows. Therefore, NVD community members will say that admonishments to forgo meat and industrial dairy are, by themselves, usually ineffective. Any call to change must be accompanied by a palatable alternative.

New Vraja Dhama is not an insular community. Quite the contrary, it actively invites visitors, and it has been the object of study for post-graduate students from various universities, with interests from ecology to sociology. The public interface with the community has also meant interaction of various kinds in the political sphere, from the small scale of the adjacent village to the national level. As scholars of religion are fond of saying, "religion and politics are two sides of the same coin." So, it has been unavoidable that the Hungarian Society for Krishna Consciousness (HSKCON) has had to face challenges in the political arena, particularly in 2011–2012, when its status as a legal religion was revoked. For us to note is one occasion, in December 2011, in the course of protesting their religious status denial, when members brought cows from New Vraja Dhama to accompany them in a protest before the Hungarian Parliament building in central Budapest. As it happened, along with seventeen other religious groups in Hungary, HSKCON's religious status was soon reinstated (Dasi 2012).

What this situation in relation to the Hungarian state highlights is the dependency of the NVD project on favorable state recognition, with the

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many, though not all, foods have been grown on the NVD land. Of course, the only dairy products used are those from NVD cows, making sure the calves are fully nourished first.

<sup>18</sup>A Bhagavad-gita stanza often quoted to underline this point: "The embodied soul may be restricted from sense enjoyment, though the taste for sense objects remains. But, ceasing such engagements by experiencing a higher taste, he is fixed in consciousness" (Prabhupāda 1972, p. 147; Bg. 2.59).

financial benefits such recognition affords.<sup>19</sup> Indirectly, cow care in NVD benefits from its being legally recognized as part of a religious institution. In turn, this relationship with the state points us back to our discussion of animal “citizenship” in Chapter 5, where I drew from Donaldson and Kymlicka’s invitation to imagine such a possibility.

Very briefly, in the context of NVD we can revisit the four areas of pre-supposition for citizenship we selected (from nine altogether proposed by these authors). First, mobility and sharing of public space: NVD bovines have ample freedom of movement, especially throughout the warmer months, with daily grazing in generously open areas; and when indoors, they are not tied. Second, the cows’ milk is used, not for business, but rather for sanctified food that is shared in the community and with visitors. No attempt is made to artificially increase the milk quantity, nor to deprive calves of their needs. Third, yes, the oxen are trained and engaged in traction work, but they are always carefully worked and not overworked. And lastly, yes, sex and reproduction are controlled, in such a way as to ensure that the already present bovines are not threatened by over-reproduction. Also, artificial insemination is rejected, and motherhood for cows neither denied nor over-frequently imposed.

It can be argued that these practices fall short of indicating that bovines are being regarded as citizens. However, the analogous sense in which the term is used serves to point the community toward honoring the cows as fellow members of the community. It also serves human community members to be reminded that the cows are, as atemporal beings with bovine bodies, ontologically equal to all other community members. However, this is not to minimize or obscure the fact that these are indeed bovines—vulnerable animals with their own specific needs and inclinations.

New Vraja Dhama is not the first or only agricultural community of ISKCON. As mentioned in Chapter 3, Prabhupada inspired followers to develop farm communities in America, and since then, with varied scales and degrees of success, several more have been established in various

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<sup>19</sup>A significant source of monetary income for HSKCON, including New Vraja Dhama, is a one-percent apportionment of tax money to the religious organization one designates or to which one belongs. Currently there are some 40,000 Hungarian taxpayer citizens who benefit HSKCON, a number that the government multiplies by four, yielding a significant annual supplement to other sources (Shivarama Swami interview, 13 February 2019).

countries of the world.<sup>20</sup> Nor is ISKCON alone in having cow care projects outside India. As we take up our next topic in relation to cow care futures, I will introduce one more ISKCON project outside London and another Hindu project in Wales. One principle these two communities have in common is that bovines should be allowed to live out their natural lives. As we will see, each of the two communities came into conflict with local civic authorities on this point. As we look to bovine futures, we must also reflect on the implications of caring for them through to their natural expiry. In particular, in a Hindu theological context, it is understood that death is the end of the body but not of the self (*atman*) within the body. Thus, animals as much as humans have a post-mortem future. But rather than canceling moral concern for animals' bodies, this understanding of non-temporal selfhood heightens moral concern for temporal bodies, as we will see in the next section.

## Departing Bovine Souls

To better appreciate implications of the following events, let us first recall Vrinda Dalmiya's five metaethical themes that frame the ethics of care (introduced in Chapter 5): *relationality* (acknowledgment of the embodied condition of all subjects of moral action); recognition of *needs* (addressing often conflicting needs of corporeal and hence vulnerable, selves); *affectivity* (the recognition that emotions have an important place in moral decision-making); *contextualism* (the awareness that moral judgments always take place in specific relational contexts); and, finally, *responsibility* (the recognition of "moral remainders"—of feelings such as guilt and uncertainty regarding inevitable limits to one's capacity to respond). As broad metaethical understandings, these themes are necessarily abstract, yet paradoxically they emphasize particularity: Care is for particular beings

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<sup>20</sup>At this writing, ISKCON proper has some 84 projects in which cows are kept. Of these, 47 are in India, 9 in North America, 14 in Europe, 3 in Latin America, 3 in Southeast Asia, 2 in Russia, 2 in Africa, and 4 in Australia. Most projects have very small numbers of bovines—as few as 5–10, a few, such as Gita Nagari in Pennsylvania, have up to 100, and the largest number is currently in Tirupati, with 500 cows and bulls. Additionally, there are several ISKCON members with private projects that include cow care on varying scales.

in particular circumstances. “Particular beings” can, of course, be nonhuman animals, and here we are specifically concerned with possible futures for the care of bovines. How is the gap filled between these very general, though essential, metaethical themes, and the specific aspirations in cow care?

To enlist the ethics of care paradigm specifically for care of bovines, Patrick Meyer-Glitza offers five overlapping “basic rules of the care system.”<sup>21</sup> First, care is *universally applied* to all cattle, including both sexes, in all ages and conditions of health. Second, care is *unconditional* in that productivity is no precondition for the animals’ right of life, with equal benefits for all animals, whether or not they are “productive.” As Meyer-Glitza pointedly notes, “The life of the cattle, their being alive, is the main product.” Furthermore, all other farmed animals have the same right of life and care. Third, and elaborating on the previous two rules, *lifetime of care* ensures that during old age, illness and dying, the bovines will be cared for in ways resembling old age homes and other institutions for disabled or vulnerable human beings.<sup>22</sup> Fourth, bovines are *familized*, which is to say the cared-for animals “are looked at as distinct individualities and treated as part of the enlarged family.” Although, he notes, the term “family” is used metaphorically, it highlights feelings of bonding between human and animal (the degree and nature depending on several factors) that may resemble feelings of relationship in the family. Finally, *prevention* is a rule of care for animals that embraces farmers’ work toward having their farms be models of how to live with farmed animals in such ways as to prevent their slaughter. In the face of state powers, the two following examples point to potential or real difficulties in upholding these rules.

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<sup>21</sup>Meyer-Glitza (2018, p. 193) refers to two combined systems—the care system, summarized by the five basic rules and characterized by a sanctuary function, and the agri-system of husbandry and animal products. Combined, “these two worlds make up the agri-care-system.”

<sup>22</sup>Meyer-Glitza notes that bovines will not, due to disability, be “(re-) commodified.” An example of re-commodification would be use of a naturally dead bovine’s hide for processing as a leather product. M. K. Gandhi apparently favored re-commodification of dead bovines, specifically their hides, as an income source for goshalas (Burgat 2004, p. 224). In contrast, Swami Datta Sharanananda at Pathmeda rejects re-commodification, arguing that it would have the effect of reducing—even if unconsciously—care for diseased and dying bovines.



## Contested Lives at Bhaktivedanta Manor and Skanda Vale

The practice of lifelong cow care in the West is quite new and rare, and it is not being done in a cultural vacuum. While some Westerners appreciate this effort and have some sense of its value, others—especially non-vegetarians, but also persons who may be vegetarian or vegan—may have ethical concerns, in particular regarding end-of-life care and rejection of euthanasia for terminally ill bovines. Two episodes in the UK involving confrontation of cow care practicing Hindu communities with local civic authorities are relevant although, strictly speaking, it is precisely that they need *not* have been terminal cases that they are noteworthy.

In the northwest part of London's Green Belt zone is Bhaktivedanta Manor, a very active and expanding community of Vaishnava Hindus established in 1973.<sup>23</sup> The main property of some 77 acres includes a *goshala*, presently with 50 bovines (mainly Meuse Rhine Issel breed), cared for as an integral feature of the Manor's missionary work to show people an alternative way of life and to share the tenets and practices of "Krishna consciousness." In 2007, one thirteen-year-old cow named Gangotri suffered a fall and a damaged leg when one of the *goshala*'s bulls tried to mount her. With attentive nursing by the Manor's cowherds, Gangotri was slowly recovering, and although she still could not walk, she was helped to stand twice a day. Despite the improvement and her general good health aside from her condition of lameness, and despite positive indications from the Manor's two regular veterinarians that she was steadily improving, word got to the local animal welfare agency, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) that a sick cow was being neglected. Through what the Manor managers regarded as blatantly deceptive means, the RSPCA arranged to have Gangotri euthanized.

The news of this act soon went public in the local Asian press in which, to a published response to accusations against the RSPCA by a representative thereof, the Manor countered (in part),

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<sup>23</sup>Bhaktivedanta Manor was purchased and gifted by "Beatle"-musician George Harrison to the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON). Swami Prabhupada, ISKCON's founder, visited here in 1973 and expressed his wish that cows be acquired and cared for on the property. For a detailed discussion of cow care at Bhaktivedanta Manor, see Prime (2009).

The Manor runs a Cow Protection Project and as such animal welfare is its first consideration. The position of the RSPCA is that nursing animals beyond a certain level is not animal welfare and in this position they are judging the practice of the Hindu faith where animals are cared for until their natural end. They say to allow Gangotri to continue to live would have been wrong; in other words, they are condemning the beliefs of the Hindu tradition as being wrong.

By framing the RSPCA's action as an affront and repudiation of "the beliefs of the Hindu tradition," the Manor challenged the agency's understanding of animal welfare as being deficient if not wrong-headed. Noteworthy is that, in this case, the conflict was eventually resolved amicably: The RSPCA issued a public apology to the Manor and the UK Hindu community, and it donated a cow to the Manor goshala (Aditi who, in early 2009, gave birth to a female calf, receiving the name Gangotri).<sup>24</sup>

A positive result of this incident was that the Manor's goshala manager, Shyamasundara Das, became a temporary consultant for the UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) in the drafting of its "Protocol for handling welfare cases in cooperation with the Hindu Community" (DEFRA 2009).<sup>25</sup> Yet this document also reaffirms governmental authority to determine if "unnecessary suffering" of an animal is occurring, such that it may decide that euthanasia is to be done, despite

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<sup>24</sup>ISKCON News Weekly Staff (2009). <https://iskconnews.org/rspca-donated-cow-gives-birth-at-bhaktivedanta-manor,1027> (accessed 8 June 2018).

<sup>25</sup>In its favor, this protocol explicitly "acknowledges that the manner in which the Hindu community cares for bovine animals is governed by strict ethical and religious beliefs. It also acknowledges that financial or such other considerations will not limit the efforts of the Hindu community to provide palliative care as they might in a situation where commercial farming practices are involved" (DEFRA Protocol 2009, para. 3). However, authority remains with government agencies to decide if an animal is to be euthanized, according to British animal welfare legislation (see especially paras. 17 and 19).

disapproval of (in this case) cow carers.<sup>26</sup> The protocol also states (para. 5) that it “does not apply to any action required for disease control purposes.”

Disease control was considered to be the issue in the case of the bull Shambo at Skanda Vale Ashram in West Wales, in 2007. Skanda Vale ashram, officially the Community of the Many Names of God (CMNG), is a quite small “multifaith, multispecies community” with a prominent Hindu orientation, with currently some twenty-eight human members, two of whom are lay members, the others being monks, nuns, or novices (Hurn 2018, p. 264). Nonhumans of the community include cows, as well as water buffalo, a variety of smaller species, and one Asian elephant. Although the community is small, it receives some 90,000 pilgrims annually, mostly Hindu South Asians of Britain with Tamil backgrounds. Founded in 1973 by the Sri Lankan Tamil Guru Sri Subramaniam, the central principles of the ashram are ahimsa and *sanatana-dharma*, defined here as “timeless consciousness of God, manifest in practice at Skanda Vale through the recognition and preservation of the sanctity of life of all living beings” (Hurn 2018, p. 264; Warriar 2010, p. 262).

As already mentioned, in 2007 Shambo, Skanda Vale’s resident black Friesian bull, was tested positive for bovine tuberculosis (bTB). Maya Warriar (2010) describes in detail the government’s determination that the bull must be slaughtered for disease control, leading to a multi-layered battle, ending with the government’s power prevailing, bringing death to Shambo. An important feature of this battle narrative is CMNG’s shift from an eclectic multifaith identity to an explicitly Hindu identity. This served well to marshal widespread Hindu support (mainly British, but also from other countries). A point for us to note is that the plea of Hindu religious tradition and its ahimsa principle failed to carry sufficient weight to reverse the government’s decision on the plea of disease control.

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<sup>26</sup>More recently, in March 2019, Bhaktivedanta Manor’s cow named Shyama Gauri suffered a broken leg which, when she rolled over on it, broke further and protruded through the skin. Her state of obvious agony could not be mitigated despite injections of painkillers. In this case, the managers decided they had no choice but to allow her to be euthanized, following government regulations. In a letter addressed to the Manor community, senior manager Gauri Das explained the situation, concluding with a comparison to the case of Gangotri, twelve years previous: “However, this [present] incident proved too extreme. Shyama Gauri was in sustained and helpless agony despite all efforts. We turn in prayers to Lord Krishna now, for the soul of Shyama Gauri, and for the wisdom to know how to best serve His cows.”

We might step back to view this incident in terms of late modern cultural theory about how knowledge and power are interwoven. This episode at CMNG serves as an example of how contemporary discourse about animals functions in a delimited scope, within a “discourse of law” and a “discourse of lines” (Johnson 2012, pp. 39–62).<sup>27</sup> From this perspective, within certain “conditions of truth” recognized by the state, Skanda Vale’s “transmigration of souls discourse” was one of *subordinated knowledge*, a way of understanding reality that carried no weight with the government. In this context, ironically, the discourse of law, in which animal ownership is decisive, was in a sense inverted, so that the CMNG’s ownership of Shambo was, in effect, superseded by state ownership. This quasi-transfer of ownership meant that fungibility replaced uniqueness: Sambho, suspected of carrying a contagious disease, was regarded by the state as disposable because replaceable. Whatever the degree of threat to public health there might have been by his condition,<sup>28</sup> the CMNG’s offer to quarantine and treat the apparently curable Shambo had no leverage against the inertial legal system. Still, as we are here considering bovine futures, what may prove to be significant about this episode is that it became a platform on which the subordinated knowledge of transmigration of souls came more into public awareness. It would be possible, in course of time, for the subordinated knowledge of transmigration to become a prominent, and perhaps even a dominant, knowledge. The hope would be that then the “discourse of animals as *beings*,” which is, as Johnson puts it, currently “buried in plain sight,” could come to the public surface, for the substantial, life-preserving benefit of animals (Johnson 2012, p. 100) and hence, for the benefit of all human society.

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<sup>27</sup>Michel Foucault (1926–1984), well known for his analyses of the relationship between power and knowledge, is the key thinker behind Lisa Johnson’s analysis of these two components in relation to animals. The expression “discourse of lines” refers to the way language “works to shape the form of our knowledge about things. Specifically, the discourse of lines requires us to see parts, rather than wholes” (Johnson 2012, p. 22). Although not using this expression directly Carol Adams (2010) elaborates extensively on how this discourse works with respect to animals and the meat industry.

<sup>28</sup>Compounding the ironies and adding an element of pathos to this episode, apparently Shambo’s post-mortem examination showed him to be tuberculosis free (Prime 2009, p. 29. No source for this information is given).

## Krishna the Ox Breathes His Last in Vrindavan

It would be reasonable to assume that such a recognition of animals as beings is necessary to appreciate the Hindu conviction that bovines should be cared for to their natural end. One account of the life, final days, and funerary honoring of a particular ox in India can give us a sense of how such “beingness” of a bovine was experienced by his carers.

In 2008, at the Care For Cows goshala in Vrindavan, the ox (of Kankrej breed) named Krishna died. It had been seven years since Krishna had twice walked a circuit around the entire coast of India and across the north, from east to west, over a period of ten years, together with his counterpart ox, Balaram. These journeys were with a *padayatra*—a walking procession, enacted as part of the Chaitanyaite Vaishnava mission to bring Krishna-bhakti (the message of devotion to Lord Krishna) to villages throughout the country.

On being suddenly retired from his service of pulling the *padayatra* cart “[Krishna, the ox] protested by being irritated and unruly for almost a year. We brushed him for hours, took him for long walks and built him a cart, but nothing seemed to pacify him” (NA, “Tribute” 2008). Eventually he became again calm (possibly because of “bonding” with a goshala co-resident cow, Vanamali). Eventually the ox contracted horn cancer, gradually lost interest in eating, and lost his ability to stand. After a peaceful death, several friends of Care For Cows gathered to help bury him.<sup>29</sup> The newsletter report continues,

After being placed in the grave, about twenty-five devotees [Krishna-bhaktas] offered Ganges water, flowers and incense and began to circum-ambulate him in *kirtan* [singing divine names]. With moist eyes we all filled our hands with Vrindavan dust and showered it all over his body.

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<sup>29</sup>Sanak-Sanatan Das, from Germany, recalled with wonder the ox’s death, and the fact that he happened to be present at that moment, feeling that the ox had “called” him “[After I arrived, Krishna] started stirring as if wanting to stand, lifted his head to the sky, opened his mouth, and expired....We [Krishna, the ox, and myself] had been really, really good friends. I had purchased him [and Balaram], I had donated him [to the *padayatra* project], I grew up with him for almost ten years.” Regarding his experience of friendship with the ox, Das goes on to tell of the ox’s remarkable friendship with his counterpart, Balaram. “They were more like lovers, Krishna taking the feminine role and Balaram the masculine role. We used to call them Mr. and Mrs. Patel.”

This strikingly handsome ox, with the very large horns of the Kankrej breed and his ten years of *padayatra* cart-pulling service, made him much admired—so much so that letters of condolence were received from around the world. Further, the family sponsoring his maintenance after retirement also sponsored the construction of a permanent memorial structure, a *samadhi*, in his honor. The final paragraph of the newsletter article speaks of him as a devotee of Lord Krishna, rather than as an animal:

[Krishna] is an inspiring example of one who served selflessly to spread the Holy Name to every town and village. His passing in Vrindavan at an auspicious moment, in the company of well-wishers and without excessive suffering attests to his greatness. May he remember us favorably as we continue to struggle in this material world. (NA, “Tribute” 2008)

“May he remember us favorably” is a telling reminder of the pan-Indic notion that, as we have discussed in relation to Jada Bharata in Chapter 5, the atemporal self continues after the body dies. There is also an indication of the conviction that this particular being, temporarily in a bovine body, had attained after death the much coveted destination of Goloka Vrindavan, by virtue of having died in the earthly land of Vrindavan.

I call attention to this account because it articulates a Vaishnava Hindu understanding of what the perfect future for an individual being—bovine or otherwise—would be, following death. Another way of putting it, I suggest, is that this particular bovine was regarded as having attained what we might call “full citizenship,” in the only realm where it is possible, namely beyond the realm of temporality. In the temporal realm, any citizenship status for any beings, including humans, can at best be an approximation, for it is contingent upon changing factors. Also to be noted is the sense of satisfaction that the human carers for this particular ox had, that they had properly done their parts in facilitating the best possible conditions for the remainder of his life.<sup>30</sup> In this case, a sense of perfect human–animal

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<sup>30</sup>In the CFC newsletter, it is also mentioned that after Kṛṣṇa’s second tour of India, three senior persons who felt responsible for him discussed at length whether he should be allowed to go on a third tour. Knowing that he was getting older, they decided not to risk that his life might end outside Vrindavan, instead having him remain where they saw he would be best cared for.

cooperation reached a summit secured by bhakti—dedication in sharing lives across the species boundary to please the supreme person.

Finally, this is an example of what was seen as an ideal case of species boundary-crossing as human/nonhuman animal cooperation. As such, it is seen as a demonstration that it is possible to transcend the “discourse of lines,” the discourse that permits humans to see nonhuman animal bodies as parsable, or divisible, to serve human ends (in a doomed attempt of humans to make themselves whole, de-alienated) (Johnson 2012, pp. 61–62). This, then, becomes dharma in the deeper sense suggested in Chapter 5: The dharmic sensibility is a recognition of agency and choice that enables us humans to “access hidden possibilities and bring them under our control” (Frazier 2017, pp. 195–198). In this case, the “hidden possibility” is the potential to transcend the species boundary as well as the boundary of death by caring for a being in a dying bovine body in hopes of ushering him toward a permanent life beyond suffering.

## When Cow Protection Activism Becomes Counterproductive

In thinking of futures for cows with the aid of a dharmic sensibility, we do well to reconsider efforts for cows in the public sphere, specifically activism in its various forms. The Cow Protection movement in India that initially took formal shape in the 1880s has continued in various ways and forms up to the present day. As we discussed in Chapter 3, in its early form it served to shape and galvanize a nationalist identity as essentially Hindu, arguably accelerating the process that led to India’s independence from British rule in 1947. Since independence, cow protection activists are known to cite M. K. Gandhi for his setting cow protection as a priority equal to if not higher than independence.<sup>31</sup> Sadly, however, the long and continuing history of Indian bovine protection legislation is, as mentioned in Chapter 3, a narrative largely of persistent failure to protect bovines from slaughter. It

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<sup>31</sup>Lodha (2002, Chapter 1, paragraph 39) quotes Gandhi, from December 1927: “As for me, not even to win Swaraj [independence], will I renounce my principle of cow protection.” I was not able to verify this quote from the CWMG. In any case, it is clear from his numerous references to “cow-protection” that he considered it a high priority.

is also a story of ignoring the manifold abuses to bovines *during* their lives. Ironically, much of this failure may be attributed to insistence on cows' sacrality. How this is so has been explained in detail by Yamini Narayanan (2018a), based on her interviews with several cow protectionists of three different types, namely religious protectionists, political protectionists, and "secular" animal welfare organization members. Here, as we look to possible cow care futures, I want to consider her findings to show the need for deeper understanding of how persons may best serve cows in the political sphere. More constructive than abandoning affirmations of cows' sacrality, I suggest, is to extend the category of sacrality, aiming toward inclusion of all sentient beings. But this requires replacing the tendency to objectify the sacred with the essential meaning and purpose of sacrality, namely to *subjectify*—to acknowledge and affirm the subjective reality and being of all creatures.

The notion that cows in general or specific breeds of bovines are sacred is often represented by cow protectionists in a way that, unfortunately, amplifies cows' objectification. This means that a cow's being, as a creature with vulnerabilities, becomes obscured by her *function* as a symbol.<sup>32</sup> As a symbol, she becomes an abstraction, because what she symbolizes are abstractions: *The cow is a symbol of* "Hinduism," "purity," "the Indian nation," "*sanatana-dharma*," and so on. Further, all these meanings are one side of binary oppositions. What is *not* "Hinduism," and so forth, are opposed to these concepts, and being in opposition, they are seen as a threat to them. Although these terms are abstractions, they are rhetorically very powerful, such that persons identify themselves either with them or in opposition to them. Then, with further rhetorical moves, the divisions become sharpened, intensifying from difference to antagonism to hatred and to violence.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Further to n. 14 in this chapter, "objectification" is a term used in feminist discourse to critique how women are objectified and thereby exploited by men. The term has been extended by some animal ethicists to call attention to a similar dynamic in human treatment of animals. Ironically, the effort to protect the cow by identifying her as "mother" can have the effect of affirming her as an object of exploitation, thus inverting the whole purpose of highlighting her identity as "mother."

<sup>33</sup>Purushottama Bilimoria (2018, p. 57) aptly asks, "Is modern Hinduism even as it becomes more secular . . . , McDonalized [sic], and globalized, after the Gandhian interlude, far behind in abrogating the moral inclusiveness of animals in a reformed Hindu ethos? Or is the evangelism and self-righteousness of Hindutva with its almost absolute embracing or 'revivification' of vegetarianism



Such antagonism can be further aggravated by what Narayanan (2018a, p. 5) calls “casteised speciesism,” whereby certain animal species are associated with specific human castes or *varnas*. This association echoes the Samkhya system of metaphysics (briefly introduced in Chapter 4): Nature’s (*prakriti*’s) quality of luminosity (*sattva-guna*) is said to be prominent in brahmins as well as cows; the quality of passion (*rajo-guna*) is prominent among *kshatriyas* and horses; and the quality of inertia and darkness (*tamo-guna*) is thought to characterize *shudras* and dogs. This association can easily be misconstrued as imputations of superiority and inferiority such that one type of animal (the cow) is privileged in such a way that other animals are neglected or condemned. Such is typically the case with buffaloes, whereby they are associated with lower castes or even with demonic beings. As a result, with little or no stigma against the slaughter of buffaloes, farmers often prefer owning them to owning cows. As a result, it is buffalo milk that constitutes most of the Indian dairy industry product, and it is buffaloes that are first to be slaughtered when they become no longer productive. The sharp distinction and hierarchizing of cows and buffaloes are mirrored in a widespread distinction between indigenous (*deshi*) cow breeds, “Jersey” (nonindigenous, Western) breeds, and mixed (*deshi* and Western) breeds. As the latter two types are considered inferior to any of the some thirty-nine officially recognized indigenous breeds, this distinction also serves to reinforce the sacrality of indigenous bovines. Again, the problem is that such sacralization leads to objectification, which can undermine the aim of protection by ignoring bovines’ animality and hence their vulnerability (Narayanan 2018a, pp. 12–17).

One practical result of such objectification is that cow protectionists tend to regard cow slaughter as the only issue to be addressed. There are two possible negative effects from cow protectionist activism’s focus on the single issue of protecting cows from slaughter. First, there is no attention given to the main cause of cow slaughter in India today, which is, arguably, the dairy industry. For dairies to maintain their profit margins, they engage their cows to produce as much milk as possible, and when their milk yield reduces or when they are no longer productive, the cows

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likely [to] alienate secular Indian animalists, by underscoring more the orthodoxly religious rather than the moral grounds?”

are sent for slaughter, along with the male calves and bulls. Second (tied to B. R. Ambedkar's analysis of untouchability, discussed in Chapter 3), the focus on protection exclusively of cows translates into persecution of the marginal classes of people accustomed to eating meat. This provokes reactions, often resulting in defiant increase of cow slaughter where it had otherwise been minimal. In a similar vein, agitation against cow slaughter has fueled defiant demonstrations in the form of "beef festivals," in which people—not necessarily from marginal castes—demonstrate their solidarity with the marginal castes by public displays of beef eating (Narayanan 2018b; Sunder 2018).<sup>34</sup>

Surely all who are involved in cow protectionism have the best of intentions to bring an end to the abuse of bovines, and to this end since decades they have been making immense efforts on numerous fronts. And yet, as Gandhi lamented already in 1921 (see Chapter 3), it must be asked to what extent these efforts are effective or indeed counterproductive. Since our concern here is specifically with Hindu animal ethics and cow care, I suggest that a valuable guide for analyzing actions aimed to aid and protect bovines may be the sacred text so broadly revered by Hindus, the Bhagavad Gita. More specifically we shall look at the Gita's quality-analysis (*guna-bhedana*) which we have already referred to as the Samkhya system of metaphysics.

## Cow Protection in Three Qualities

In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna sets out the classical threefold typology of cosmic dynamics in terms of "qualities" (*gunas*, literally "threads")

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<sup>34</sup>Sunder offers a striking analysis of the complexities involved in the issue of cow protection versus slaughter, through samples of recent Dalit ("Untouchable") literature, noting, for example (p. 15) that "[t]he Indian Left's deployment of meat as a signifier of progressive politics presents an ethical dilemma for those with a stake in animal welfare or rights ... Calls for animal justice in India that do not take into account such complexities risk imposing upon Muslims, Dalits, and untouchable communities an ethics of privilege propagated by First Worlders and caste Hindus who, intentionally or not, 'do no harm' to animals as a matter of luxury, class mobility, and the violent oppression of the poor. Questions of animal rights or welfare paradigms cannot easily apply to Indian meat politics, but nor can we efface the lives of animals as we struggle to grant liberation and dignity to South Asia's most marginalized and vulnerable people."

or “strands,” but also “qualities” or “constituents”).<sup>35</sup> We have already encountered this typology briefly: *sattva*—illumination or “goodness,” *rajas*—passion, and *tamas*—darkness can be compared to three primary colors—yellow, red, and blue, respectively—from which all color mixtures are derived and which thereby “color” experience. The Gita’s eighteenth and final chapter, which is largely concerned with effective practices of world renunciation, takes the analysis of action (*karma*) as a key theme. Since action invariably binds human beings to its results, and it is impossible to refrain from action even for a moment, the question becomes how to upgrade or refine the *quality* of action such that its binding effect is reduced and ultimately eliminated in realization of one’s spiritual identity. Here is how Krishna characterizes action in terms of these three qualities:

Prescribed action, free of attachment, done without passion or aversion by one not seeking the fruit, is said to be in goodness. But action done by one seeking selfish pleasure, or done with egotism and much trouble, is declared to be in passion. Action undertaken in illusion, disregarding consequences, waste, harm and human limits, is said to be in darkness. (Bg. 18.23–25, transl. Goswami 2015, p. 208)

In this clearly hierarchical typology of moral values, it is the attitude of the actor that is crucial. Beginning at the low end, *tamo-guna*, darkness characterizes action under this quality because it is counterproductive, harmful, and wasteful. In the context of bovine protection and advocacy, illusion predominates where differences are considered essential—differences among human communities and differences among species and breeds. It may happen that activists locate their own identity in the designation “Hindu,” defining themselves in contradistinction to “Muslim” or “Christian” identities. In like manner, they may identify with a particular political party over against another political party, claiming that it is their party that champions the cow, not the other party. As we have discussed, when this attitude predominates, it leads to antagonism, hatred, and violence. Such action is therefore bound to be counterproductive, typically aggravating rather than alleviating conflict.

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<sup>35</sup>For further explanation of the *gunas*, see Rusza, “Sankhya” in the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Section 4b: *Prakṛti* and the Three *guṇa-s*. <https://www.iep.utm.edu/sankhya/#SH4b>.

Similarly, action in which *rajo-guna*—passion—predominates is characterized by egotism (*ahamkara*), whereby one thinks oneself to be of crucial importance in making positive changes for cow care, or one seeks recognition and praise for one's cow care activism. The passionate quality also predominates in expectations of quick results, such as getting a law passed or winning a legal case expected to favor bovines. *Rajo-guna* is likely to be exhibited by politicians who make promises and schemes for cow protection to win votes—promises and schemes that may never materialize. Similarly, it can be exhibited in the making of laws meant to protect cows that are unenforceable, or in making state-led schemes for cow protection that prove to be unsustainable or abusive of cows, or both.

If cow protectionists were to pursue their purposes in ways characterized by *sattva-guna*, how would this look? Gandhi once gave an indication of this when he wrote: “Cow slaughter can never be stopped by law. Knowledge, education, and the spirit of kindness towards [cows] alone can put an end to it” (Gandhi 1999, CWMG 92, p. 119).<sup>36</sup> I would modify Gandhi's assertion slightly, shifting the word “alone” to the first sentence, to read “Cow slaughter can never be stopped by law *alone*....” Law has its place (Cochrane 2012, pp. 13–14), and it can only be supported and sustained by a broad-based culture of what I am repeatedly calling “cow care.” Such cow care needs to be practiced in a spirit of *sattva-guna*, characterized by valuing and pursuing worldly detachment and, more specifically in the present context, detachment from expectation of quick favorable results for cow care in the wider public sphere.<sup>37</sup>

To further reflect on cow care in which *sattva-guna* predominates, the second half of Gandhi's above statement (regarding knowledge, education, and a spirit of kindness) bears further attention in terms of this conception of qualities, especially the quality of illumination and goodness.

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<sup>36</sup>Earlier, in 1942, Gandhi wrote, “[Regulation of cow slaughter] cannot be achieved by legislation. In the first instance people ought to be trained. Hindus have got to put up with cow-slaughter. Killing Muslims will not stop them from slaughtering the cow....What will the law do in this?” (Gandhi 1999, CWMG 82, p. 95).

<sup>37</sup>Despite numerous good reasons for skepticism about the efficacy of legal regulation for care and protection of bovines, there are occasionally hopeful signs. As I write, the central Government of India has “approved a proposal for the setting up of ‘Rashtriya Kamdhenu Aayog’ (National Commission for Cows) for conservation, protection and development of cows and their progeny” (Times News Network, *Times Nation*, 7 February 2019, p. 14).

However, before doing so, a further aspect of Samkhya's threefold quality typology must be considered: In terms of cosmic order and change, the Bhagavata Purana associates passion (*rajo-guna*) with creation; goodness and illumination (*sattva-guna*) with sustenance, regulation, and preservation; and darkness or inertia (*tamo-guna*) with entropy and destruction. The association of sustenance, regulation, and preservation with *sattva-guna* is particularly relevant in considering how cow protectionism in *sattva-guna* might look, because it recalls the essential meaning of the term *dharma*—to hold, uphold, or sustain. Therefore, to elaborate a vision of future cow care, for the remainder of this chapter I will suggest, through six *affirmations on the dharma of cow care*, what we can characterize as cow protectionism predominated by the quality of goodness and illumination.

## Six Affirmations on the Dharma of Cow Care

Keeping within a Hindu vocabulary, I return to the notion of *dharma*, albeit an expanded understanding that includes what we have discussed about *dharma* in Chapter 5. In addition, *dharma* will be used here as a *balancing sensibility*, giving priority to practices of cow care that foster balance among the conflicting interests that surround bovines. To this end, I draw on a non-Hindu, contemporary Western typology of six “moral foundations of political life” developed by social psychologist Jonathan Haidt and his colleagues (Haidt 2012). Drawn from his extensive empirical research, Haidt identifies five positive foundational moral themes underlying and energizing political discourse. Each positive theme has a negative counterpart—conditions or principles sought to be avoided or suppressed. These five positive/negative moral theme pairs are: *care* versus *harm*, *fairness* versus *cheating*, *loyalty* versus *betrayal*, *authority* versus *subversion*, and *sanctity* versus *degradation*. A sixth moral foundation awaiting more empirical confirmation is *liberty* versus *oppression*. Haidt and his colleagues have found definite correlations between one's political leanings and which of these five or six moral foundations one will value or, negatively, abhor, above other foundations. Here, our aim is to see how, in the practice of cow care, all six positive moral foundations can be honored, such that the interests

of bovines are upheld and cow care becomes an important means by which the expanding moral community is fostered and sustained.

Taking each positive moral foundation in turn, what follows will be in the form of affirmations—present-tense positive as-if statements that aid in sparking the imagination to envision a possible better future that is rooted in the pursuit of self-integrity (Cohen and Sherman 2014).

1. *Cow Care and Care.* The first of Haidt's six moral foundations is *care*, the opposite of which is *harm*. We frame our care practices in the general terms identified by Dalmiya (see Chapter 5) in relation to bovines. More specifically, we have instituted a certification system (through a network similar to that of worldwide organic farmers) to monitor and ensure that all institutions and individuals who care for cows and wish to have the monitoring agency's seal of approval must follow minimum standards summarized in the five "basic rules of the care-system" for lifelong care of animals (Meyer-Glitza 2018, pp. 193–194; see above, in the section "Departing bovine souls"). Further, and as an integral aspect of this monitoring system, we observe standards of care for all humans serving as cow carers, in terms of appropriate remuneration and medical care. In caring for cows, we further strive to realize, as far as feasible, the nine aspects of citizenship for bovines (see Chapter 5). We do not discriminate types of bovines with respect to care, either by breed or by species, but we do have programs to preserve indigenous breeds of various regions and countries. We pursue the ideal of *go-seva*—service to cows in a spirit of selfless dedication that characterizes the bhakti ethical paradigm. By all these practices, we seek to minimize *harm* to bovines and to the planet's biosphere and, rather, to foster regenerative practice that sustains bovines, humans, and the earth.
2. *Cow Care and Fairness.* A comprehensive monitoring system ensures that any physical products or byproducts from bovines are obtained only under strict conditions of respectful and caring treatment: Milk in particular is never denied to a dam's calf; cows are preferably milked by hand; and no artificial means of increasing milk are used. Under similar strict monitoring, working oxen are engaged in traction services such that they are never overworked. In the interest of fairness

to all recipients of goods received from our bovines, we label all products accurately, including indication of the type or breed of cow (and whether cow or buffalo) from which the products originate. Further, our accounting of cow care expenses is transparent: All donors can know how their donations are being used, and they can be informed of any challenges the cow care organizations face. On a deeper level, we pursue social justice and environmental justice by showing how cows deserve to be protected, thus approaching the ideal of proper respect and dignity for domestic and farm animals, in a way analogous and pursuing the ideal of citizenship. Further in the interest of fairness to persons suspected of breaking any laws related to bovines—in matters of welfare or protection from slaughter—we respect and uphold the rule of law and we condemn any illegal and violent acts of “cow vigilantism”; rather, “neighborhood watches” are trained to inform authorities of improper activity involving cows.

3. *Cow Care and Liberty*. Cow care activists recognize that all people are at liberty to follow the diet of their choice, within various sorts of constraints. If they are accustomed to eating meat, we encourage them and explain reasons for, reducing meat consumption, and we appreciate and applaud the work of any environmental activism that explicitly confronts the environmental cost of carnism. We also urge anyone consuming dairy to source their dairy products from cow care families and institutions that are authorized (as described in # 1 above). Persons unable to source ahimsa dairy are encouraged to move toward this goal in a progressive manner.<sup>38</sup> To persons accustomed to eat meat, we explain traditions of animal sacrifice, and where this is legal, we

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<sup>38</sup>Madhava Candra Das (Seattle and Bangalore) suggests a five-stage progression to “liquid dharma”: (1) One continues to buy commercially produced milk while becoming aware of the hidden “karmic cost”—the consequences of one’s action (karma); (2) one buys organic commercial milk, and sets aside the equivalent amount spent as “cow credit” to be donated in support of an “ahimsa” dairy; (3) one makes arrangement with a local dairy farmer to keep one’s own cow(s), to be protected for life, whatever the cost; (4) one creates a community “ahimsa” dairy together with local like-minded persons, pooling resources and hiring the necessary management and labor; and (5) one has one’s own cows, caring for them at or very near one’s home.

encourage them to restrict meat to animals thus immolated (by qualified priests), preferably having been personally present at the event.<sup>39</sup> To dairy farmers in particular, we offer free workshops on methods of converting their operations into nonviolent, cow care-based establishments. Similar workshops and information events, as well as media, are available for the public for learning to adopt a nonviolent vegetarian or vegan diet. Anticipatory communities have well-organized outreach programs, especially to schools and colleges, explaining how cow care is vital to a culture of human liberty that is not anthropocentric and speciesist. On a deeper level, the moral foundation of liberty is served by education in the principles and processes of yoga, the aim of which is final liberation from the bondage of temporal life. We show how cow care can be integral to realizing this aim.

4. *Cow Care and Loyalty*. Loyalty of cow carers to their own nations is encouraged, as is loyalty to their particular communities. Dharma-based cow carer culture is such that these loyalties are not energized by antagonism against other nations or communities. Rather, by caring for cows, these persons make a deep connection with the earth and their environment in such ways that they cultivate knowledge in the quality of goodness and illumination, as described in the Bhagavad Gita: “Knowledge in goodness is that by which one sees a single unchanging reality in all beings, undivided in the divided” (Bg. 18.20; transl. Goswami 2015). In turn, this knowledge nurtures cow carers’ dedication to the bovines in their charge, such that they do all that is necessary for the bovines to be cared for properly for life, thus never to have their trust in their carers *betrayed*. Such knowledge also protects carers from the tendency to commodify bovines and their products against their own interests, which would also be a form of betrayal.<sup>40</sup> Thus, cow carers, who are well trained and practiced in their duties, are

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<sup>39</sup>This suggestion is bound to be controversial, as most modern states prohibit ritual slaughter of animals—ironically so, since they strongly allow and support the non-ritual, factory slaughter of animals. Numerous questions arise regarding how such ritual slaughter would be done in practice. In this positive affirmation exercise, suffice to mention that in a Hindu context it would be done according to the appropriate ritual texts; it would be regulated by an appropriate agency; and it would surely involve a system of state taxation.

<sup>40</sup>Thomas Berry wrote, “To reduce any mode of being simply to that of a commodity as its primary status or relation within the community of existence is a betrayal” (Berry 2006, p. 9).



dedicated to the cause of cow care as a key means of bringing well-being to the world. In their dedication to this cause, however, they do not make the mistake of holding abstract cause above interpersonal duties. The possible danger of tribalism being fostered in the name of loyalty associated with cow care is avoided by eschewing the quality of passion with its tendency to sharpen tribal identities.

5. *Cow Care and Authority.* Authority in relation to cow care is specifically located first and foremost in persons with extensive experience in all aspects of cow care, including cow-based organic agriculture. Indeed, these persons are recognized and accredited as teachers of cow care, in learning institutions connected with cow care centers and cow-based organic farms and village communities throughout the world. At a few larger such centers research projects related to cow care and cow-based organic farming are undertaken, with results published in peer-reviewed journals and disseminated to other educators, farmers, and cow carers.<sup>41</sup> Such educational and research facilities serve the purpose of bringing knowledge and education forward as requirements for protection of cows, as expressed by M. K. Gandhi. Cow care organizational entities network extensively with a variety of organizations dedicated to deep reform of human-environment relationships, sharing knowledge and experience.<sup>42</sup> All levels of practical knowledge related to cow care are, in turn, supported by the spiritual knowledge in goodness mentioned previously, namely the recognition of a “single unchanging reality in all beings.” As farmers realize practically the advantages of cow care for sustainable farming (possibly supported by various schemes in connection with goshalas and community agriculture organizations), the *subversive* activities involving cow smuggling or other illegal or abusive practices are replaced with effective local communities of cow protection. For persons and communities who do not understand the importance of cow care and therefore allow or take part in bovine

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<sup>41</sup>A dedicated, multi-disciplinary, peer-reviewed journal, *Cow Care*, is also planned.

<sup>42</sup>For example, they could network with IFOAM—Organics International (including Good Food for All); the Global Ecological Integrity Group (see Westra et al. 2017; the Bhumi Project—<http://www.bhumiproject.org/>); the Vegetarian Resource Group—<https://www.vrg.org/>).

abuse, there are substantial dedicated staff of “animal police” with special training in all relevant skills.<sup>43</sup> At the same time, the cow care community is deeply challenging to and subversive of self-destructive lifestyles centered in the consumption of animal bodies.

6. *Cow Care and Sanctity*. Those who care for cows regard them as bearers of sanctity in that they are unique in their ways of creaturely being in the world such that humans can care for them. For many Hindus, cows are special because they are regarded as especially dear to the supreme divinity Krishna. Therefore, they are practiced to give cows’ special attention. Such special attention is not at the cost of other creatures (indeed, in the bovine family, Krishna is said to have a pet buffalo); rather, to again quote M. K. Gandhi, “We can realize our duty towards the animal world and discharge it by wisely pursuing our dharma of service to the cow. At the root of cow-protection is the realization of our dharma towards the sub-human species” (Gandhi 1999, vol. 81, pp. 139–140). Cow care practitioners “wisely pursue” such dharma by balancing sanctity with care, the first of these six moral foundations of political life in which cow care is practiced. In this way, they realize the true sanctity of all life, and thus they contribute significantly to protection of the biosphere from *degradation*—the direct result of the absence of a sense of sanctity.

These six affirmations serve to point us in a positive, and not implausible, direction toward a bright future for cows and thereby for other creatures and for human beings on this planet. Again, these affirmations are nourished by a sense of dharma as a cosmic principle of balance, which in turn supports action characterized by the mode of goodness and illumination. Conscientious Hindus pursuing such a dharma culture would claim that the aim of sustainability (which is also a feature of this mode) on all levels, including environmental and political, is achievable. Anticipatory communities in which these ideals are pursued need to be supported and their

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<sup>43</sup>Maneka Gandhi reports the institution of “animal police” in Holland, with an initial 500 officers dedicated to overseeing observance of animal protection laws in the country. Gandhi laments that in India, far from such services existing, the existing police generally take *bafta*—bribes—from cow smugglers and other animal law offenders. <https://www.peopleforanimalsindia.org>, “Animal Police” (accessed 9 February 2019).

examples followed to spread the awareness that an alternative way of living is available, and we have much to learn from well-cared-for cows about how to realize this alternative.

With the six cow care affirmations, we arrive at what may seem a utopian vision located in dharma culture upheld by *sattva-guna* practices. But, one might well ask, even if such a culture would become established and even widespread, what is to keep it from degenerating back down to *rajo-guna* and even *tamo-guna*? According to the Bhagavad Gita, the three modes of phenomenal nature tend to transmute from one into another. Therefore, Krishna urges Arjuna to rise above these modes and be situated in transcendence, constituted of bhakti, the culture of devotion, and practice of care. Thus, the negative tendency that *sattva-guna* carries in relation to cow care, namely the tendency for one to become preoccupied with "correctness" at the expense of genuine care, is overcome. Such transcendent cow care assumes and includes correct action in relation to cows and other beings, from a position of joyful heightened relational awareness that sees all life in connection with divine being.

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