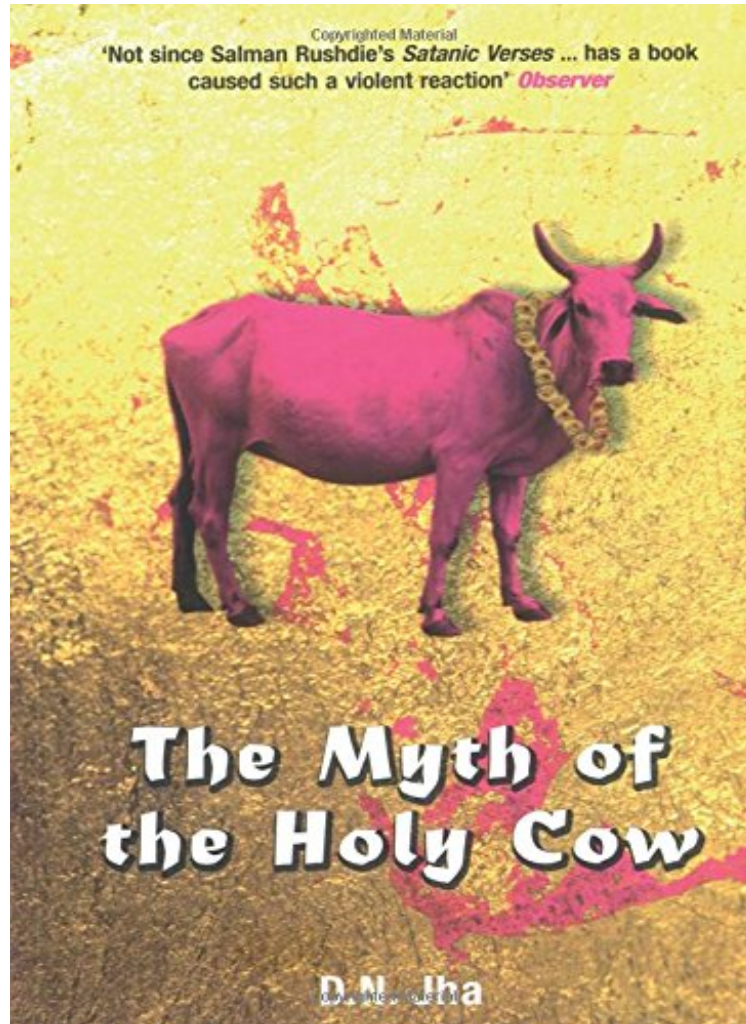


The Myth of the Holy Cow

D. N. Jha, Dwijendra Narayan Jha

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D. N. Jha, Dwijendra Narayan Jha : The Myth of the Holy Cow before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Myth of the Holy Cow:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Very informative and good bookBy CustomerAll Indians should read this book. Believing our right wing etremist Hindu political leaders blindly without questioning the facts is irrational. Know the facts and history of Hinduism.2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Holy cow!By Ashtar CommandThe Myth of the Holy Cow is a controversial book by Dwijendra Narayan Jha, an Indian historian. It was published during the first BJP government, the BJP being a right-wing Hindu nationalist party. The author and the original publisher were threatened by both BJP supporters and the even more extreme VHP. The Indian edition was banned by the Hyderabad Civil Court, ironically after a complaint by a Jain (a peaceful religious group). Eventually, a new edition was published abroad after well-known leftist intellectual Tariq Ali had intervended to aid D N Jha. What

caused all this uproar? The central argument of Jha's book is that the cow hasn't always been considered holy in Hinduism. This is a politically contentious claim, since the BJP and other Hindutva groups use the sanctity of the cow as a rallying point for (sometimes violent) anti-Muslim mobilizations and also as a marker of communal identity. For Hindu nationalists, it's also important to claim an unbroken cultural continuity from Vedic times until today. If the sacredness of the cow is a modern construct, the entire Hindutva worldview falls apart. Jha's book is dry and scholarly, with lengthy and tedious references to various Hindu scriptures. He also takes on Buddhism and Jainism (which explains why a Jain filed a complaint against the work in Hyderabad). However, Jha does succeed in demonstrating his point. The cow was certainly not sacred to the original Aryans, who both sacrificed and consumed cattle. They also used cow hides and fat. Later, Hindu tradition became more mixed, but never completely pro-cow nor strictly vegetarian. There is ample evidence from various scriptures that cattle was sacrificed in honor of prominent Brahmins, who then partook of the meat. Medical texts recommended various forms of meat for their curative effects. The Hindu epics (regarded as holy writ by pious Hindus) often mention meat-eating, including beef-eating, without questioning the practice. It wasn't until the period we call the Middle Ages that the Brahminical authorities began to question cow-killing. Even then, they indirectly admitted that cattle hadn't always been sacred: cow-killing was only prohibited in the present dark age (kali yuga). In some places, the ritual slaughter of cattle didn't end until the 19th century, and the slaughter of the buffalo continued well into the 20th century. Jha claims that early Buddhists and Jains weren't completely opposed to meat-eating either. While they opposed animal sacrifice and preached ahimsa (non-violence) towards all living creatures, the Buddhists in particular often adapted to local cultural norms which included such sacrifice and meat-eating. The Jains were more strict, but nevertheless allowed meat-eating under some circumstances, for instance if the ascetic lived among robbers or in isolated villages where no vegetarian food was available. Jha also points out that the Buddhist emperor Ashoka never prohibited the killing of cattle. This is intriguing, since Ashoka prohibited the killing of many other animals, including parrots, bats and ants! Nor was Ashoka himself a vegetarian. The Mauryan emperor consumed both peacocks and deer. While *The Myth of the Holy Cow* is intended as a counterblast to Hindu nationalism, it also pops another myth: the often-heard Western claim that Hindu and Buddhist civilizations are vegetarian. This is a common canard in vegetarian and vegan circles, including animal rights activists. Any remaining militant vegans would do well to procure a copy of this work. Religious injunctions aside, archeological excavations prove beyond the shadow of a doubt that the common people of India have always been omnivores. I suppose many people's reactions to this book could be summarized in two words: Holy cow! 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Tender flesh By Ashtar Command This book intends to prove that the cow wasn't always sacred within the Vedic or Hindu tradition. It also takes on Buddhism and Jainism. However, what I found most entertaining is that the book (inadvertently) also disproves one of the more silly myths peddled by fanatical vegetarians and vegans: the claim that Hindu and Buddhist civilizations are vegetarian and that Westerners can therefore stop eating meat, meat-eating apparently being a pure lifestyle choice. Not! This book proves that Indians have always killed animals (sometimes under ritualistic forms) and then consumed their flesh. Apart from pigs, deer, fowl, fish and the odd leopard, holy cows were a popular part of the diet. So popular, in fact, that the pious Buddhist emperor Ashoka never bothered prohibiting the slaughter of cattle. Ashoka himself was also an omnivore, the royal household consuming two peacocks and one deer per day. The sacrificial killings, hunting, fishing and plain old slaughter mentioned in this book is probably enough to make every militant vegan boil over in righteous anger! Well, it seems that omnivorous eating habits aren't a social construct or lifestyle choice, after all. Animals are verily food. Deal with it. Have a steak or something.

Hugely controversial upon its publication in India, this book has already been banned by the Hyderabad Civil Court and the author's life has been threatened. Jha argues against the historical sanctity of the cow in India, in an illuminating response to the prevailing attitudes about beef that have been fiercely supported by the current Hindu right-wing government and the fundamentalist groups backing it.

A well-argued and soundly documented study ... Choice Not since Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* ... has a book caused such a violent reaction. Observer While cow veneration and vegetarianism may be the hallmarks of Hinduism today, Mr. Jha compiles copious evidence that this has hardly always been the case. New York Times A meticulously researched, strongly worded, persuasively articulated challenge to long-held religious beliefs, *The Myth of the Holy Cow* is a unique and iconoclastic contribution to the study of Hindu beliefs, practices, history and customs. Wisconsin Bookwatch Jha draws on an amazingly wide range of material ... an enlightening endeavour, demonstrating a critical understanding of a popular misconception. Journal of Asian Studies The pen might still be, if not mightier than the nuclear arsenal, at least a weapon worth scanning for, like knives at airports, a weapon capable of subversion. Times Literary Supplement This book may not please Hindu fundamentalists, but its research is impeccable. The Telegraph, Calcutta, India About the Author Dwijendra Narayan Jha is Professor of History at the University of Delhi. His books include *Ancient India in Historical Outline* and *Feudal Social Formation in Early India*.