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## Cultural identity and beef festivals: toward a ‘multiculturalism *against* caste’

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Beef festivals are a dramatic and visible form of protest against the Indian government’s ban on beef. These festivals are framed popularly as an assertion of Dalit ‘cultural rights’ and identity, with beef represented as the cultural food of Dalits. While it is clear that the beef ban is a casteist ban based on a Brahmanical food hierarchy, this paper explores the limits of resisting casteism through the assertion of caste-based cultural rights and identities, or as an assertion of an individual right to food choice. It argues that such a politics of resisting casteism runs into problems of the culturalization of caste, and limits the kinds of radical Dalit subjects and actors who could emerge as liberatory political subjects. The paper calls for reframing beef festivals as ‘antagonistic’ moments that articulate the degradation of Dalit labor in the politics of beef, reassert Dalit identity as an *anti-caste* identity rather than a cultural caste identity, and herald a politics of ‘multiculturalism *against* caste’.

**Keywords:** beef; Dalit; anti-casteism; cultural identity; culturalization

### Introduction: a political puzzle and a culture trap

Restrictions on cow slaughter have existed since the adoption of the Indian Constitution in 1950. Article 48 of the Indian Constitution is a directive to individual states to be ‘protectors of cows.’ Since 2014, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the party of Hindutva (or Hindu supremacist ultranationalism), has introduced stringent state and national level legislation seeking to ban the slaughter of all bovines, the consumption of beef, its possession and transportation, and the sale of cows for slaughter. These ‘beef bans’ are frequently justified by votaries, including political leaders and ‘cow vigilantes’<sup>1</sup> as representing, protecting and promoting the ‘culture’ of Hindus, and of India which is claimed to be essentially a ‘Hindu nation’ (Chigateri 2011; Punwani 2015; Jaffrelot 2017).

Beef bans have been resisted most dramatically through ‘beef festivals’ organized in different parts of India, on campuses by university students, and in public spaces in cities by political parties. Dalits (especially students) have been at the forefront of organizing beef festivals as counter-hegemonic discourse (Garalyte 2015; Gundimeda 2009; Pathania 2016). Beef festivals are thus arguably part of a long history of resistance to casteism, including the attempt to re-appropriate historically stigmatized cultural symbols (Arun 2007; Gorringer 2016). Frequently, organizers and participants (Dalits and non-Dalits) in

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beef festivals represent beef festivals as assertions of Dalit ‘cultural rights’ against casteist humiliation, with beef being articulated as part of the ‘food culture’ or as ‘cultural food’ of Dalit groups (Thomas 2011).

Claims to ‘culture’, identity, and ‘community’ are thus central to political action, not only of authoritarian populist states and their foot soldiers, but also of protesting social groups. Having come to occupy a central place in Indian politics today, Dalit politics demands serious attention, especially in its choice of the forms and idioms of resistance. Yet, the salience of the concept ‘culture’ for a liberatory politics of caste remains unclear. What kind of radical democratic politics do struggles such as beef festivals advance? What historical subject and actor do beef festivals enable? Let us begin with a political puzzle.

In a remarkable presaging of extant beef politics, political scientist Kancha Ilaiah, a long-time formidable opponent of casteism, argued more than two decades ago:

If beef is banned in India that will be the beginning of the end of our multiculturalism. Cultural plurality has been the essence of Indian society ... *The very caste system synthesised multiculturalism in India right from ancient days.* The attempt to homogenise India’s cultural and legal practices is a dangerous trend. (1996, 1445; emphasis mine)

Ilaiah’s warnings and arguments show remarkable prescience about beef bans. However, it brings into relief a puzzle. If, as Ilaiah argues, the caste system in ancient India ‘synthesized multiculturalism,’ and hence is the author of India’s ‘cultural plurality,’ then do we need to defend and protect the caste system in order to value plurality and diversity? It throws up a puzzle: *Is Indian pluralism a ‘multiculturalism of castes’ wherein each caste’s ‘culture’ contributes to the country’s diversity?* To affirm this would of course run contrary to the long-standing anti-caste character of Ilaiah’s writings, analyses and politics.

Such a ‘multiculturalism of castes’ is deeply problematic. It makes casteism appear benign by rendering the ‘culture’ of castes innocent. Caste discrimination appears then as cultural discrimination, and caste conflicts as cultural (or identitarian) conflicts. Caste itself then becomes a problem for the ‘management of diversity’, rather than being viewed as a sociopolitical problem. Our political puzzle thus offers a secondary set of questions to explore. Is it possible to resist casteism by appealing to the ‘cultural rights’ of castes?<sup>2</sup> More fundamentally, are caste groups *cultural* groups, i.e. are castes really distinguished by their ‘culture’, and hence do caste groups have ‘cultural rights?’ What then are the liberatory potentials of claiming a stigmatized food as a part of Dalit ‘cultural identity?’

The puzzle emerges from the way Ilaiah traverses the slippery slope *from caste to culture* in his essay. While he initially rightly speaks about the need to view beef as ‘people’s food’ due to its cheap availability and high protein content, he quickly slips into portraying beef as the food of particular castes. Hence, he ends by arguing that ‘no caste can ban the food of another caste’ (1445). Beef thus gains its status in Ilaiah’s analysis as a contributor to India’s cultural diversity, being the ‘cultural food’ of Dalits, referenced above as a caste group with cultural rights. Ilaiah’s logic, which leads to the puzzle, assumes that caste difference *is* cultural difference. It is therefore compelled to valorize caste identities as contributing to cultural diversity. In doing so, it elides the fact that the caste system has historically required, and continues to actively demand and indeed produce, ‘culture’ as a mark of caste ‘difference’ for its own reproduction and legitimation. In other words, casteism demands cultural difference. Elsewhere I have shown how a multiculturalist logic legitimizes caste and casteism, precisely by enabling castes to parade as ‘cultural’ difference, a process that I call the ‘culturalization of caste’ (Natrajan 2012a).<sup>3</sup> I argue that

*casteism demands and produces the 'culture' of particular castes* as a necessary part of its own need to differentiate (hence produce discrete 'castes'), dominate (by hierarchizing 'difference'), and legitimize itself (by appealing to multiculturalism). The 'culturalization of caste' is a key mode of legitimizing caste today. It occurs whenever caste seeks to pass off as 'culture', when caste hierarchy masks itself as benign 'cultural difference', and caste identity asserts itself as 'cultural' identity.<sup>4</sup>

Beef festivals, at least those that frame themselves entirely around an assertion of beef-eating as Dalit cultural identity and rights, thus risk falling into a 'culture trap' – a trap that results from the misrecognition of a key process of the legitimization of caste today – the 'culturalization of caste'. Whereas we seemingly encounter empirically 'different' practices between castes in terms of (say) food, dress, music, marital customs, speech or jokes, any analysis which takes these 'differences' as the *reason* why different castes exist and as an unproblematic basis for their separate 'cultural' identities, fails to account for the production of these differences. It simply accepts what needs to be explained – the appearance of 'difference', its representation as 'cultural' identity, and its claim (by social actors) as undergirding 'caste identity.' In another essay, I contended that beef festivals were (best viewed as) 'a caste war on cultural grounds; not a cultural war on caste grounds' (Natrajan 2012b, 57, fn 19). I further noted that we need a 'caste conscious, multicasite, anti-caste formation' in order to combat caste. In this paper, I build upon these earlier formulations as part of a sympathetic critique of beef festivals, sharing Ilaiah's concern about the beef bans, but eschewing his logic of a 'multiculturalism of castes.'

Briefly, I argue that invoking 'cultural rights' or 'cultural identity' in the context of beef festivals limits resistance to casteism. On the one hand, it affirms the 'right of recognition' of Dalits as a people historically denied a history and 'culture' (Kymlicka 1995; Taylor 1997; Rao 2009). On the other hand, it risks reifying 'caste cultures' and caste group boundaries, and privileging particular voices (usually gendered) as speaking for the group (Sunder 2001; Phillips 2007). 'Culture' has historically been the handmaiden of casteism. The 'culture' of individual castes bears the mark of casteism. Misrecognizing this relation between culture and caste mystifies the production of the 'culture' of castes and *reifies* 'caste cultures' (i.e. the 'culture' of different castes). **The 'culture' (of castes) then appears as a *thing* (a substance) to be possessed (and claimed) rather than as a *relation* of casteism.** Caught in the vortex of culture, beef festivals run the risk of *essentializing* cultural traits as stereotyped markers of caste groups, and *masking variability* within castes by assuming homogenized caste categories as actual social actors.<sup>5</sup> The notion of the 'cultural rights' of caste groups then reinscribes the problems of casteism by reintroducing the problems of essentialism and 'culturalization' which underlie casteism. It constructs the Dalit subject as seeking to conserve 'caste cultures' rather than tearing them apart. Dalit identity then remains as a caste identity with cultural characteristics, rather than becoming a radical anti-caste identity. **Consequently, a liberatory cultural politics around beef needs to assert the rights to consume beef but without reification of 'caste cultures'.** Here, the paper makes the case that a liberatory politics requires a view of the 'Dalit' as an *anti-caste identity* and not merely as a caste cultural identity. Offering a different reading of the beef festivals that brings out the dynamics of casteism at work in the beef bans, I argue that for cultural dissent to retain its liberatory potential, beef festivals need to foreground the 'antagonism' of the social situations of caste with respect to food (both vegetarian food and beef), a goal which helps rearticulate the degradation of Dalit labor in the politics of beef. Such a reframing of beef festivals would craft a notion of 'multiculturalism *against* caste.'

Before we get to the remaining sections, it is worth emphasizing the anti-nationalist, communal, and casteist character of beef bans. Beef bans have had devastating

consequences for large sections of the Indian population. Beef being a cheap source of animal protein, the ban has negatively impacted the nutritional capacity of the poorest and most marginalized populations of Indians by attacking their political rights to choose their food.<sup>6</sup> A recent study<sup>7</sup> estimates the incidence of beef-eating in India to be at least 15% of Indians (Natrajan and Jacob 2018). This estimate is probably conservative, based on self-reported data in a political climate where hazards to health and life accrue to anyone who openly declares that they eat beef in India today. The ban has also put tremendous stress on millions of farmers whose livelihoods depend upon the timely disposal of cattle (Ramdas 2015; Upadhyay 2017), and ruined the livelihoods of cattle traders and those working in the booming leather and ancillary industries linked to cow products in India. Most ominously, Muslims and Dalits have been subjected to new forms of everyday harassment, public humiliations, and ‘lynchings’ (by cow vigilantes) based on stereotyped suspicions of the possession of beef, eating beef, killing cows, or transporting cows for slaughter. In sum, it would be hard to justify the beef ban as being in the ‘national interest.’

Scholars have noted the communal basis of calls for cow protection and the beef ban (Baxi 1967; Freitag 1980; Yang 1980). Demands of votaries of Hindutva to ban the slaughter of cows everywhere usually rest on grounds that the ‘sacred cow belief’ is an essential part of a ‘Hindu cultural identity’ and a defining feature of ‘Indian culture.’ Such assumptions essentialize the variety and complexity of ‘Hindu’ and Indian cultural traditions and pass off political claims as established cognitive ‘beliefs.’ As beef quickly becomes a key material and symbolic technology of state and vigilante repression in India today, boundaries between idealized categories of ‘Hindu’ and ‘Muslim’ cannot be viewed innocently as marked by cultural traits such as beef avoidance and beef eating respectively. Norms that need bans and social threats in order to hold them in place cannot be taken as organically constituting a ‘culture.’

The beef ban is also casteist. Historical studies have shown how the ‘sacred cow belief’ and the beef taboo have been Brahmanical impositions on society (Brown 1957). Their historical emergence in a post-Vedic period, and their historical encoding in social and moral codes of law, are intimately tied to a caste-based worldview and technologies of social control. For instance, cows were a central form of wealth during Vedic times, frequently given as gifts or prestations, or as food to Brahmin and other honored guests. In post-Vedic times, with the rise of the beef taboo, punishments for the killing of a cow varied according to one’s caste, with a cow killer being treated categorically as an untouchable or *antyaja* (Jha [2001] 2009, 114, 127–129). Indeed, the ideology of caste accords the bodies of the cow and the Brahmin both an exalted normative status, and the Dalit body an essentially degraded status. Resistance to the beef ban is therefore very much a resistance to its anti-nationalist, communal, and casteist character.

The paper is organized into three sections. The first highlights a slippery slope from caste to culture in the public discourse of caste, with the ‘culturalization of caste’ being a ‘culture trap’ for anti-caste movements. The next section critically examines some aspects of identitarian caste politics in order to point a way out of this ‘culture trap.’ The final section reframes beef festivals by insisting that Dalit identity is not a caste identity but an anti-caste identity. Here I integrate the question of Dalit labor within casteism and in beef festivals, in order to reframe beef festivals as a multiculturalism against caste.

### **The slippery slope from caste to culture: culturalization and essentialism**

‘Culture’ is regularly invoked to justify caste and casteism in India. For example, *khap* panchayats<sup>8</sup> routinely defy state intervention against practices of gendered caste violence, by

arguing for their rights as ‘community’ organizations protecting ‘cultural’ ways of being (Chowdhry 2009; Kachhwaha 2011). A more banal example is provided by caste associations which, since the late nineteenth century, have articulated a notion of ‘caste community’ or *samāj*. Thus, the *Bāwisa Brahmin Samaj*, a caste association in central India, describes itself as

[a] community dedicated to the purpose of uniting Brahmins to revive, preserve, protect and propagate the Brahmin culture to descendants without intimidation or dilution from anti-Brahminical forces ... we value our traditions as does any other culture and look upon ourselves as a community on par with other communities of India with a sense of unique identity and NOT of high rank. (emphasis in original)<sup>9</sup>

We have here a social group whose membership is based strictly on birth (‘descendants’), but which claims to be a community whose identity is based on its ‘culture’ (‘traditions’) and not its relative ‘rank’ within the caste system. Extending an observation by Walter Benn Michaels in the history of race and culture in the USA (Michaels 1992), we can construct a conundrum thus: to be a Bawisa Brahmin one has to display Bawisa Brahmin culture; but to display Bawisa Brahmin culture one has to be born a Bawisa Brahmin. Descent or ‘blood’ therefore already underlies the so-called ‘culture’ of a caste. In other words, culture camouflages *jati* (descent-based caste). Claims about caste as ‘cultural’ identity thus turn out to be ideological in nature – they mask the ascriptions of birth and descent that constitute caste.

Twin assumptions animate the above claims of the Bawisa Samaj – that caste is a cultural group, and that castes can exist without casteism. The former legitimizes caste by ‘culturalizing’ it; that is, representing differences between castes as ‘cultural’, instead of descent-based status. The latter enables a new form of casteism, which I have called ‘differentialist casteism’ or ‘cultural casteism’ (Natrajan 2012a; see Balibar 1991 and Taguieff 2001 in the context of racism), wherein casteism proceeds silently as benign cultural preference or a ‘taste’ for people of one’s own (cultural) kind. Now, since law frequently needs a demonstration of intentionality in order to prove discrimination (for example, parts of India’s Atrocity laws; also the US 14th amendment), it is unable to grapple with a legitimization mechanism of caste that presents casteism as ‘cultural preference’ apparently without any intent to discriminate. Culturalization and differentialist/cultural casteism thus enable members of the Brahmin *samāj* to assert their caste identity even while disavowing the caste system without any hint of self-deception. To avoid this imbroglio, casteism needs to be viewed not simply as discrimination, but as the ongoing and ‘normal’ social process of ‘monopolization,’ in this case of wealth, power and prestige (Natrajan 2012a, xviii). Casteism as monopolization reveals cultural or differentialist casteism at work when any *samāj* recruits members by birth/descent and imposes endogamy among its membership *in the name of* cultural preference or *de facto* ‘cultural rights.’

In 2005, the Supreme Court of India made the slippery slope from caste to culture into a legal possibility. The Zoroastrian Cooperative Housing Society (ZHSG), a ‘minority institution’ for Parsis, sought to continue to require its members to sell their homes only to other Parsis. Ruling in favor of the ZHSG and against one of its members who wished to sell an apartment to a non-Parsi, the court opined, ‘it is open to that community to try to preserve its culture and way of life and in that process, to work for the advancement of members of that community’ (SCI 2005, 19). While the ruling is in line with the designation of Parsis as a religious ‘minority’ group with rights to preserve ‘culture’ (Article 29 of Fundamental Rights), the court’s justification introduced an expansive logic that is troubling. It noted

that such a right was already legally available to groups covered by the Cooperative Societies Act, such as ‘co-operative societies of religious groups who believe in vegetarianism and abhor non-vegetarian food.’ The court went on to argue that ‘it will be impermissible, so long as the law stands as it is, to thrust upon the society of those believing in say, vegetarianism, persons who are regular consumers of non-vegetarian food’ (20).

By locating vegetarian housing societies within the ‘cultural rights’ discourse, the court flattens out distinctions between different kinds of communities in India, and makes ‘culture’ innocent within the politics of vegetarianism. Recent studies have argued that vegetarian-only housing, far from being a question of cultural rights, is actually a form of caste discrimination (Gorringer and Karthikeyan 2014; Thorat et al. 2015). We can further note that owners of flats or houses who seek to restrict membership to vegetarians only, operate with caste and communal assumptions about who is a vegetarian and who is not. This neglects the fact that there are huge variations within almost all social categories in India, with only one religious group, Jains, satisfying the court’s referent of ‘cooperative societies of religious groups,’ marked by their ‘vegetarian culture’. As has been recently argued, Indians are extremely diverse even within social groups; thus there are Brahmins who eat meat and beef, Dalits who are vegetarian, or Muslims who don’t eat beef (Natrajan and Jacob 2018). It is a casteist and communal view that represents individuals as stereotypes and caste groups as culturally homogenous. Given this, do caste communities have a right to practice vegetarian-only housing to preserve their ‘culture’?

Any response to this question depends upon whether we think that caste groups have cultural rights or not. Political theorist Mahajan (2005) reminds us that the Indian Constitution has built a system of differentiated rights by distinguishing between four kinds of communities, those based on religion, language, caste, and ‘tribe.’ Whereas tribal, religious and linguistic communities were granted ‘protection of diversity such that each group could live in accordance with its distinctive way of life and culture,’ Mahajan argues that caste groups were not granted this right to culture, since the makers of the Constitution recognized that their discrimination was based on segregation and exclusion (295). Further, Article 29 of the Constitution upon which the above court judgment was based states the following: ‘Any section of the citizens residing in the territory of India or any part thereof *having a distinct* language, script or culture of its own shall have the right to conserve the same’ (Constitution of India, emphasis mine). To preserve a clarity about how vegetarian-only housing practices are discriminatory, we need to insist that the so-called ‘culture’ (of vegetarianism) of caste groups (usually so-called ‘upper caste’ groups) is not really ‘distinct’ at all, but only derived from their relative location or caste position within a system. It is *derivative* of the casteist food hierarchy that assigns a pure and polluted status to particular foods and to those who consume them.

Here, two senses of ‘cultural difference’ need to be distinguished – ‘substantive’ and ‘relational.’<sup>10</sup> For instance, the difference between linguistic/ethnic identities such as Tamil and Telugu ‘culture,’ or religious identities such as Hindu, Muslim or Jain ‘culture,’ or Adivasi identities such as Gond and Santali ‘culture,’ to the extent that such unified entities exist, is arguably ‘substantive.’ That is, although each pair has historically developed in some proximity to each other, and hence takes accounts of the Other in some manner while constituting the Self, their differences are not entirely derivative of each other. This is because they are not elements of a system (religious or ‘tribal’) that regulates and hierarchizes their differences. On the other hand, the difference between regionally clustered caste groups such as Tamil Brahmin, Gounder, Thevar and Arundathiyar, or Telugu Brahmin, Kamma, Reddy or Madiga for example, is ‘relational.’ That is, given that caste hierarchies exist in local spaces (e.g. agro-ecological zones), cultural differences exhibited

by individual castes are relative to and derivate of each other since casteism historically acts as a generative and regulating mechanism for individual castes.

Caste works simultaneously through both identity and difference, hierarchy and separation, heterophobia and heterophilia, or a fear of and a love of ‘difference.’ Indeed, caste *rules through difference*, a difference that it demands in the first place – due to a casteist ideology that views the world as divided into castes that need to be kept apart. It cynically demands, produces, signifies, organizes, and regulates ‘difference’ in such a manner that the differences are integrated into a hierarchy of what Ambedkar termed an ‘ascending scale of reverence and descending scale of contempt’ (1990 [1947], 26). When we represent caste identity as a cultural identity, we represent castes as ‘substantialized’ entities, much like ethnic identities. In doing so, we legitimize ongoing cultural casteism by camouflaging the reality of castes as ‘relational’ entities that reproduce domination through collectively reinforcing ‘embodied practices’ (Rafanell and Gorringer 2010).

It is therefore problematic to make legal space for the ‘cultural rights’ of caste groups such as Brahmins, or any caste groups who engage in vegetarians-only housing practices. However, what about Dalit groups opposing the beef ban, many of whom demand the right to eat beef *as a cultural right*? Could framing the resistance to casteism as ‘cultural rights’ of caste (Dalit) groups, ironically reproduce casteism’s twin logic of legitimation – the culturalization and essentialization of caste identities? Redirecting Audre Lorde’s maxim in the context of ‘difference’ in the USA, we may ask ‘can the Master’s tools dismantle the Master’s house of caste in India?’ Or, ought we to aver with Lorde that ‘[t]hey may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never allow us to bring about genuine change’ (Lorde 1983, 27). I raise these questions since debates about caste identity need to ultimately advance our understanding of the nature of caste oppression and strategies to combat it.

### Anti-casteism and cultural identity

None of this is to deny the special significance of beef for Dalits. In his sharp analysis of the beef festival in Hyderabad, political scientist Gundimeda notes that, given the humiliation faced by Dalits through the bans on beef, the only alternative for Dalit students was to ‘assert positivity and pride in those practices which grant license to the humiliators’ (Gundimeda 2009, 140). Rightly arguing that giving up beef would itself be an act of humiliation for Dalits, he frames beef festivals as actions for the ‘democratization of the public space,’ a space hegemonized by what legal scholar Chigateri (2008) has called a casteist culture of ‘food-hierarchy’. In a similar vein, sociologist Pathania too notes the importance of how such cultural politics challenge the everyday common sense, wherein ‘marginalised students assert counter-hegemony of [the] “sacred” spaces’ of dominant groups (Pathania 2016, 271).

Nonetheless, both scholars conclude on a cautionary note about the limits of such a counter-hegemonic politics. Gundimeda notes that combatting the casteist beef ban by representing beef as ‘Dalit food’ also bears the risk of essentialization and a ‘hardening of identities’ which affect Dalits negatively. Consequently, for him, ‘once such representation is secured, what is expected is an abandonment of those exclusive markers rather than a clinging to them’ (Gundimeda 142). Pathania too notes that while the history of the casteist imposition of particular foods on Dalits problematizes beef festivals, the class differentiation and diversity of food practices *within* Dalit communities makes ‘the idea of a common food practice among Dalits ... quite misconceived’ (Pathania 2016, 272). Importantly, Pathania points to the limits of countering hegemony through the



inversion of symbols and myths, since apart from being anti-authoritarian protests, these do not ultimately offer a clearly liberatory ideology (272). Such accounts mark the limits of a radical identity politics for Dalits. The challenge, however, is how to ensure the ‘respect and recognition’ that Gundimeda identifies as critical for a pluralist society, whilst simultaneously eschewing a culturalizing and essentializing Dalit identity and community?

Resistance requires attention to the claims made about caste and culture. The same study above (Natrajan and Jacob 2018) documents immense variation *within* most social categories in India (religious and caste), and spatially between the southern and eastern states versus the western and northern states, with significant gender and class differences (both within and between social categories). Again, to be sure, given the rising fascist tendencies of Hindutva with beef-eating holding clear hazards to anyone who admits to it, the self-reported data here makes it necessary to consider the real possibility of the over-reporting of vegetarian practices and underreporting of beef-eating practices. As per the study, all over India and in contrast to most stereotypes, no more than 30% and more realistically closer to 20% of the population reports being vegetarian, 66% Brahmins report being vegetarian (likely overestimates), about 15–30% Dalits report being vegetarian (likely overestimates), and only about 5% Dalits, 45% Muslims, and 27% Christians report eating beef (likely underestimates). The spatial variation in beef eating practices is stark. For example, whereas about 26% of Dalits report eating beef in Andhra Pradesh (undivided), only about 3% of Dalits do so in Gujarat, and even less so in Haryana. Similar figures exist for Muslims in India. Such variations warn us not to view humans as cultural dupes that simply embody norms and perform stereotypes. It makes it difficult to sustain broad-based claims about vegetarianism and beef eating in India. Given such empirical realities, what does it mean to claim that beef is a ‘cultural’ marker of Dalits?

Here the interventions of political scientist Gopal Guru offer a way out. Guru initially observes that ‘[m]ost Dalits in India eat beef’ (Guru 2009, 13). Such a statement cannot be an empirical claim since, as noted above, despite being an underestimation, only about five percent of Dalits at an all-India level report eating beef, and there is immense variation within Dalit caste groups. Indeed, Guru notes right away that ‘[e]ven if they have given up eating the meat of dead cattle, their cultural identity seems to be permanently attached to this food’ (13).<sup>11</sup> Shifting the focus from behavior to norms, including the realm of the affective, allows Guru to argue that Dalits *do not view* the cow as sacred and beef as a stigma. This claim is very plausible given the fact that there are a large number of beef recipes within many Dalit communities, and the fact that many Dalits in different parts of India have expressed an open preference for relishing beef dishes through public poetry and songs. Indeed, as Arun (2007) has pointed out, beef-eating, far from being considered degrading, has been valorized by Dalits such as the Paraiyars of Tamil Nadu as a source of their strength (2007, 100).

Yet even while noting the significance of beef-eating for the self-respect of Dalits, Guru does not turn it into an easy marker of Dalit cultural identity. Instead he highlights the *relational* character of foods by showing how caste relations constitute certain foods as ‘Dalit’ foods, and certain others as ‘Brahmin’ or upper-caste foods in the context of Maharashtra (in his case, beef and sweets respectively). He thus argues that beef eating is part of the construction of a ‘savage identity’ of Dalits – an identity constructed by casteism. Although the term ‘savage’ echoes anthropologist Michel Trouillot’s landmark observations about colonized subjects (Trouillot 2003), Guru takes this term from historian Shankararao Kharat, who documents how Mahar (a Dalit group in Maharashtra) identity was shaped by so-called ‘upper castes’ through a process that he calls ‘using food for freezing some social

sections into a cultural box' (14). In short, for Guru, casteism shapes (if not entirely produces) the culture and identity of castes, especially in the case of food.

Consequently, although he documents the positive symbolism that beef has within many Dalit communities, and the rich ways in which Dalit cultural politics challenges the stigmatization of beef to reconfigure its meanings, he remains skeptical about its possibilities for liberation. Building upon Guru's insights, beef festivals, in order to be a force of resistance to casteism, need to steer clear of signaling any of the following – that all Dalits eat beef, or, that one shows one's Dalitness by eating beef, or that eating beef automatically signals someone's 'progressive' credentials. While the first runs counter to empirical realities and stereotypes Dalits, the second culturalizes Dalit identity in the problematic ways discussed in the previous section, and the last 'naturalizes radicalism', as pointed by Guru.<sup>12</sup> Beef eating is a *relative* and not an independently developed or *substantialized* cultural trait among Dalit groups. It is derived from the historical demands of the caste hierarchy.

What does such an understanding of beef mean for the salience of caste identity within anti-casteist resistance? Here I engage, albeit briefly and by way of critique, with an astute defense of caste identity as cultural identity. Cultural studies scholar Satyanarayana (2014) rightly points out the need to recover the previously stigmatized and buried histories and culture of Dalit communities. He highlights, as a key example of the need to rethink caste and identity, the Madiga Dandora movement, wherein individuals now proudly wear their caste names (Madiga, a Dalit caste group in south India) as their suffix (or surname) as a way to reclaim their caste or (as he prefers) 'sub-caste' histories, symbols and culture, and thence signal the diversity of caste oppressions within the term Dalit. For Satyanarayana, this requires the project of the annihilation of caste to be 'rethought as a project where caste identities may remain as markers of a culture and history, but inequalities and indignities will be eliminated' and 'by shifting the discussion from annihilation of caste to equality of castes, and from the equality of individuals to equality of castes' (57). In short, for Satyanarayana, caste identities do not need to be annihilated, even within an annihilation of caste project. This is a bold claim and deserves longer engagement.

In the brief space available here, we can ask whether there can ever be 'equality of castes' so long as castes are relational entities, each derived from a hegemonic status ascription, and each depending upon recognition from the other? For dignity is of course not only self-dignity (as important as that is for the politics of 'recognition'), but also one that constantly demands social accounting by/from others. In other words, what are the limits to reclaiming Madiga history and cultural elements *as caste identity markers*, when their meanings are hegemonically articulated within a caste universe? Can such a reclamation assure the 'equality of castes,' without also dismantling of the hegemony of casteism, i.e. without an annihilation of caste identity, relations, practices, and institutions? The formulation of 'equality of castes' needs to contend with the fact that it is casteism that produces individual castes in the first place, within inequalities of power, wealth and status (or symbolic prestige and indignity). Equality of castes thus comes dangerously close to the myth of 'castes without casteism' explored in the previous section with the Bawisa Brahmin samāj.

Perhaps to escape from such a sobering conclusion (that the annihilation of castes cannot be that easily dismissed or displaced), Satyanarana makes another key (although relatively unarticulated) assumption – that castes, especially Dalit castes, can 'ethnicize' by reclaiming their cultures and histories that have been marginalized by casteism. However, it needs to be noted that when caste identities do ethnicize, *they cease to be caste identities*. Such a transformation is further only possible in a few situations. A

paradigmatic example is that of Ambedkar's conversion (with tens of thousands of Dalits) out of Hinduism and to a new form of Buddhism (replete with its own symbols, origin myths, practices, and cosmology), which is an attempt to ethnicize Dalit identity, i.e. make it derived from outside of the universe of caste (which, for Ambedkar, was fundamentally a Hindu phenomenon). To my knowledge, such an ethnicization of caste is far from emergent on the ground. As I have argued elsewhere, the concept of culturalization serves as a useful counterpoint to the much heralded 'ethnicization' of caste by some scholars (e.g. Fuller 1996; Gupta 2004). Culturalization reminds us that ethnicization does not in fact occur but is rather an ideological representation by social actors in the thick of caste politics. This error is what Brubaker has identified as the mistaking of categories of ethno-political practice as categories of social analysis (Brubaker 2002, 166).

In this context, recent works on Dalit movements by cultural studies scholar Muthukruppan (2014) and sociologist Gorringe (2016) are illuminating in different ways. Both examine the tensions faced by Dalit movements in seeking to reconfigure symbols (musical instruments in both cases) that have been long degraded in caste history. In opposition to a deliberate valorization of the *parai* (a drum instrument associated with Paraiyars, a Dalit group in Tamil Nadu) by sections of Dalits, Gorringe points to many other Dalits who seriously question the possibility of the *parai* being genuinely reconfigured as a symbol of pride and cultural identity for Dalits. However, building upon earlier insights (e.g. McGilvray 1983; Nagaraj 1993), Gorringe ultimately offers a relatively positive view of a cultural politics of anti-casteism around the *parai*. His optimism is based on the ways in which the 'parai no longer simply connotes subordination' and has arguably shown signs of 'breaking out of the bounds of caste' (22) by gaining some recognition within mainstream Tamil culture. In contrast, Muthukruppan rejects the move to reconfigure the *dappu* (a drum instrument associated with Madigas, a Dalit group in South India). He initially distinguishes two approaches within recent Dalit anti-caste social movements – one deploying 'culture' as a political instrument of protest to 'build solidarities among oppressed groups across nationality and language,' and the other deploying 'culture' as symbols of cultural pride to reclaim stigmatized symbols, such as playing the *dappu* and beef eating as the 'cultural practice of Dalits' (38). He firmly rejects the second due to its logic that it 'reduces the universal cause of Dalits fighting the anti-democratic forces into a particular argument of protecting their own cultural practice. As a result, the centrality of the problem further slips into the domain of an argument for cultural rights or tolerance for different cultures' (39). The 'cost' then of reconfiguring the *dappu* is the possibility of making the anti-caste Dalit cause into a universal one for democracy. We are thus back to appreciating the dangers of the 'culturalization of caste' as an ironic depoliticization of anti-casteist struggles. Whereas Gorringe's optimism based on the dominant groups in society accepting the reconfigured meanings of the *parai* has very little possibility of success with respect to beef-eating, Muthukruppan's dismissal draws too stark a line between democratic struggle and cultural recognition. I explore below an alternative way of reframing the beef festivals that recognizes the significance of cultural politics and symbols while being vigilant, albeit not self-righteous, about opposing identity claims (see Clifford 2000).

### **Dalit subjectivity and community: reframing resistance to beef bans**

It is not surprising that almost all cow vigilante attacks thus far have been against Muslims or Dalits (Abraham and Rao 2017; Jaffrelot 2017). But, what does the fact that *almost none* of the victims were actually doing what they were accused of doing (viz., slaughtering a cow, or transporting beef, or eating beef) say about casteism (or communalism)? Just

like the votaries of vegetarian-only housing, cow vigilantes too identify individuals by à priori identifying them as members of social groups (Muslim or Dalit), quickly followed by an essentialist attribution of cultural traits to the group. Such stereotyping pays scant regard to the realities of variation in beef eating practices within Muslims and Dalits (as noted earlier in the paper). Three principles are at work with cow vigilantes – each of them subsuming the individual within the group. These are: the **culturalist** (that cultural traits are markers of caste and communal identities), the **essentialist** (that individual Muslims and Dalits display essential traits of their groups), and the **metaphysical** (that ‘the group is prior to the individual’, i.e. that there is a Muslim-ness and Dalit-ness that produces these traits). The last mentioned has been noted by philosopher Berel Lang in the context of race as metaphysical racism, a form of inherentism (1997, 166). These principles animating cow vigilantes require us to be vigilant about representing individual subjectivities and ‘community’ within beef festivals.

Let us start with what we know – that beef eating is a political assertion in the face of casteism. Following recent work on the problem of the subject in modern times, appeals to group identity may be read as ‘first of all a rejection of social roles, a refusal of the social definition of the roles that must be played by the social actor’ (Touraine 1988, 75). We can go further through terms made famous now by Laclau and Mouffe ([1985] 2001) in their elaboration of radical democracy. Beef festivals are, no doubt, an assertion of ‘identities’ in a political struggle. But these identities are *not* preexisting identities. We need to view beef festivals as creating/producing *new identities*, precisely by rejecting preexisting caste identities. For beef festivals are sites that produce *anti-caste identities* crafted using ‘culture’ as a resource in the sense that Stuart Hall has called the ‘taking up of positions’ (Hall 1997, 291). Eating beef at beef festivals is an act that makes visible *even as it transforms* a historically invisible situation (Dalits and beef-eating). Beef festivals make ‘subordination’ to be recognized as ‘oppression’ (the casteist-imposed practice of eating beef from carcasses in the Dalit quarters), and resistance as a moment of ‘antagonism’ that rearticulates a counter discourse to caste hegemony. **They are moments of ‘antagonism’ because the Other (i.e. the Dalit) has signaled the impossibility of ‘being a full presence’ for itself under existing conditions of casteism, and in this process questions the basis of the Self (i.e. caste Hindus) which too cannot exist since their ‘objective being is the symbol of the Others’ non-being’** (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, 125). Beef festivals are thus *caste wars* on cultural grounds (they challenge caste identities through cultural politics), not *cultural wars* on caste grounds (challenging cultural practices of different castes). Viewing beef festivals as merely the assertion of ‘cultural’ identities of preconfigured caste groups thus does injustice to the annihilation of caste subjectivities contained within such acts of resistance.

Such a view of beef festivals and identities brings back the question of labor for a liberatory caste politics, and sets up the possibility of imagining a different basis for imagining the Dalit ‘community.’ In response to the public flogging of four Dalit men by cow vigilantes who wrongly accused the men of killing a cow,<sup>13</sup> the Rashtriya Dalit Adhikar Manch (National Dalit Rights Forum, RDAM) called upon Dalits in Gujarat to publicly denounce and renounce their casteist-imposed ‘traditional’ work of removing dead cows. Both resistances (RDAM and beef festivals) make visible the working of caste in everyday life by transforming particular ‘normal’ (and hence invisible) situations of subordination of Dalits into visible ‘antagonisms’ that articulate caste hegemony. The RDAM resists caste at the moment of production by transforming labor (under caste conditions) into a moment of ‘antagonism’ of the collective refusal of Dalits in that region to perform their imposed social role. Beef festivals resist caste at the moment of consumption by transforming food (under

caste conditions) at a university cafeteria into a moment of ‘antagonism’ of the collective demand for proscribed / erased food. Both resistances have ensured that production and consumption in Indian society cannot be any longer viewed as not shaped fundamentally by caste practices. The question is, how both resistances articulate Dalit subjectivities and ‘community’?

Philosopher Jean Luc-Nancy cautions against a view of community as a ‘commonality of being’ where a notion of *shared being* is assumed to animate a people, a community (1991). Such a view of community as a concrete substance, a shared *being* (as it appears in fascist ideology) animates a ‘communitarian’,<sup>14</sup> view of the world, which underlies communalism and casteism. Exploring the senses of words such as community, communion, communism, Nancy veers us toward another view of community as a ‘being *in* common.’ As he puts it, ‘there is no communion, there is no common being, but there is being *in* common’ (4). Interpreting Nancy for an anti-essentialist recovery of the idea of community, philosopher van den Abbeele notes ‘the challenge of community is not to understand it in terms of some common being whose immanent exposition it would be, but rather to think the difficult but necessary question of what the *in* of being *in* common means’ (1991, xvi, emphasis in original). This then is also the challenge for a Dalit politics against casteism. When Dalits come together to protest beef bans by eating beef, how do we understand this ‘being *in* common’ of Dalits? Further, when non-Dalits join beef festivals, or when vegetarians oppose the beef ban,<sup>15</sup> how do we understand this ‘being *in* common’?

Stigmatization is the technology of repression of caste par excellence. Long ago, Ambedkar insisted that caste is not just ‘a division of labor, but a division of laborers.’ Advancing this insight further, caste is arguably not just about division of labor and laborers, but also about control over labor (the process) and laborers (that is, their allocation). It is also a power over classification, or what Bourdieu calls symbolic power. This power (control) is based upon the essentialization of caste identities and their camouflaging as ‘culture’ (that is, the culturalization of caste). Like capitalism, caste depends upon controlling the price of labor-power (wages). Dalit labor-power remains low-waged or unwaged. However, unlike capitalism, caste is sustained through control over labor itself (not only labor-power). Labor within caste is largely ‘unfree,’ as one proceeds along what Ambedkar called a ‘descending scale of contempt’, with Dalit labor being the most ‘unfree.’

Reading RDAM and the beef festivals together helps point to possibilities of escaping the ‘culture trap’ while resisting the beef ban. Both control over Dalit labor and Dalit labor-power are based on degradation of the labor domains of Dalits. In the realm of production, these domains are traditionally relegated to the removal of entities considered degraded or polluted, such as dead cows (carcass) and human feces (manual scavenging). Essentialism and culturalism work to make Dalit labor cheap and unfree. They are the ideological forms of power that produce ‘casted’ subjects of labor. Thus, to be a Dalit one must remove carcasses, and to remove carcasses one must be born a Dalit. The RDAM movement’s refusal to do the forced labor of removing cow carcasses is resistance against such control over labor within caste economies. Such resistance de-essentializes and de-culturalizes Dalit identity by freeing *Dalit* labor. It is a moment where the ‘difference’ (Dalitness) that (under)values the concrete labor of Dalit individuals is made visible in order to annihilate. No longer will Dalits remove carcasses, or be known as carcass removers. Further, the RDAM struggle seeks legal guarantees including land, so that Dalits would become ‘free’ to do other kinds of work, *free off from caste*. This is liberatory anti-casteism because it rejects essentialism and culturalism while resisting stigmatization.

Now, what would such liberatory anti-casteism look like within beef festivals? In the realm of consumption, degradation of the labor of Dalits has meant the degradation of Dalit labor within households and community that have produced and transmitted nourishing food under caste conditions, food which become stigmatized as 'Dalit food.' Resisting this means making visible the process of stigmatization and degradation of Dalit labor. As productive bodies under a caste regime, Dalit labor reproduces itself by consuming the food allocated to it in the ecological niches of casted production. It has historically been reproduced by gendered labor within Dalit households, and communitarian labor that produced, as part of the regular diet of Dalits, a rich variety of beef recipes that embody stories of triumph of the human spirit under conditions of casteist dehumanization. The homology between beef festivals and the RDAM nevertheless produces a conundrum. Whereas the refusal to remove carcasses by the RDAM challenged caste diktats, and whereas the refusal to not eat beef challenges the beef bans of Hindutva, how does the insistence of Dalits eating beef challenge caste diktats which expect Dalits to eat beef, albeit the meat of dead cows rather than slaughtered ones? In other words, while the refusal to remove carcasses by Dalits, or the eating of beef by non-Dalits (especially upper castes or *savarnas* who are normatively prohibited by caste diktats), evidently challenges a caste order, does beef eating by Dalits pose a similar challenge to caste? This conundrum exists because while Dalits cannot participate in their humiliation by giving up eating beef (as Gundimeda puts it above), the eating of beef *as a Dalit cultural practice* only confirms and conforms to casteist stereotypes. It does not (at least easily) aid the reappropriation of the meanings of beef under casteist conditions. Representation of beef-eating as a cultural practice and as Dalit caste identity, while based on a defensible view of the historical formation of 'Dalit culture', does not pose a challenge to the caste logic that has dictated such food habits. It arguably erases the anti-casteist character of eating beef (by Dalits) at beef festivals. A potentially radical act of cultural dissent against casteism remains, thus, contained at the margins of caste society and within the conventional logic of caste.

Are there alternatives? One possibility is represented by those beef festivals which replace the particular cultural claims of Dalits with claims about the rights of all individuals to eat their choice of food. Such 'moments' of assertion of individual rights may exist, even in beef festivals framed otherwise by the notion of beef as Dalit cultural food. Indeed, given the newly recognized right to privacy, it is possible to view all food as a private act and right. Indeed many non-Dalits who participate in beef festivals may be acting from such a political subjectivity. The problem of course is that beef appears in such moments as liberated from caste, and the festival itself appears as a caste-blind festival, thus taking away the anti-casteist thrust of such festivals. The communalism of Hindutva thus trumps the casteism of Hindutva in such acts of resistance.

To address this problem, beef festivals need a representational politics that frames the eating of beef neither as the cultural food of Dalits, nor as the food of 'caste-free individuals', but as the **celebration of Guru's 'savage food'**, that requires all anti-caste individuals to resist its stigmatization. Casteism constructs vegetarian food as a 'casteless universal' to be valorized and consumed by all. In stark opposition, it constructs beef as a 'casted particular', to be stigmatized and hence consumed only by degraded caste subjects (Dalits in particular). In reality though, vegetarian food is an 'unmarked casted' food (Brahmanical) masquerading as a 'casteless universal.' It needs to be 'put in its place', or provincialized as the food of a hegemonic minority enjoying the privileges of a caste system. In contrast, beef, which is ascribed the status of being a 'marked casted' or 'casted particular' food in India (of Dalits, Muslims, Christians and other minorities including a racialized 'northeasterner' category), needs to be de-provincialized. This requires foregrounding a

case for re-symbolizing beef, *not* as a provincial food, but as uniquely and *universally symbolizing casteism*. Beef is as crucial as the cow to an agrarian economy. Both are the power-effects of casteism. The stigmatization of beef is inextricably tied to the valorization of the cow and vegetarian food. Valorization of the cow valorizes the Brahmin body while degrading the Dalit body which becomes cheap, and hence controllable. The stigmatization of beef ensures the reproduction of this Dalit labor for a casteist economy through the innovative beef recipes of Dalits that nourished their bodies. The cheap price of beef is connected intimately to its low and degraded status as food on ‘free’ markets shaped by ‘unfree’ caste labor. Far from being a ‘provincial’ food of Dalits, beef is what allows its structural Other – vegetarian food – to appear ‘universal’ under caste conditions.

Beef festivals are thus best viewed as moments where different subjects occupying different social locations and with different conceptions of the common good come together to resist beef bans on both fronts – its communal character (Hindu supremacy), and casteist character (Brahmanical supremacy). Their ‘being *in common*’ at the sites and moments of these festivals, is akin to what Chantal Mouffe has elaborated as the ‘modern form of political community.’ Such a ‘political community’ is held together only ‘by a common bond, a public concern’, a ‘common recognition of a set of ethico-political values’ (Mouffe 1991, 77, 79). I submit that this bond and the values enabled by beef festivals can only be that of resisting casteism (and communalism) broadly conceived as processes of de-essentializing, de-culturalizing identities, with a refusal to impute a metaphysical existence to Dalit-ness or Muslim-ness.

## Conclusion

Beef marks the cultural boundary between caste groups as demanded by a system of casteism – that between beef-eaters and beef-avoiders (see also Ambedkar vol 7, chps 10–14), with the former being stigmatized. This paper has argued that beef eating is valuable for India’s plural society *not* because it is part of the culture of Dalits, but because beef reveals how ‘food diversity’ is intimately connected to unequal caste status in an agrarian cattle-economy, and beef-bans embody the technology and logic of casteism, a logic that is fundamentally not about pluralism but about **‘dominating through difference.’** Ilaiah’s position (at the start of this paper) imagines multiculturalism as a ‘multiculturalism of castes’ in India, and invites us to celebrate and valorize caste identities as contributing to cultural diversity and pluralism. This paper has made a case for resisting beef bans by crafting a position that imagines a **‘multiculturalism against castes,’** that is, a multiculturalism that makes an **argument for viewing ‘differences’ as produced by casteism and hence cautions against reifying castes as cultural groups** (see Phillips 2007 for a case to view ‘multiculturalism without groups’). Such a view keeps alive Ambedkar’s vision of the annihilation of caste by viewing **‘Dalit’ not as a caste identity but as an anti-caste identity.** Beef festivals then represent beef *not* as the cultural food of Dalits, and *not* as food that is liberated from caste to be the caste-free individual’s choice, but as the **food of resistance** that continually problematizes vegetarian food’s claims to its universal and unmarked (by caste) status.

Further, this paper has hopefully clarified why the ‘being *in common*’ in the case of Dalit identity cannot be based on a purportedly shared commonality of an essentialized cultural trait (beef as cultural food), or any metaphysical essence (Dalit-ness). For, that is how casteism and cow vigilantes identify Dalits. De-essentialization requires a clear refusal to homogenize (or stereotype) groups and acknowledge the empirical reality that no caste group is without internal variation, and no individual blindly follows social norms (of her caste).

Secondly and simultaneously, a de-culturalization of caste identities insists that ‘Brahminness’ is not evident simply by being vegetarian, and neither is ‘Dalit-ness’ evident by eating beef. The fact of beef-eating Brahmins and vegetarian Dalits points to the ‘excess’ of cultural traits and the underlying imputations of birth/descent that sustain casteist identification or casteization of individuals. Instead, this paper has argued how Dalits and non-Dalits, beef eating individuals from all castes, *and* non-beef eating individuals including vegetarians who participate in beef festivals, need to be seen as ‘being *in* common’ at a moment and in a situation that heeds Gundimeda’s call to eschew the ‘radical exclusion of others.’ Dalit cultural identity here is not an attribute but a relation – a lead player in the anti-casteist struggle. Eating *boti* (dried and preserved beef among Gujarati Dalits) was (and still is) the only way to survive without land or access to other forms of livelihood for unfree Dalit labor. Yet, it is not beef (the cultural object), but Dalit labor as Dalits within a caste matrix (with its creativity and imagination including an indomitable spirit that made a degraded commodity into a lifeline) that is the cultural identity at work. Dalit identity therefore is not simply another caste identity marked by culture. To maintain its liberatory potential, ‘Dalit’ can only be an anti-caste identity.

## Notes

1. This is the common English translation of the self-styled Hindi monicker, *gau rakshaks* (or cow protectors), vigilantes who roam the country attacking and many times killing people (almost always Muslims or Dalits) by accusing them of transporting cows for slaughter, or consuming beef.
2. Sociologist Alain Touraine captures the dynamism of ‘cultural rights’ for our age by noting that ‘it is in the cultural field that the main conflicts and demands occur, the ones with the weightiest stakes’ (2007, 146), even as he reminds us about their potential to ‘become anti-democratic, authoritarian or even totalitarian instruments, if they are not closely linked to political rights, which are universalistic’ (2007; 150).
3. See Dhanda 2015 for a sharp deployment of this concept in the context of the struggle to recognize caste discrimination in British law.
4. Culturalization is the processual cognate of ‘culturalism,’ an intellectual orientation and method that reduces the social and historical to the cultural, and thus legitimizes hegemonic relations by mystifying oppression and exploitation (Dirlik 1987, 17; Dominguez 1991).
5. The last point is what sociologist Brubaker has termed the error of ‘groupism’ (2002, 164).
6. As recently as August 2017, the Indian Supreme Court upheld privacy as a fundamental right. For its connection with the right to choose what one eats see Prasanna 2016 EPW.
7. The study uses three large databases, the National Sample Survey (NSS), National Family Health Survey (NFHS), and the India Human Development Survey (IHDS).
8. Khaps are extra-judicial ‘caste courts’ that exist in different forms all over rural India.
9. <http://www.bawisabrahmin.org/about-brahmins/history-2/> (accessed July 15, 2017).
10. In an early exposition of this distinction, Louis Dumont, identifies recent changes in caste as a movement wherein ‘structure *seems* to yield to substance, each caste becoming an individual confronting other individuals’ (1970, 227, my emphasis). Substantive differences denote independent existence of differences, whereas relational implies a dependence. Tellingly, he notes that this movement towards substantialization of caste is largely apparent in that it is really only a way in which caste adapts to modern realities rather than indicate any fundamental change in caste relations.
11. The reference here is to the fact that Dalits frequently consume the meat of the dead cattle which they were forced to carry away as part of their ‘traditionally’ imposed caste duties. It is not clear if Guru implies that Dalits have now moved to eating beef from slaughtered cows.
12. As he points out, “One cannot conclude that beef eating is a sufficient condition for being progressive and radical ... It is possible to hold a radical position even without eating beef. Conversely, it is quite possible to take a most rabidly conservative position while eating beef” (Guru 2009, 18).



13. Una, a small town in Gujarat, became infamous in June 2016 through a video which went viral on social media and showed four Dalit youths tied up and flogged by cow vigilantes on the suspicion of having killed a cow. As it turned out, the cow had been killed earlier by a lion.
14. For a succinct overview of the term ‘communitarian,’ see Touraine (2007, 145).
15. A watershed moment in the resistance to beef bans came from Madurai in Tamil Nadu state where Ms. S. Selvagomathy filed a Public Interest Litigation against the ban despite being a vegetarian. Her grounds were a complex of the right to choose one’s food, the right of farmers to their profession and culture, and a concern for the violence perpetrated by cow vigilantes invoking the beef bans (<http://www.livelaw.in/madras-hc-stays-new-rules-restricting-cattle-trade/> accessed on March 31, 2018).

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