Margul (1968) Present Day Worship of the Cow in India

Margul, Tadeusz


Reference is incomplete. See me during office hours or visit librarian Kim Hoffman.

Reference is still not in the correct format. There are many examples of the format in the existing bibliography and you obviously did not see me or Kim.

This article addresses the issue of the veneration of cows in India in 1968. According to Tadeusz, the practice does not hold the same value that it did for the early Hindus. It started out as a belief that the god Brahma created a divine Mother Cow from which all sustenance originated. Cows gave the Hindus means for milk and agriculture so they were known as the givers of plenty, and thus revered.

Nowadays, the “untouchability” of the cow is presenting problems for India, becoming a political, economic, and hygienic issue. Six out of the ten Indian States have strict laws prohibiting the slaughter of cows, however there are no regulations on breeding practices, or on ownership of cows at all. Thus, instead of having a “humble and servile relationship,” as Margul calls it, with the cows as early Hindus or the ancient Egyptians did, it is now more a relationship of neglect. Cows that roam around the large towns of India have it especially bad. They have no caretakers, wander around the streets, eat only the food that people throw out, and are milked very irregularly. They are not protected from the wet season or any other weather, but nobody will help them because of the taboo placed around them. It is not uncommon to find cows sleeping and blocking the streets, becoming an inconvenience and a hygienic problem.

They are becoming an economic liability as well. India has a very low milk production because of the “sacredness” of the cow, and milk is rationed in many cities. This has a sizable negative effect on the economy. Some cities such as Bombay have attempted to drive the stray cattle into farms to be milked, to help with the shortage, but this is only on a small scale. There is an inhumane practice being performed on some cows known as fooka, which is the extension of the period of milk giving with the downside of being extremely painful for the cow. It is seen a lot in cities like Calcutta where the milk shortage is especially severe. Some animal rights activists have made efforts to end this, but it still persists. Well it did in 1968... this would have been an easy thing to look into to see what is happening now. Not required for the assignment but with such an old article it would be appropriate. The cows that do live on farms are allowed to live far past their age of productivity because the farmers will not slaughter them, causing a problem with overpopulation.

Lastly, it has proven to be a political problem between the two dominant religions of the country; Hinduism and Islam. They use it to generate hate between their people for political purposes. Any attempts by the government to make changes, or modernize the state are severely opposed by the Hindus who hold on to what some may see as a conservative, isolationist point of view.

As the government makes some attempts at change, they run into a huge discrepancy over what the Hindu religion requires and what the actual country as a whole requires.

The article as a whole was very educating as far as clearing up stereotypical thoughts about cow worship in India. I had previous conceptions that they raised cows as sacred animals and treated them with utmost respect. The article was written in 1968 so it would be interesting to see how and if this problem in India has been relieved at all, or if it still persists. The concept of strict religious practices being affected by modernization and westernization is controversial and a tough issue to resolve.