

**By Sidharth Mishra**



With five-phase voting for the Bihar assembly elections coming to a close, the whole controversy around beef should end. The hullabaloo started with the ban on the sale of meat in Maharashtra during a Jain festival. It soon went on to gain gargantuan proportions with the lynching of one Akhlaq in Dadri for allegedly killing a cow and storing its meat. The hullabaloo took yet another turn in the absolute fracas created near the Kerala House canteen, located in the heart of the national capital, as certain religious reactionaries had raised a misinformed hue and cry over the sale of delicacies made of buffalo meat. Precious airtime was spent on discussing the matter, complete with both scholarly and stupid discourses. While scholastic giant like Romila Thapar and DN Jha put forth very articulate arguments in defence of beef eating, they were countered by right-wing cacophony with half-literates masquerading as intellectuals. In the political arena, Lalu Prasad Yadav first claimed that even Hindus ate beef. However, he quickly withdrew the comment realising that the cow was a breadwinner for many in his community.

As the controversy galloped with newsroom tickers going berserk with beef and buff stuff, your reporter came across an extraordinary spectacle. During my regular pre-dawn walk last week I saw about 10-odd rickshaw pullers close to metro line approaching Kaushambi station forming a semicircle and talking anxiously. Given the training of a reporter, I decided to change the usual route and go towards the assembly. What I witnessed there was unbelievable if not earth-shattering.

There stood a completely emaciated cow on the road in the middle of the enclosure formed by rickshaws. On closer look, one could see a pool of blood on the road. In the middle of the pool of blood sat a newly born calf, wide-eyed trying to come to terms with the cacophony around it. The birth had taken place next to a park, where a shakha is held every morning. At this shakha, people passionately swear to save the cow. There is also a temple close by, less than 50 metres away from the spot where the cow delivered the calf.

True to the DNA of a reporter I gathered my thoughts, brewed the idea and walked away from the spot wondering what would be the right time to call my colleagues on the Ghaziabad beat. All through the walk that morning I reflected on what could be the good intro, the journalese for an opening paragraph of a news report. As I approached the last lap of the walk, I decided to have another peek at the spot, more to reconfirm the story. Except for the splatter of blood on the road, there was no other evidence left of a calf's birth having taken place at the spot.

There was no cow, there was no calf and the rickshaw pullers too had left with office goers rushing to the metro station. A fruit-seller who had arrived on the spot gave a vague description of how the spectacle ended. The worse than a butcher owner of the cow had arrived from the neighbouring Bhowapur village. He took charge of the calf and mercilessly pushed the cow, who

## Walking into a bovine trap

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had just delivered, towards the cowshed about a kilometre away.

“The calf has saved his mother’s life for at least a year. Since she can now be milked, the cow-keeper would not sell her to a butcher for some time,” said the fruit vendor in a matter of fact manner. Despite the prevalence of rising tempers on television and in the cyber world over cow killing and beef eating, the truth of the bovine economy in our country is that a cow is killed only when its keeper hands it over to a butcher.

As a political party, it’s important for the BJP to win elections. However, to make an issue out of beef is uncalled for. The BJP leaders have gone to the town claiming that beef was made into a poll subject not by them but their rivals. Despite their claims, leaders from the BJP were imprudent enough to allow themselves to be engaged in this controversy.

Realising that his party was roundly cornered on the issue, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley recently wrote in his blog that Prime Minister Narendra Modi was the worst victim of ideological intolerance. Jaitley said that the Congress, many left-leaning thinkers and activists have practiced ideological intolerance towards the BJP over recent decades. The Finance Minister said that the opposition party’s strategy was two-fold — to obstruct Parliament and create an environment that there is a social strife in India by structured and organised propaganda.

Nothing could be closer to the truth. But why did Jaitley ever expect the Congress or the Left to be soft towards either the Prime Minister or the NDA government. The opportunity came the opposition’s way to mount a sharp attack on the BJP and the government because they left their flanked unguarded. The Dadri incident should have been decried at the first instance but instead arrived on the scene Modi’s Minister Mahesh Sharma to defend the perpetrators of the crime and then came the sophomores from the Sangh stable causing much calumny on television screens.

As I had mentioned in these columns a few weeks back, the BJP and the larger Sangh family woefully lacks in scholarship vis-a-vis the Left. Engaging the Left in a debate needs scholastic attributes and it should be avoided. If you engage them it’s like a Sudhir Naik preparing a flat cricket pitch at Wankhede stadium for the Indian team’s slaughter at the hands of the Proteas.

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