



The Cow our Mother our Mission

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Millions of Hindus revere and worship cows. Hinduism is a religion that raises the status of Mother to the level of Goddess. Therefore, the cow is considered a sacred animal, as it provides us life sustaining milk. The cow is seen as a maternal figure, a care taker of her people. The cow is a symbol of the divine bounty of earth. Lord Krishna, one of the most well known of the Hindu deities is often depicted playing his flute amongst cows and dancing *Gopis* (milkmaids). He grew up as a cow herder. Krishna also goes by the names *Govinda* and *Gopala*, which literally mean “friend and protector of cows.” It is considered highly auspicious for a true devotee to feed a cow, even before eating breakfast oneself. Throughout the Vedic scriptures there are verses which emphasize that the cow must be protected and cared for. It is considered a sin to kill a cow and eat its meat. Even today in India, there are many states in which the slaughter of cows is illegal. That is why you can find cows roaming freely all over India, even along the busy streets of Delhi and Mumbai.

Ayurveda is a big proponent of the *sattvic* qualities of milk and dairy products. That is why most Hindus are vegetarian, but not vegan. Fresh, organic milk, yogurt, buttermilk, paneer (homemade cheese) and ghee, are all considered highly nutritious, and an important part of the diet. Not only do these dairy products provide important protein and calcium for our tissues, but are sources of *Ojas*, which gives our body strength and immunity. Besides their milk, cows also provide many practical purposes, and are considered a real blessing to the rural community. On the farm, bulls are used to plough the fields and as a means of transportation of goods. Even Lord Shiva's trusted vehicle is *Nandi*- the sacred bull.

Cow dung is saved and used for fuel, as it is high in methane, and can generate heat and electricity. Many village homes are plastered with a mud/cow dung mixture, which insulates the walls and floors from extreme hot and cold temperatures. Cow dung is also rich in minerals, and makes an excellent fertilizer. There is a big organic farming movement in India to return to ancient methods of utilizing cow dung to re-mineralize the depleted soil. In such a spiritual land as India, one can find religious ceremonies taking place at any time and any place. Spiritual “*yagnas*” are fire ceremonies that performed to thank the Gods and receive their blessings. Cows even play a central role in these fire *yagnas* or *Agnihotras*. Scientific research has found that the ritual of burning cow dung and ghee as fuel for these sacred fires, actually purifies the air, and has anti-pollutant and anti-radiation qualities in the environment.

Ayurveda understands that some physical and emotional health crisis can not be healed by diet and herbs alone. They need the deeper and subtler healing of these types of Vedic ritual ceremonies to clear astrological past karma. The holy cow again offers its bounty by providing the ingredients in the Panchamrit, or blessed drink, that is distributed after the ceremony. *Panchamrit* translates as “sacred ambrosia” or “nectar of the gods” and is made up of 5 items – milk, yogurt, ghee, honey and sugar. By drinking this sweet *prasadam*, one is infused with the divine energy created during the puja, and is healed. (1) Various products of cow are used in innumerable ways in Ayurveda. Cow milk stands first in them. Cow milk benefits are innumerable. Let us find out the effect of cow milk on Tridosha, when we can have cow milk, when we should not, in what diseases it is helpful and more.

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The holy cow is perhaps the most harmless animal in the entire world. The best characteristic of a cow is that it gives so much yet demands nothing in return. As we know, there are innumerable dairy products made out of milk e.g. Butter, Ghee, Curd, sweets and what not! The Hindu rituals are never complete without Ghee and curd is considered as a lucky charm by many. Whereby, they find it essential to have it before doing something important. The cow dung is used in the making of Fertilizers that stimulate the farming process. It is also saved, to be used as fuel and produce heat and electricity. For many years, the bull was extremely important for our lives. The bull used in agriculture to tilt the land to produce food grains. It is sad that floored by the growing technology we have forgotten the significance of the cow in our Life.

- Milk can boost calcium and vitamin D levels--both crucial for development and for the prevention of disease. Milk stimulates growth
- Milk may also boost cognitive performance--either because it improves general nutrition or because it specifically promotes brain growth.

More universally, all people, regardless of their capacities to digest milk sugar, have reason to restrict their intake of milk and milk products. Cow's milk is NOT recommended for babies under 12 months. Some milk products are high in saturated fat, and saturated fats should be restricted for kids over 24 months. Indeed, the benefits of milk and dairy farming may have given some populations a big evolutionary advantage. Recent genetic analyses suggest that the hunter-gatherers of Neolithic Europe were replaced by dairy farming newcomers around 8,000 years ago (Malmström et al 2009; Bramanti et al 2009).

But traditions—even apparently adaptive traditions—don't always reflect what is ideal for an individual's long-term health and well-being. More generally, we have to remember that diets—traditional or otherwise-- are always constrained by what's available. In the civilizations of the ancient Mediterranean, people drank wine or beer instead of water. A good idea? Not if you have safe, clean water to drink. But they didn't. So the benefits of drinking alcohol outweighed the potential risks.

Where does that leave milk? Research suggests that milk consumption may benefit many children. Fortified milk and milk products are important dietary sources of calcium, vitamin D, vitamin A, vitamin B12, and other micronutrients. In fact, studies suggest that milk consumption can play a crucial role in maintaining calcium levels and vitamin D stores (e.g., Maguire et al 2012; Vissers et al 2011), and these nutritional benefits may have major health consequences. Recent research suggests that vitamin D insufficiency is a risk factor for a variety of diseases, including heart disease, diabetes, cancer, and multiple sclerosis (Holick et al 2005). If so, vitamin D-fortified milk may help children avoid developing such diseases. Similarly, milk consumption--by increasing calcium intake--may protect people from developing hypertension, kidney stones, insulin resistance syndrome, obesity, cancer, and even lead poisoning (Nicklas 2003). And of course the protein and calcium in cow's milk may contribute to better overall nutrition and bone health. As summarized by Janet Rich-Edwards and colleagues (2007) Our West-influenced intellectuals sneer at the mention of the cow. The same intellectuals first sneered at yoga. Now it is a fashion to do pranayama at cocktail parties the arguments in the West for cow slaughter are no more uncontested. They also sneered at our sanyasis as 'godmen'. Now they flock to ashrams with their white friends ever since the Beatles. Who knows, they may soon have a cow in their backyards.

India has 150 million cows, each of them giving an average of less than 200 litres of milk per year. If they could be fed and looked after, they can give 11,000 litres, as Israeli cows do. That would provide milk for the whole world. The milk we produce today is the cheapest in the world. With enhanced production we could become the world's largest exporter of milk and it could be India's biggest foreign exchange earner.

For those of us who are desi by pedigree and conviction, I place some facts about the cow in the perspective of modern Hindutva. The cow was elevated to divinity in the Rig Veda. In Book VI, Hymn XXVIII attributed to Rishi Bhardwaja extols the virtue of the cow. In Atharva Veda (Book X, Hymn X), the cow is formally designated as Vishnu, and 'all that the Sun surveys'. Indian society has addressed the cow as gow mata. The Churning of the Sea episode brings to light the story of the creation of the cow. Five divine Kamadhenus (wish cows), viz, Nanda, Subhadra, Surabhi, Sushila, Bahula emerged in the churning. Thousands of names in our country are cow-related: Gauhati, Gorakhpur, Goa, Godhra, Gondiya, Godavari, Goverdhan, Gautam, Gomukh, Gokarna, Goyal, Gochar etc. They signify reverence for the cow, and our abiding faith that the cow is Annapurna.⁽²⁾

REFERENCES

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