CRIMINALIZING LIVELIHOODS
LEGALISING VIGILANTISM

The Adverse Impact of the Karnataka Prevention of Slaughter and Preservation of Cattle Act, 2020

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1. The Karnataka Prevention of Slaughter and Preservation of Cattle Act, 2020

Prohibitions on slaughter of cattle have existed in Karnataka since Independence (1947), with the scope of restriction varying over time, and depending on the government in power. Soon after Independence, the then State of Mysore enacted the Mysore Prevention of Cow Slaughter Act 1948. Section 2 of this Act, defined “cow” to include cow, bull, bullock, buffalo, and calf, and Section 3 of the Act imposed a ban on the slaughter of “cows” except when certified, by a qualified veterinarian, to be affected with rabies. Following the reorganisation of states in 1956, the Bombay Karnataka areas, which had the Bombay Animal Preservation Act, 1954, were added to the Mysore state.

By 1956, 9 out of 14 Indian states had enacted laws prohibiting the slaughter of cows. In 1956, 12 Writ Petitions were filed before the Supreme Court of India challenging the Uttar Pradesh Cow Protection Act of 1955, the Bihar Preservation and Improvement of Animals Act of 1955, and the C. P. and Berar Animal Preservation Act of 1949 (de Rohit, 2019). These laws had been enacted with the purported aim of giving effect to Article 48 of the Directive Principles of the State Policy Chapter of the Indian Constitution on Organisation of agriculture and animal husbandry which states that:-

The State shall endeavour to organise agriculture and animal husbandry on modern and scientific lines and shall, in particular, take steps for preserving and improving the breeds, and prohibiting the slaughter, of cows and calves and other milch and draught cattle.

In the judgment pronounced in these petitions, referred to as Mohammed Hanif Qureshi vs State of Bihar (1958), the Court held that a complete ban on cattle slaughter was an infringement of the fundamental right to trade enshrined in Art 19(1)(g) of the Constitution. However, the court upheld that the Article 48 of the Constitution enjoined the State to prohibit the slaughter of cows and calves and “...those animals which are presently or potentially capable of yielding milk or of doing work as draught cattle but does not...extend to cattle which at one time were milch or draught cattle but which have ceased to be such.” (pp. 641-642.)

The Mysore Prevention of Cow Slaughter and Cattle Preservation Act, 1964 was brought in to ensure uniformity in the laws applicable across the unified Mysore State and also to give

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1 The term ‘cattle’ as used in this report includes cows, bulls, bullocks, oxen and calves. The term 'bovine' as used in this report includes cattle as well as buffaloes.
2 Bulls are adult uncastrated male domesticated cattle and bullocks are young bulls. Oxen are castrated male cattle.
effect to the judgement of the Supreme Court in the case of *Mohammed Hanif Qureshi vs State of Bihar* (1958). This Act, while retaining the prohibition on slaughter of cows, its calf and the calf of a she-buffalo, allowed for slaughter of other bovine animals namely bulls, bullocks and buffaloes, after obtaining a certificate in writing from the competent authority stating that the animal is ‘fit for slaughter’. ‘Fit for slaughter’ certificate could be issued if the animal was above 12 years of age or had become permanently incapacitated for breeding, draught or milch purposes due to injuries, deformities or any other cause (Section 5).

In 2005, a 7-judge bench of the Supreme Court in the case of the *State Of Gujarat vs Mirzapur Moti Kureshi Kassab (Mirzapur)* reversed the *modus vivendi* arrived at in *Mohammed Hanif Qureshi* and held that a complete ban on slaughter of cattle, including that on bulls and bullocks was not-violative of fundamental right to trade of butchers, and is only a reasonable restriction on it.

During the tenure of the first Bharatiya Janata Party government with a full majority in Karnataka (2008-13), Bills were passed in 2010 and 2012. The 2010 Bill, which went the farthest in terms of its reach, would have replaced the 1964 Act. The 2010 Bill sought to bring in bulls, bullocks and he- and she-buffaloes (irrespective of age) within the definition of cattle in addition to cows and calves. It imposed prohibition on their slaughter as well their interstate and intrastate transport for slaughter. The 2010 Bill prohibited “sale, usage and possession of beef” wherein beef meant “flesh of the cattle in any form”. The 2010 Bill was pending with the President for their assent, when another Bill was enacted in 2012 which sought to amend the 1964 Act. It sought to add bulls and bullocks to the categories of cattle whose slaughter was prohibited. Only buffaloes were to be allowed for slaughter and that too after an enhanced age limit of 15 years after which they could be declared ‘fit for slaughter’. This Bill remained pending with the Governor and when the Congress returned to power in 2013, both these Bills were withdrawn.

Back in power in February 2021, the BJP government legislated a complete ban on the slaughter of bulls and bullocks and male and female buffaloes below the age of 13 years, in addition to cows, via the Karnataka Prevention of Slaughter and Preservation of Cattle Act, 2020. Additionally, the transport, sale, export, purchase or disposal of the above categories of cattle for the purpose of slaughter within or outside the state has also been completely prohibited. The law allows authorities to conduct search and seizure operations merely on

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4 Section 4 of the 2020 Act states that: “Notwithstanding anything contained in any law, custom or usage to the contrary, no person shall slaughter or cause to be slaughtered, or offer or cause to be offered for slaughter or otherwise intentionally kill or offer or cause to be offered for killing any cattle.” The Act defines cattle as: cow, calf of a cow and bull, bullock of all ages and he or she buffalo below the age of thirteen years.
suspicion and these powers of search and seizure also extend to transport vehicles carrying cattle.\textsuperscript{5}

Table 2.1: Comparison of the Provisions of the Karnataka Prevention of Cow Slaughter and Cattle Preservation Act, 1964 and the Karnataka Prevention of Slaughter and Preservation of Cattle Act, 2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1964 Act</th>
<th>2020 Act</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prohibition on Slaughter of</strong></td>
<td><strong>Unqualified</strong>: Cows and their calves and calves of buffaloes</td>
<td><strong>Unqualified</strong>: Cows and their calves, Bulls, Bullocks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Qualified</strong>: Bulls, Bullocks and Buffaloes of less than 12 years age and fit for breeding, draught or milk purpose.</td>
<td><strong>Qualified</strong>: Buffaloes of below 13 years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Permitted Slaughter</strong></td>
<td>Bulls, Bullocks and Buffaloes of above 12 years of age; or Unfit for breeding, draught or milk purpose</td>
<td>Buffaloes above 13 years of age.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Restriction on transport of animal</strong></td>
<td>Prohibition of inter-state transport of animals in contravention of the provisions of the Act</td>
<td>Prohibition of intra-state and inter-state transport of animals in contravention of the provisions of the Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quantum for punishment</strong></td>
<td>Imprisonment for a term of upto six months, or with fine upto one thousand rupees, or with both.</td>
<td>For slaughter: Imprisonment for a minimum 3 years and maximum 7 years or with fine of minimum Rs 50k and maximum Rs 5 lakhs or with both</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A definition of beef as flesh of cattle in any form, where cattle means cow, calf of cow, bull, bullock and he or she buffalo below the age of thirteen years, has also been introduced. While the Act does not specifically prohibit the consumption of beef, the prohibition of slaughter of cow, calf of a cow and bull, bullock and he or she buffalo below the age of thirteen years effectively translates into a default ban on beef consumption. It also converts what was, for generations, a legal trade, into an illegal one, without making any alternative provisions either for livelihood or nutrition. Having been passed overnight, during the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic and draconian lockdowns, it gave no opportunity for people to prepare in any way for the effects of the new Act. The penalties and punishments have been steeply enhanced for contravention of any provision of the new Act. There are strict provisions of imprisonment of

\textsuperscript{5} Section 8(1) of the 2020 Act says: “Where a Police officer not below the rank of Sub-Inspector or a competent authority has reason to believe that an offence under this Act has been committed has power to inspect and seize such cattle and premises and materials used or intended to be used for the commission of such offence.” The word “premises” has been defined to mean and include “any premises, vessel or vehicle”.

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not less than 3 years and upto 7 years on conviction, with fines of not less than Rs. 50,000 and upto Rs. 10 lakh. To put this in perspective, the maximum punishment under the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act 2013, for employing human beings, who are mostly from Dalit communities, is only 2 years for the first offence.

The 2020 Act is almost identical to the 2010 Bill except on two counts: the section prohibiting sale, usage and possession of beef has been omitted while the prohibition on buffaloes has been imposed only on those with age below 13 years. These changes were most likely influenced by the 2016 Bombay High Court judgement where it read down those amendments to the Maharashtra Animal Preservation Act, 1976 which sought to make possession of beef an offence. In the context of this judgement of the Bombay High Court, legal scholar Gautam Bhatia has argued that any restrictions to the fundamental right to freedom of trade have to pass the test of public interest and reasonableness. Any test of reasonableness would involve the test of proportionality. Article 48, which is a Directive Principle of State policy prescribes a goal to be achieved and not the means by which such goal is to be achieved. Hence, it cannot by itself justify reasonableness of a restriction because reasonableness is a test of the means adopted to achieve those goals. Additionally, the facts required to judge proportionality of a restriction and its reasonableness cannot solely be those provided by the government.

This report is an attempt to challenge the claims and “facts” used by the Karnataka Government to justify the Karnataka Prevention of Slaughter and Preservation of Cattle Act, 2020 (2020 Act from hereon), by placing in public domain, the visible and not so visible impact of the cattle slaughter ban in Karnataka. Some of the effects documented by this report are on nutrition, livelihood, social wellbeing as well as mental health. The report documents the disruption caused, within a short span of time, by the Act on farmers, cattle traders, butchers, vendors and consumers and the debilitating blow dealt by this Act to the livestock, leather and meat economy of Karnataka.

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6 Shaikh Zahid Mukhtar vs State of Maharashtra (WP N0 5731 of 2015)
2. Methodology and Structure of the Report

The Karnataka Prevention of Slaughter and Preservation of Cattle Act, 2020 was passed in a great hurry by the State government in February 2021, when the effects of the second wave were beginning to be felt. In September 2021, almost 7 months later, a group of researchers who are part of Ahaara Namma Hakku collective felt that there was a need to document the effects of the cattle slaughter ban in Karnataka following complaints from groups like the farmers and butchers about the Act being poorly thought out and with many adverse consequences. The group began contacting individuals and organisations directly working with, affiliated with or employed in cattle related work in Karnataka. A snowballing method was used to speak to different individuals/organisations across the economic chain of the cattle trade. These include:

- Leaders and representatives from the Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha (KRRS), Beef merchants association, Jamaat-e-Islami, Karnataka Minority Rights Forum, Dalit Sangharsh Samiti (DSS).
- Butcher shops and associations - Bengaluru (Devarajeevanahalli and Shivajinagar), Ballari
- Hide and Skin Curing Units, Slaughterhouse workers, loaders and unloaders
- Eateries/street vendors
- Leather vendors
- Sellers of cattle (farmers) and buyers of cattle (other farmers and butchers)
- Cattle market officials and traders
- Consumers of bovine meat

The names of some of the people who have been quoted in this Report have been changed or withheld at their request, and in consideration of the larger culture of targeting and harassment of vulnerable communities in Karnataka. The authors of the report declare that they have no conflicts of interest. By the time the field work for this report was conducted (September 2021), the second wave had subsided. While some of the difficulties experienced by the interviewees were immediate effects of the numerous lockdowns, most of the people we spoke to were able to connect the enactment of the Act with adverse impact on different aspects of their lives and livelihood. Section 4 of the report presents the data collected by us through these interviews.

Apart from the field interviews conducted during September 2021, we have referred to official documents like the Cabinet Note submitted by the Department of Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Services to the Cabinet Committee to understand the official position and rationale.

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9 For details visit, [https://aharanammahakku.home.blog/](https://aharanammahakku.home.blog/)
10 Some of the video-recorded interviews can be watched here: [https://tinyurl.com/cattleslaughterban](https://tinyurl.com/cattleslaughterban)
for bringing in this Act. Based on the primary data collected from our interviews with key actors, and the secondary data presented in Section 5, we also evaluate whether the justifications provided for the introduction of the Act in the Cabinet Note hold up to scientific scrutiny. In Section 5, we have relied on the arguments made by Dr. Abdul Samad, who is a veterinary scientist and an independent petitioner before the Karnataka High Court. In Section 6, we briefly delve into how the Act is likely going to affect small scale businesses which are largely owned by Muslims, to the advantage of export-oriented corporates. In Section 7, we reflect on the caste and communal dimensions of the Act and then we conclude the Report in the final section. But first, a brief overview of the role cattle trade plays in Karnataka’s economy and the economic value chains it sustains.

\[\text{11 An interview with Dr. Abdul Samad was conducted in September, 2021. We are grateful to Dr. Abdul Samad for giving us permission to use the data and arguments made available by him during the interview. The data provided by him has been independently verified by the authors before inclusion in the report. We have used the latest figures wherever available.}\]
3. Role of Cattle Trade in Karnataka’s Economy

“Livestock\textsuperscript{12} production and agriculture are intrinsically linked, each being dependent on the other, and both crucial for overall food security. Livestock sector is an important sub-sector of agriculture in the Indian economy. It forms an important livelihood activity for most farmers, supporting agriculture in the form of critical inputs, contributing to the health and nutrition of the household, supplementing incomes, offering employment opportunities, and finally being a dependable ‘Bank on hooves’ in times of need. It acts as a supplementary and complementary enterprise.”

\textit{Annual Report of the Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying, 2020-21}\textsuperscript{13}

The trade in cattle sustains several upstream and downstream activities across the urban and rural economy in Karnataka. Karnataka’s livestock sector contributed 22.61\% of Agricultural and Allied Sector Gross Value Added\textsuperscript{14} (GVA) and 2.87\% of the total GVA during Financial Year 2019-20.\textsuperscript{15} The farmers primarily rear cattle for milk, manure, transportation and draught purposes. Typically a farmer seeks to maintain a constant herd-size by combining draught and milk-giving cattle (both younger and in-milk/lactating).\textsuperscript{16} Cattle which the farmer doesn’t need are culled\textsuperscript{17} from the herd and sold in cattle markets. The economic value realized from this sale is then used to meet necessary expenses (expenditure) or buying new animals (investment). The income earned from the sale of unproductive animals is a crucial activity for farmers to replenish their stock with younger, more productive animals. Unproductive animals are either sold to other farmers for agricultural purposes or to traders for meat. The latter are transported to slaughterhouses from where meat is transported to the meat shop owners, and hides to the skin and hide curing units. In 2018-19, the total estimated value of livestock products in Karnataka was INR 49834.6 crores, of which milk contributed 59.8\%, meat 14.97\% and Dung contributed 16.75\%.\textsuperscript{18} This value chain is depicted in the schematic below:-

\textsuperscript{12}Livestock means all farm animals other than poultry and includes cattle, buffaloes, sheep, pigs, goats, horses.
\textsuperscript{13}See \textit{Government of India (2021)}.
\textsuperscript{14}Gross value added (GVA) is an economic productivity metric that measures the contribution of a sector to the economy calculated by deducting the value of inputs from the value of outputs produced.
\textsuperscript{16}Interview with Dr. Abdul Samad.
\textsuperscript{17}The act of reducing or controlling the size of a herd by removal of especially weak or sick individuals.
\textsuperscript{18}See \textit{Government of Karnataka (2019)}. 
Fig 3.1 Schematic of the Value Chain supported by Cattle Trade

According to the latest NSSO data, Karnataka has 77,586 rural households of which 54.8% are agricultural households. Of these, Scheduled tribes constitute 9.2%, Scheduled caste 14.6%, Other backward castes (OBC) 56.5% and Others 19.6%. 18.5% households reported owning in-milk cattle and 8.1% in-milk buffaloes.\textsuperscript{19} Among the various sources of income for agricultural households, across all land-sizes, animal husbandry contributed 5.8% of the total income. Among the near landless farmers (<0.01 ha), the percentage contribution of animal husbandry was 20.23% of the total income (see Table A.1 on the appendix). A worrying trend is that while in India as a whole (see Table A.2), income from animal husbandry (107.34%) saw the largest increase among all sources of income between 2012-13 and 2018-19, in Karnataka the increase was only 8.16%, second lowest after non-farm income which actually saw an absolute decline.

The landless, marginal and small holding farmers are the mainstay of livestock ownership in Karnataka and the incomes derived from animal production is significant for these farmers. In Karnataka, marginal farmers allocated 43.84% of their holdings for animal farming while small farmers allocated 32.12%.\textsuperscript{20} Out of the land allocated for animal farming, over 85% was used for dairying.\textsuperscript{21} The milk production in Karnataka has seen constant increase over the last 30-40 years as shown in Figure 3.2 below.


\textsuperscript{20} Table 3.7, \textit{Ibid}.

\textsuperscript{21} Table 3.8, \textit{Ibid}.
While the contribution to milk production by buffaloes has remained more or less constant over the last decade, the production of milk from cows has shown a steep 6-fold increase in Karnataka between 1986-87 and 2019-20. Cow milk contributed 53.23% to the total milk production in Karnataka in 1986-87, followed by buffalo milk (46%) and goat milk (0.72%). By 2019-20, the contribution of cow milk increased to 76% of total milk output while that of buffalo milk halved to 23.2%.\textsuperscript{22} The cattle ownership (number per 1000 cultivators) is concentrated over the northern and western districts of the state while the buffalo ownership is largely concentrated in the northern districts of the state as can be seen in Figure 3.3 below.

\textsuperscript{22} Department of Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Services, Government of Karnataka, “Estimated Milk Production From Year 1986-87 to 2019-20”, Bengaluru.
Before the enactment of the 2020 Act, bulls, bullocks and buffaloes (above age 13 years), used to be sold to meat traders. In terms of species-wise contribution to meat production, in India, cattle meat constitutes 3.59 percent of total, while buffalo contributes 18.43%. In contrast, in Karnataka, cattle meat constitutes 6.83% while buffalo meat comprises 2.01% of the total meat (see Figure 3.4 below).
Even before the enactment of the 2020 Act, cattle meat production had been showing a declining trend over the last 3 years as shown in Figure 3.5. In 2018-19, the total value of meat produced from cattle and buffalo in Karnataka was estimated to be 271 crores and 185.5 crores respectively. The total estimated value of cattle and buffalo skin was 13.1 crores for 2018-19.\(^{23}\)

![Figure 3.5: Trends in Meat Production by Species in Karnataka (1983-84 to 2019-20)](image)

Figure 3.5: Trends in Meat Production by Species in Karnataka (1983-84 to 2019-20)

In the next section, we describe the actual ground-level impact of the Act based on interviews conducted with a variety of actors along this whole economic value chain.

\(^{23}\) See *Government of Karnataka* (2019).
4. Effects of the Cattle Slaughter Ban

As discussed in the previous section, an entire economic chain exists around cattle. The farmers who procure and rear cattle do so primarily for dairy and/or agricultural purposes. It is only when the cattle becomes less productive or unproductive, that they are sold off at the thriving animal markets across the state, and replaced with more productive cattle. Depending on their age and productivity, the animals that are sold are either used by other farmers for dairy or draught or by butchers for meat. Transporters take the cattle to slaughterhouses from where the meat is bought by butchers, who in turn sell the meat to consumers, hotels, small eateries, street vendors etc. Hides which are sold to the hide merchants are salted and cured and later sold to agents for manufacture of leather products. Parts such as the intestine, bones and hooves may also be sold to pharma companies etc. Apart from the meat, economic activity from cattle includes hides and skins; bones for processing into gelatin, ossein, di-calcium phosphate; casings from the intestines; horns and hooves; blood for the pharma industry; meat and bone meal; tallow and pet foods. The cattle slaughter ban has adversely affected all these economic chains through its impact on the cattle trade. In this section we present the qualitative data, gathered through interviews with actors along the whole value chain underpinned by cattle trade.

We begin with the cattle markets which are the places where exchange of cattle between sellers (farmers) and buyers (farmers as well as traders) takes place. Apart from cattle, live animals namely buffaloes, sheep, goats and pigs are sold in these markets under supervision of the State Veterinary Departments. These are mostly weekly markets owned privately or by trusts or local bodies (Panchayat/Municipality/Corporation). Marketing is also undertaken under Agriculture Produce Markets Act (APMA) notified by various States (Bajaj and Ranjhan, 2020). Often, the transaction between a buyer and a seller is mediated between a broker or a trader (Savanur et al, 2018).

According to Veerasangaiah from Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha (KRRS)24, there used to be around 2000-3000 cattle markets in Karnataka, which have now either come to a standstill or have markedly reduced footfall.

“We had 2000-3000 thriving cattle markets (santbes) in Karnataka and cattle from across the state used to come to these markets. There was huge competition. People could make any kind of business transaction at the markets. Now, under this law, the number of these santbes has come down to 100 and even these are not functioning like before. Farmers are already in a dire economic situation. This law makes owning cattle itself a problem, especially for dairy farmers. They have also

24 KRRS - Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sanghas or the Karnataka State Farmers’ Association which started as an agrarian movement also works towards broad social change at various levels of society.
We visited two cattle markets in the North Karnataka region: a large cattle market at Ginigera in Koppal taluka of Koppal district and a relatively small market at Devara Hippargi in Vijayapura district.

We reached the cattle market at Ginigera at around 7 am. Over a large stretch of land, there were hundreds of buyers and sellers with different types of bovines. The animals were in different states of health and we gathered that the healthy bovines would be bought by other farmers for dairy or draught purposes, but those that were sick, aged or unable to move around were meant to be sold to the cattle traders. Clearly the functioning of these cattle markets is central to economic activity for the farmers and traders alike.

**Figure 4.1: Cattle market, Ginigera, Koppal**

Some of the people we spoke to said that the numbers of people and cattle on the day of our visit were a fraction (almost a third) of the usual numbers in the market. One of the traders who is a regular at the market, informed us that earlier there used to be around 5000 buyers and sellers in the market, but because of the ‘harassment from gau rakshaks, number of buyers have reduced and the market is no longer the way it used to be’. Once a deal was struck between the buyer and seller, an official from the market yard issued receipts for the transactions. This receipt was meant to serve as documentation of the legal purchase of the animal. A market fee of Rs 5 per transaction was being charged by the market committee. We were informed that till January, the market fee collection used to be upwards of Rs 20,000 per day but since then these numbers had come down to Rs 5000-6000 per day only.
There was an air of despair in the market, and later we realised that many of the farmers would end up taking their unsold cattle back home, essentially due to a sharp decrease in the numbers of buyers since the cattle slaughter ban was enacted. Several of the farmers we interviewed had visited similar markets in Kushtagi and Sindhanuru and had come to Ginigera after being unable to get a good price for their cattle or not finding any buyer at all.

At the Devarahippargi cattle market in Vijaypura, we spoke to a group of Muslim men who lived in the vicinity. They were initially hesitant to speak but with the intervention of a local activist from Vijaypura town, they shared how the cattle slaughter ban had led to a decline in
the trade. The market used to get purchasers from places like Bengaluru in the state and from Sholapur in Maharashtra. They informed us that although instances of police or vigilantes stopping cattle carrying vehicles were rare in their area, but such instances in the nearby district and at the Karnataka-Maharashtra border has affected the inter-district and inter-state transport of cattle and thus several such buyers have stopped coming to the market which has led to significant reduction in the number of transactions at the market as well as the price that people receive for their cattle.

![Figure 4.3: Unsold cattle at the Ginigera market, Koppal](image)

**Farmers**

“We bring sick, old and lame cattle to the market. From age 7 years, the animal can start getting unproductive and by 8-9 years, many are not productive. They keep telling us to protect these animals. Now who will take care of these animals when they are sick? The cost of everything is going up. Even to take the cattle for short distances for treatment, we have to pay a minimum of 500 rupees.”

Gajagandra, a farmer from Nedungudu village, Hosapete
Farmers usually sell unproductive cattle to traders who transport them to slaughterhouses. The 2020 Act, by prohibiting the slaughter of bulls, bullocks and buffaloes (below the age of 13 years), and prohibiting transport, sale, purchase or disposal of such bovines for the purpose of slaughter, essentially criminalizes the traders who buy bovines for slaughter from the cattle market. This leaves only farmers in the market, who would buy only productive bovines for milk or draught. Cattle slaughter ban and ‘vigilantism’ means that farmers cannot sell unproductive animals and will have to continue taking care of the animal which they categorically say is economically unviable. This is echoed even by those who are not farmers but who understand the economic chain.

Veerasaingiah of the Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha (KRRS) says that when a cow or buffalo reaches the age of around 13, the farmer who sells the animal, gets around three-fourth of the money that he bought the animal for. Now, that economic option has suddenly been taken away and the only alternative option being offered to them is to hand over the unproductive animal to a gaushala.

>“An animal bought for 40 thousand used to have a resale value of 25 thousand rupees. Who is going to give us that 25 thousand now? How can the government expect us to give away the cattle free of cost? We are already struggling to make ends meet and are economically in a bad situation. Many farmers are choosing the path of suicide and we hear of suicides almost every day. On one side there is corona and on the other side there is famine. Now this ban. We have taken up this milk business for the sake of livelihood. KRRS has taken up the demand across the state that the government should pay us if it wants us to give away cattle to the gaushala. We are raising these cattle and giving milk, curd and other dairy products to the state. We will not allow this law to be implemented.”

It is ironic that the Cabinet Note justifies the enactment of the Act by stating that the bill ‘will become a milestone in preventing farmer suicides by providing cheap agricultural inputs & additional sources for income generation’, while a practicing farmer and representative of a farmer organization (KRRS) feels that the Act is going to further aggravate the precarious situation of farmers in Karnataka. It appears that the government has decided what is ‘best’ for the farmers, without even consulting them!! The inability to sell unproductive cattle for a good price is especially debilitating for landless farmers, as explained by Gajagandra from Nedungudu village, Hosapete who says that

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25 *Gaushala* is supposed to be a protective shelter for unproductive and ageing cattle in India.
“We are poor people. We don't have any land. We take land on lease and cultivate it and we have to pay the rent. If we are not able to sell our cattle what are we supposed to do? We came to sell cattle here. We bought it for 20 thousand. Now they are saying we should sell it for 10 thousand. It is difficult for us. If we are not able to sell our sick, injured or unproductive cattle, then how would we repay our loans. We as farmers are cursed, I have aged because of all this stress.”

Many of the farmers we spoke to told us that they were already in a difficult situation because of unpredictable rains and the Covid situation. The costs of inputs including diesel and agro-chemicals have increased sharply. Over the last few years, many of their expenses related to cattle rearing such as feed, transport etc. have also increased. In this difficult situation, the cattle slaughter ban has hit them further economically. They say it’s difficult to care for unproductive cattle and that they can neither feed their cattle nor let them starve, as Gajagandira, the tenant farmer from Hospete explained

“Seed prices have also gone up. We have to buy seeds at higher cost and sell our produce for less. How much profit do you think farmers make on small plots of land? On top of that, the cost of taking care of cattle is very high. The only option left for us is to rent out the women in our houses. The reason we have goats and sheep and cattle is to help us in difficult times. We don't have land to sell in difficult times. We are facing loss in all aspects.”

“Earlier we used to sell this cattle for 50000, now it won’t even sell for ten thousand. We cannot maintain the cattle this way. I have leased-in four acres of land and have eight heads of cattle. I brought three today, one ox and two buffaloes, to be sold. How will I sell them? I will lose around 35 thousand rupees. Before the law, we used to get around 20 thousand per cattle but now they are not ready to pay us even half of that. They ask us to give it for 4 - 5 thousand.”

Ramanna, a small farmer from T Hosahalli, expressed his anger in a similar vein:-

“Some of the cattle stop eating or drinking, some start losing weight, some may have injuries and find it difficult to walk or get up. So we have to sell them. But if we sell at the rates they are offering now, we will lose 4000 - 6000 rupees so we will not sell it now. We will wait for a better price. I have 4 cattle. They are not ready to buy some of the cattle and are asking us to give them free of cost so I have decided to take the cattle back. The government doesn’t listen to us. See how they are treating us. Everything is so expensive. How will we eat? How will we pay for the transport?”

Usually, if the farmers realise that the cattle are dying, they quickly sell them off knowing that they will otherwise end up spending money to dispose of or bury the dead cattle. But because
of the Act, there are no buyers now for such cattle who are on the verge of dying. Majore, a Lingayat farmer from Kalaburagi taluka spoke of this unrealistic burden being imposed on the farmers by the Act

“You expect us to take care of the cattle till the end of their lives. How will we manage? Don’t throw a stone at our livelihood. No one buys dead animals. We have to pay an extra 2000 to get a JCB\textsuperscript{26} to dispose of the animals. Why are you harassing people after they buy the cattle from us? They give correct money and buy it. We also need animals in our fields so we won’t just sell animals that are useful.”

A farmer demonstrates how he knows that his bullock will die shortly

“This bullock that I brought today is sick.” (He shows how yellow liquid is dripping from the nostrils,) “I have spent 1500 rupees till now on its treatment but it hasn’t gotten better, so that’s another loss for me. If I was able to sell it for some money I could have used it to clear some part of my loan at least. I am very tense with all this (tears).”

-Farmer, Shivapura taluk

In addition to not being able to get a good price for their cattle, Veerasangaiah felt that the Act has now created a situation that makes farmers vulnerable to being criminalised for cattle transactions:-

“All this makes farmers appear like criminals. Even if there is a small issue, cases are filed on us, we are charged fines and the cattle are taken away. This will definitely affect the milk production in the state. The government doesn’t seem to understand this. If something is not done immediately to change this situation, we will not even need these departments like Veterinary and Animal Husbandry. The farmers will be destroyed by then.”

\textsuperscript{26}JCB is a heavy duty vehicle used for lifting or moving objects.
Farmers we spoke to say that they spend anywhere between 500-2000 rupees to transport the cattle one way, and in case these are not sold at the market, they have to pay to take them back again. They visit different markets in the hope of getting decent rates for their unproductive cattle. Many farmers said that the butchers were no longer buying unproductive cattle from them, and because of that they were finding it difficult to meet many of their own expenditures. In fact, (on paper) even the government considers that livestock are like ‘bank on hooves’ because of their potential to be ‘disposed of’ during emergencies.27 Gowshithappa, a farmer from Gidigara says that the cost of fertilizers has doubled in the last few years and that the poor are in distress. He asks pointedly whether the government came to power without the support of the farmers and feels that this government has given extreme trouble to people.

“How can the government cheat farmers like this? We don’t even have a livelihood of a few rupees. 100% of the farmers are struggling and suffering. When we need to go to a hospital or have a marriage, we usually manage by selling cattle. If we can’t sell them, then we have no way of surviving. We have to drink poison and die”.

Figure 4.4: Sick and unproductive cattle are brought to the cattle market

Khasim Shoaib ur Rahaman Qureshi (All India Jamiatul Quresh-Karnataka) echoes what Veerasangaiah says, that this law has only brought a dire economic crisis to the already vulnerable farmers.

"Please try to understand that farmers cannot maintain unproductive cattle which generate no income. Only selling these cattle will bring income for these farmers. First understand what are the causes of farmer suicides. Look at other places where cattle slaughter bans have been implemented. Has the suicide rate come up or gone?"

Nabe, a Lingayat farmer from Hosapete says that the government is turning a deaf ear to the farmers issues.

"Doesn't the government know that we are struggling here? Let them give us money to maintain their gaumata. If they make a law they should support its implementation. They are not the ones suffering. If they keep seizing the animals during transportation everyone goes into loss. I have come to this market so many times. Till now no one has come forward to give a proper rate. I paid 2000 to bring my cattle here. If I give it at the rates they offer, I will lose ten thousand rupees."

Reacting to the government’s suggestion of meeting the costs of maintenance of cattle through sale of cattle urine and dung, Hanumappa a Lambani farmer says

"Why don’t you people make arrangements for these cattle and pay us what is due. We have land that we have to cultivate. We need money to feed our family, we need money to maintain the farms. The rains are so erratic. Urine and manure will not give us much profit. How to feed the cattle? I have to repay loans. I have to spend 1000 rupees one way to transport the cattle each time. The cost of fuel is so high now."

In Devara Hipparagi, the residents of the village where the cattle market is located informed us that although seizure of cattle carrying vehicles was not happening in the vicinity of the market but the effect of such seizures along the Karnataka-Maharashtra border and in other districts has had cascading effect on the market here. The buyers from places like Bengaluru and Sholapur have considerably reduced in number. This disruption in the cattle trade eventually impacts the farmers as well

"Farmers buy some of these cattle on loan. So if it becomes too difficult to maintain these cattle and they are not able to sell, then they just leave these cattle here and there."

In Vijaypura, we spoke to Bhimsi Kaladgi, a senior leader of Karnataka Prantha Raitha Sangha about the effect of the cattle slaughter ban. He says that beef is eaten by minorities, backward communities and dalits and that this ban will affect them while also being a huge issue for farmers:-
“Cattle get old. They can neither be used for any farm work nor maintained. They are of no use to the farmers. Farmers usually sell these to butchers but now they are not able to. This is anyaya (injustice) to the farmers. How can the farmers maintain such animals? This law has created a huge problem for farmers. Banning cow slaughter is not acceptable.”

Figure 4.5: Cattle market at Devara Hipparagi in Vijayapura

A farmer from Shivapura informed us that taking care of sick animals is a costly affair. Veterinarian doctors prefer treating the cattle rather than declaring them sick/unproductive enough to be sold because treating the sick animals gives doctors a regular income. The farmer was in tears and was unable to complete the interview. The sense of despair was easily palpable.

“Each time the doctor comes to see the cattle at home, we have to pay around 350 - 500 rupees. We can’t take the animals to the doctor because they are so sick sometimes they can’t even walk properly. We are always worried that they may die on the way. Then we have to again pay for the carcass to be disposed of. Women spend so much time cutting grass for these animals. If I give this animal to a gausbala, who will pay my loan? I have one house. I am looking after my wife, father, mother, sister and three children. I can’t tell you how much we are struggling.”
Utharappa, a farmer from Sakin Gidigara village says that no other farmer will buy sick cattle and their only choice is to sell to butchers. He says that it is a serious situation for the farmers and that the government should take back the Act. In the 20-22 years lifetime of a cow, it gives milk only upto age 12 years, according to one person interviewed. After 12 years, it neither has calves nor gives adequate milk. In the case of the buffalo, this is around 15 years. The farmers ask how they will look after these cattle for 6-8 years till they die a natural death.

Veerasangaiah from Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha feels that this Act will also negatively affect milk production in the state and is therefore anti-farmer:-

“What is important is that when the farmer sells milk, it is guaranteed that he or she will earn 22-23 Rs per liter of milk. Because of this guarantee of minimum income, these families rear cattle. Once they rear the cattle, they may replace these cattle or buffaloes almost every year. They procure the cattle when it has just delivered, so it will give milk for 8-9 months. After this period, it may get pregnant again and start lactating only after another 8-9 months. To avoid taking care of the cattle during this period, farmers sell them at the cattle markets/santhe and get new ones that have just started lactating by paying another 5-10 thousand rupees more.”

“Dairying has become an important secondary source of income for millions of rural families and has assumed the most important role in providing employment and income generating opportunities particularly for women and marginal farmers. Livestock sub-sector plays a vital role in the Indian economy and also the socio-economic development of millions of rural households. Livestock is a principal source of draught power in rural areas and provides milk, meat, eggs, wool, hides and skins, manure and fuel.”

The importance of income from dairying for farmers cannot be overstated. Many farmers are totally dependent on dairy for their livelihood, while others are partially dependent. Most of the milk-producing farmers in Karnataka sell surplus milk to the Karnataka Cooperative Milk Producers’ Federation Limited (KMF) which is the second largest dairy co-operative in the country under the brand name Nandini, with 14 Milk Unions covering all districts of the State that procure milk from the Primary Dairy Co-operative Societies (DCS).

29 Karnataka Co-operative Milk Producers Federation Limited (KMF).
A drop in milk production is not only a threat to the farmers’ income but also a threat to nutritional security of the state. According to the National Institute of Nutrition (NIN), milk is an ideal food for infants and children and a good supplementary food for adults. It is a source of good quality protein, calcium, riboflavin and other nutrients but deficient in Vitamin C and iron. An adult diet is recommended to include at least 150 ml of milk a day, while children, pregnant and lactating women should receive at least 250 ml a day. The enforcement of similar laws in other states especially with the vigilantes as foot soldiers has been accompanied by a drop in milk production. The inability of the farmers to sell their unproductive cattle, and use that income to buy new and productive cattle, has serious implications for both milk-producing farmers and consumers alike.

It is doubtful whether the government even understands the sheer magnitude of the economic impact of this Act on hundreds of cattle markets across the State. In effect, in attempting to protect cattle, the government has signed a death knell for a crucial link in the cattle production cycle, with dire long term consequences for the people of Karnataka.

Transporters

Even before the enactment of the 2020 Act, transport of cattle was the riskiest part of the cattle trade and those involved in cattle transportation were extremely vulnerable to attacks. The 1964 Act had empowered the competent authority to enter and inspect any premise if there is a reason to believe that an offense has been committed under the Act or is likely to be committed. Khasim Qureshi, AIJQ explains how the arbitrary use of these powers and the free hand given to ‘cattle vigilantes’ had made the transport of cattle a risky affair:

“If you purchased animals from farmers, the vigilantes would wait till you travel 1-2 km away from the cattle market. After that they would come and stop us and seize the vehicles with the animals. They would assault and abuse the transporters. If it is the police who stopped the vehicles, the mahazar (head count and verification) of the animals would not be done as per the procedure under the law. They would just glance into the truck and declare that it is a cow. They wouldn’t even check if it is male or female. They just say basugalu (cows). The main thing as per the law, is the identity of the animal - the age, born size, is it male or female, is it sick.”

Obtaining a ‘fit for slaughter’ certificate as required by the 1964 Act from the ‘competent authority’ was difficult because very few of such officials were actually appointed. Additionally, as a member of the Karnataka Beef Merchants Association informed us, even when people had all the legitimate documents, they could still be harassed, abused and

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exploited:-

“Even when people legitimately transported cattle, they used to be targeted. Even if they had certificates, the police would throw those away and extort/harass them. Shops can be raided, cattle are seized and even the building of the person can be put up for auction. How is that legal? Even when cattle used to be transported from one state to another via Karnataka, they would falsely mention that it was headed towards Shivajinagar in Bengaluru. This would get us into trouble.”

The Karnataka Prevention of Slaughter and Preservation of Cattle Act 2020 imposes restrictions on the transport of cattle both within and outside the state. The 2020 Act empowers the competent authority (which includes police officers, not below the rank of sub-inspector) to enter premises (which also includes vehicles), to seize cattle/buffaloes, and materials used or intended to be used for the commission of offence (transport of cattle for slaughter). These provisions of the Act are clearly open for abuse and give unchecked authority to the police. No judicial oversight is required for taking such actions. Unlike many existing laws, other procedural safeguards have not been specified. For example, search warrants are not even required for search and seizure by the police or the competent authority. This has created a situation where police and ‘competent authority’ may not even document the seizure but instead route the cattle either to the gaushala or to some unknown location. The person who has been literally robbed by this has no recourse to justice because all his evidence has been seized. There is no provision for return of confiscated cattle or buffalo pending trial. The Act states that confiscated cattle/buffalo will be handed over to the care institutions and should not be handed over to the accused ‘under any circumstance’. This is seen as a loophole which puts those who legitimately transport duly purchased cattle in a very difficult situation. On the one hand, they have paid for the cattle, and on the other hand they stand the risk of losing the cattle with no recourse to justice. Many people have given up even buying cattle because of this specific issue and the farmers are the first to take a hit because of this. If the vehicle has been rented, it puts the owner in an even more difficult situation. The officer is expected to record the grounds of his belief for the search operation and is required to call two independent and respectable inhabitants of the locality and search is to be conducted in their presence and list of seizures are to be signed by these witnesses. The Act also provides that the Sub-Divisional magistrate (SDM) may order the sale of confiscated premises (including vehicles) through a public auction if he believes that it is expedient in the public interest. Judicial authorisation is not required for ordering either confiscation or sale of premises (even before trial!). Again this gives undue power to the authorities of this Act, and, as can be seen from the people interviewed for the report, is being consistently and repeatedly misused against legitimate buyers. If the ‘accused’ (in this instance victim) appeals successfully

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32 See Section 5 and 6 of the 2020 Act.
33 Section 8 of the 2020 Act.
34 Ibid.
against the order of confiscation and the premise has been auctioned in the meantime, he will only be eligible to receive proceeds from the auction. This affects their livelihood and creates a situation of being accused until proven otherwise. Further, under this Act, even if subsequently found to be ‘not guilty’, the ‘accused’ has already been punished by the law. Ironically there is no clause for penalty against those who had falsely accused legitimate owners.

The law also has a clause offering impunity to anyone acting out of ‘good faith’ in implementing the law.

Protection of persons acting in good faith – No suit, prosecution or other legal proceedings shall be instituted against the competent authority or any person exercising powers under this Act for anything which is in good faith done or intended to be done under this Act or the rules made thereunder.

The government is surely aware of the spate of macabre lynchings of people across the country for only the suspicion of carrying beef.\(^{35}\) That the government of Karnataka has wilfully inserted this clause only shows that the motive behind this law is in itself mischievous.

There is a prohibition of transport of cattle/buffalo within the state for slaughter. Even if the cattle are being transported for bonafide agricultural or animal husbandry purposes, or if the animal has to be taken for grazing or medical treatment, a permit is now required for each of these activities. The officials who issue these permits are often hard to find and not available close to where people live. This makes day to day functioning difficult and also opens up the situation for exploitation. Now, farmers transporting cattle to and from the cattle market regularly face the possibility of their vehicles being stopped either by police or self appointed vigilante mobs and asked to pay an extortion fee or run the risk of having their cattle confiscated. This makes, what should have been a fairly routine practice, into one fraught with danger. Even when we were leaving the cattle market, we observed the police stopping two vehicles transporting cattle belonging to farmers. This is a very good example of how a bad law is (ab)used against people carrying out perfectly legitimate activities.

One of the traders we spoke to at the cattle market at Ginegara said that he used to buy and transport 200 buffaloes every week to Kerala where cara beef (buffalo meat) is preferred. Although the 2020 Act allows slaughter of buffaloes above the age of 13 years, he still gets stopped often and his vehicle gets seized under the false pretext that the buffaloes are less than 13 years of age. He says that estimating exact age and proving that cattle are above a certain age is very difficult and that is becoming a loophole for the police and vigilante mobs to extort traders and also seize their cattle.

“I have been in this business for several decades. Even my son has joined in the trade. Everytime new laws are brought in, they cause a lot of inconvenience to people like us. I have lost a lot of money because of these seizures. It is difficult to estimate the exact age of the animals. I used to buy buffaloes here and sell them in Kerala, but we can never be sure if it will reach Kerala or not. We are still stopped on the highway by police or ‘gau rakshaks’ and they ask us so many questions about the age of the animals. This just becomes an excuse to seize our vehicles. Even trying to do legitimate business, I am losing money. I have been beaten so many times by these ‘gau rakshaks’. I have filed several FIRs against them but nothing has changed. Hence, I have stopped buying buffaloes here.”

Similar experience was narrated by a butcher in Ballali:-

“Police and rakshaks keep seizing the maal (animal). We have a lot of difficulty. Because of this, we had to increase the cost of beef. Earlier we used to sell for 160 – 180 rupees per kg here, but now it has gone up to 240 rupees. The ones who buy cattle are targeted, not the ones who sell. Earlier, we used to go to different markets to buy cattle but now we think a lot before buying from the farmers. Earlier we used to buy 8-10 cattle a day. Now it has come down to 4-5. We are given a receipt when we buy the cattle, but these receipts are ignored when they stop our vehicles. They take money from us and also seize vehicles. They ask questions we cannot answer. We have huge losses because of this. The government should offer protection to people.”

Khasim Qureshi of the AIJQ says that the government should make arrangements for transport of legitimately procured animals

“We will pay the government the charges for transport of the cattle that we buy. Otherwise we go under huge loss whenever our vehicles get seized even when we have the required documents.”

Although stringent cattle slaughter bans have been brought in Karnataka, there is no ban on transporting beef from other states. Even though this works out to be slightly expensive, many of the butchers transport beef from other states because there is a demand in Karnataka. There is very little demand for cara beef, so this is often not imported. However, even bringing in beef from other states is fraught with risks. Transporting the animals has become an expensive and difficult task against the backdrop of fear of being caught by the cattle vigilantes, who often act in collusion with the police.36 Javed, a meat trader in Ballari told us that:-

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“They stop us and say - you slaughtered the animal within Karnataka and are transporting it. When we try to explain that it is from outside the state, they are not ready to listen to us. We are experiencing huge losses because of the seizure of our beef. It is difficult for us to prove and they don’t even give us a chance to prove that we have brought it from other states. The cost of transportation has increased a lot for us, also the harassment. We have to pay big bribes everytime we transport beef from other states.”

Within four months of implementation of the Act, and during the peak of the second wave of Covid-19, 58 cases and 29 FIRs had been registered.37 The maximum number of FIRs were in Dakshina Kannada (8) followed by Mysuru (7). When compared to delays in registration of other cases such as deaths due to manual scavenging38 or caste-based atrocities, the alacrity with which the police act in this instance, is telling. Of the 35,091 cases filed under the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 (SC/ST Act) and its Rules from 2015-2019, charge sheets were filed only in 6400 cases.39

The law has brought in some specifications for transport of cattle, which disadvantages many of those who have been transporting cattle for years. Redesigning their vehicles to suit the new specifications or buying a specifically designed vehicle is financially beyond the reach of most of the existing people in the business, as a member of the Karnataka Beef Merchants Association informed us

“They have criteria for the transporting vehicle and the kind of containers. If this really had to be implemented, no one could be involved in this business at all. It is not cost effective for small traders.”

With all costs having gone up, transporting beef has also become economically very unviable for small traders. As a meat trader in DJ Halli who gets beef from across the border in Andhra Pradesh told us:-

“Petrol and diesel costs have gone up. We have to pay toll fees on all the roads. The cost has gone up from 20 rupees in each toll to 100 - 220 rupees. Now vehicles for transportation are also charging more. Senior citizens have had to start work and school going children are also forced to start working because the economic situation has become so bad. 6000-8000 people who were working in this sector in the DJ Halli area have moved out or they have died.”

Slaughterhouses

The Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) estimates that, for the domestic market, there are more than 4000 slaughterhouses registered with the local bodies. Traders/individual butchers buy their animals from the weekly livestock markets and bring them to slaughterhouses, which cater either to domestic markets or the export market.

There is a 150 year old slaughterhouse on Tannery road in Bengaluru which was permitted to slaughter both large and small animals and which supported the livelihood of many workers and businesses. Now it is mostly empty and only a small number of buffaloes are slaughtered there. Whereas there used to be thriving activity of buying and selling before the ban, this has now been almost completely decimated by the Act. The Tannery Road doddi (slaughterhouse) has been closed for a year and people who used to be employed in activities associated with it, have been struggling without income and absolutely no support from the government. Those who used to work in the butcher shops, the cleaners and sanitation workers involved in waste disposal have all had to look for alternative sources of employment. With the Covid-19 pandemic already rendering many people unemployed, the situation is dire for these workers. Many have had to move away in search of jobs. As a former employee at the Tannery Road slaughterhouse told us,

“I used to work in the slaughterhouse, but since the last 9 months, we have had no income. Each person working here was maintaining 5-6 family members. Is anyone asking what is happening in those homes and how people are managing without income? Is any government concerned? We are not bothered which government is in power, but just want them to address our problems. We are worried about how we will manage our homes and our children are forced to go to work now. This government is troubling us a lot. Many people have disappeared and we have no idea what happened to them.”

We were informed that a new modern abattoir near Harohalli Industrial area is under construction. Using that as the pretext, the existing slaughterhouse in Tannery road is apparently going to be shut down, making it difficult for people who were involved in the trade. The cost of taking permitted cattle for slaughter to the abattoir at Harohalli and bringing meat from there is going to be prohibitively costly for the small traders. This was perceived as a deliberate ploy to destroy small businesses.

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40 See Bajaj and Ranjhan (2020).
Skin and Hide Curing Units

India’s leather production is closely interwoven with caste. Hides, animal skins and carcasses are labelled as unclean, polluting or impure and handling these have been largely left to the Dalit and Muslim communities. In spite of leather transitioning from a traditional craft to an industrialised sector, the workers continue to be Dalits and Muslims. According to a report by Reuters\(^{41}\), harassment by ‘religious activists’ has disrupted India’s leather industry, which employs almost 2.5 million dalit worker.\(^{42}\) The leather chain involves handling several chemicals, often without adequate protection, leading to occupational hazards affecting the skin, lungs and eyes. Most workplace injuries or long term complications do not warrant even basic first aid, leave alone compensation or health insurance. The workers lead an extremely precarious life.\(^{43}\) Tamil Nadu is the leader in India’s leather industry with around 60% share in the country’s tanning capacity and finished leather production and contributes 6% to the global finished leather production. Vaniyambadi and Ambur, two cities in Vellore district, are the main centres of leather and leather products manufacturing in Tamil Nadu.\(^{44}\) The tanning industry in Tamil Nadu has backward linkages in terms of sourcing of hides and skins from Karnataka. In 2018-19, the estimated value of the cattle and buffalo skin produced in Karnataka was pegged at 8.26 and 4.84 crores.\(^{45}\) To understand the impact of the ban on slaughter of bulls, bullocks and buffaloes (below 13 years) on the industries dependent on skins and hides (by-product of the slaughter of cattle), we visited the DJ Halli area in Bengaluru and spoke to owners of hide and skin curing units located in the area and the workers employed there.

The Devarajeevanahalli (DJ Halli) and Kadugondanahalli (KG Halli) area in Bengaluru used to have several tanneries. These tanneries used to be dependent on the curing units mostly located in the DJ Halli area, which in turn used to buy the skins and hides from the government slaughterhouse on Tannery Road.\(^{46}\) The curing units used to supply hides and skins to several buyers in Tamil Nadu as well. Over a period of time, the tanneries were closed down and the curing units became completely dependent on the demand from Tamil Nadu. The 2020 Act has affected the curing units in DJ Halli badly. Several curing units have been shut down and the quantity of raw material has reduced considerably. Even the quantity of final products has come down. Earlier traders used to come searching for skins, now the skin merchants have to go looking for buyers. The curing units at DJ Halli, one of them as old as 1914, would usually be buzzing with activity. The cloying smell of hides would pervade the air.

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\(^{41}\) Reuters, ‘Cattle slaughter crackdown ripples through India’s leather industry’, June 14, 2017.
\(^{42}\) See Hoefe (2017).
\(^{43}\) Ibid.
\(^{44}\) Ibid.
\(^{45}\) See Government of Karnataka (2019).
\(^{46}\) The Hindu, “Looking forward to breaking with their past,” October 10, 2012.
and the thriving business was unmistakable. Now the entire stretch of road lies empty and unrecognizable.

Javed Pasha, owner of a skin curing unit in DJ Halli told us that the cattle slaughter ban imposed in 2020 was the last among a series of deathblows to the skin-curing industry in the area. Demonetisation and then the shoddy implementation of the Goods and Services Tax had hit them hard. The closure of the tanneries in the area as well as in Tamil Nadu, coupled with availability of cheaper substitutes for leather, had also affected them adversely. The increase in input costs had reduced the margins as well. Then came COVID19 and the severe lockdown affecting inter-state transport, followed by the 2020 Act banning slaughter of bulls, bullocks and buffaloes (below 13 years of age):

“We have been doing this work (skin curing) for the last 50 or 60 years. Many workers died of Covid, many lost jobs. Some are now doing painting and other odd jobs. We don’t get cattle skin nowadays. The cost of salt has also gone up. For each skin, we need 3-4 kg salt. We used to buy these skins from the slaughterhouse and after applying salt overnight we used to send it to Erode/Chennai. An agent used to come and buy it from us. The cost of the chemical to treat the hide has gone up. Diesel costs have gone up. Earlier transport used to cost 3000 rupees. Now it is 9000 rupees to bring the load from Mysore where there is another slaughterhouse. Earlier, we used to get around 250 hides a day, but now it has come down to 15-20. Big companies are able to manage somehow, but it is the small traders who have lost income. The police collect so much money and are benefitting from this.”

Khaleemullah, another owner of a curing unit informed us of the closure of units at a massive scale in the area

“There used to be 250 units here (DJ Halli and KG Halli area) about 2 years back. Now there are only 10-15. Skins of at least 250 animals would be bought every day earlier. Now it is 10-15. During the peak of the lockdown, we have seen people collapse out of hunger. The police and gau rakshaks are benefitting from all of this.”
The droves of workers who used to be carrying hides and skins in and out of the units, seem to have disappeared. The few workers we met at the curing units shared their concerns with us. One of the workers told us that there used to be different groups of workers to load and unload the skins, to apply salt on the hides and then to clean and dispose of the waste. Salt would be applied and left overnight and sent to Ambur or Vaniyambadi in Tamil Nadu. Each of the skins used to be sold for Rs. 1000 but now they barely fetch 50-60 rupees. The arrival of skins to these centers have reduced drastically because of the ban on the slaughter of bulls and ox. The loading-unloading of a standard size truck requires 2 workers and each worker is paid Rs 500 for loading-unloading a truck. Earlier the arrivals and departure of skin hides was enough to provide loading-unloading work of 4 trucks to each pair of workers (Rs 8000/-) per month which has now reduced to 1 truck per week, mostly of goat and sheep skin. Sometimes there is no work for weeks and workers are experiencing deep distress. A women worker who identifies as a Dalit and is employed at one of the units told us that:-

“We apply salt on the skins and we have been doing this for years. Even our parents were doing this. Now we have no work for so many days since Corona came. We don’t get rations. We are struggling for food.”
A skin curing unit owner in DJ Halli, described the dire situation of those employed in these units in following words:-

“There is a lot of tension among the people here. They are worried about not getting income and how they will meet all their expenses. This tension can lead to stress and can increase crime and robbery, even murders and violence. The rich are also not safe because they have to constantly worry about what is going to happen and whether they will lose their belongings.”

An owner of a leather product shop near Russel market, Shivajinagar informed us that there are both large and small businesses involved in the leather-related sector, and it is the small businesses which have been most affected by the ban and have lost their livelihood

“Some restrictions protecting the cow are acceptable and have been respected and followed, but imposing a ban on slaughter of non-functioning male cattle is not reasonable. One day these animals will die and then people will have to handle the carcass. These cannot be buried each time because they are large animals, so they will just be disposed of here and there.”
Many of the people we interviewed felt that over a period of time, as technology in the leather industry has advanced, the ownership of the business has shifted away from Muslims as they were not able to invest in expensive new machines or adopt the latest technology. Leather is also not used as much by the Muslim community which is generally poorer, as compared to the rich in the country. But as A J Khan, State Secretary, Dalit and Minority Sene informed us, even if Dalit, Muslim and other backward communities are not the owners of big leather businesses, a large part of the workforce in the sector still comes from these communities and a forcible decline of the small-scale units involved in skin curing and tanning work is essentially an economic blow to these communities.

Butchers and Eateries/Street vendors

In 2018-19, the estimated market value of cattle and buffalo meat produced in Karnataka was 270.6 crores and 185.5 crores respectively.\textsuperscript{47} Nearly 40% of beef produced in the State is consumed in Bengaluru (2019-20).\textsuperscript{48} This market supports lakhs of livelihoods across the value chain. To understand the impact of the 2020 Act on the butchers, retail meat sellers and eatery owners we spoke to a range of shop owners at DJ Halli and Shivajinagar in Bengaluru and at the Beef market at Ballari. We heard accounts of shops being closed or the sales having reduced drastically. Muneer Basha from the Beef Merchants association, DJ Halli described the post-ban situation in DJ Halli area:-

“In DJ Halli itself, there used to be 100-150 beef shops and each shop employed 4-5 people. Now almost 60 shops have closed down. Together these shops used to sell 4000 kg per day, but now it has come down to 2000 kg. Many lost their jobs and are now forced to take up work like painting, furniture work, driving auto etc. Kabab centres, biriyani shops, street vendors have all been badly affected.”

The reason, according to Khasim Qureshi, AIJQ is because most beef consumers in Karnataka do not prefer to eat buffalo meat. The ban imposed by the Government of Karnataka now allows slaughter of only buffaloes above the age of 13 years. Because of this preference for cattle meat rather than buffalo meat, a drop in consumption of beef has been observed following the ban, as a member of Ballari Beef Merchants Association informed us

“In buffalo meat is not preferred here in Karnataka and it is not suitable for our weather. Only people in North India and Kerala prefer to eat buffalo meat. If buffalo meat is not eaten, it will not be reared. By insisting that we eat only buffalo meat, they are affecting our food choices. Now, we are trying to sell buffalo meat but

\textsuperscript{47} See Government of Karnataka (2019).
\textsuperscript{48} The Indian Express, “Not just beef-eaters, Karnataka’s anti-cattle slaughter bill will hit farmers, tanners and more,” December 20, 2020.
not many people buy it. Many people usually buy beef from us – poor labourers, Christians from the organisations and many others.”

Figure 4.8: Buffalo meat sees very little sales at the butcher’s market in Ballari

This was echoed by other members of the Association. According to the Shivajinagar chapter of the Beef Merchants Association, there were around 150 beef stalls in the area before the Act, out of which 50-60 have now closed down. In a day, around 5000 kg of beef was sold by these shops, which has now come down to 2000 kg per, a sharp drop of 60%!

Even transporting buffalo meat doesn’t offer immunity from harassment for the community engaged in cattle trade. According to a report by Reuters, export of buffalo meat in North India saw a decline primarily due to harassment by ‘religious activists’ who have disrupted the entire supply chain. The only option available to meat traders and eateries to legally sell cattle meat is to transport the meat itself from other states, the logistics of which are extremely cumbersome. Additionally, even though selling cattle beef has not been prohibited in Karnataka, the licenses issued to eateries and meat sellers no longer mentions ‘beef’. This again puts them at risk of harassment and exploitation. Several interviewees told us that corruption

49 Reuters, “Attacks on India’s beef industry hit buffalo meat trade,” October 27, 2015.
50 Representation made by Jamiat-ul-Quraishi to the Commissioner, Department of Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Services dated 23-02.2021.
has gone up markedly after the Bill was passed. Each butcher’s shop in Bengaluru is expected to give Rs. 100 a day (vasooli) to the police. Now it is not just the cow, but the entire cattle family that is being used to target butchers. In fact some of the age-related provisions of the Act are a recipe for this kind of illegal bribe-seeking, as Dr. Abdul Samad, a veterinarian explains:-

“No text book tells us how to estimate an animal’s age accurately. We have not been taught how to confirm if an animal is 10 years old. How will we say with certainty that this animal is 12 years or 13 years old? We need the entire history, what treatment the animal has received etc. Nowadays if you pay (the veterinarian), the animal becomes unproductive, if you don’t pay him the animal becomes productive!!! There is actually no competent authority in the villages for assessing age. Sometimes people have to come to the city. There have been no notifications passed by the government to set up competent authorities to estimate the age of the cattle accurately. Why include provisions which you know cannot be implemented?”

The inability to assess the age of buffaloes, which can be slaughtered after 13 years of age, can also provide pretext for violent cattle vigilantism, a possibility expressed by AJ Khan State Secretary, Dalit and Minority Sene:-

“The government says that you can slaughter buffaloes after 13 years. What is the age proof available? Henceforth, give a birth certificate or Aadhar card to the cattle as soon as they are born. The so-called cattle vigilantes can attack. What is the guarantee they won’t. The current government has enabled them. You should therefore give a document to ensure that the law you passed is enforced.”

A member of Beef Merchants Association informed us of several examples of shops with legitimate certificates being shut down by vigilante groups, backed by the police. In DJ Halli, several shops were closed down by the police during Bakra-Eid. A meat shop owner in DJ Halli, who is also a member of the Beef Merchants’ Association described the deep distress that these actions were causing them:-

“They brought in the law suddenly without any advance notice or warning. Overnight they made it illegal. We had to shut our shops immediately. This affected our livelihood in a very bad way. Police came round and made us close all the shops. Even if we have a license, we are still targeted. Now our children have no school and we can’t even ask younger children to work. Older children also are not able to find work. Either allow them to work or send them to school. People are dying of stress and hunger more than corona.”
In Ballari, owners of several legitimate butcher shops informed us that their licenses are often not renewed without any reasons being given. This leads to huge disruption in their livelihoods.

Clear estimates of the number of people who have lost jobs or who were dependent on this sector are hard to come by because of the unorganized nature of this work. There were people who worked as tallow merchants, cleaners, loaders, tempo drivers, shop workers, roadside vendors and in the slaughterhouses. Across all these categories of workers, there has been large scale loss of livelihood. A member of the Karnataka Beef Merchants Association described the general scenario in the state and how the poorly thought out ban has impacted their livelihoods

“What livelihood should all these people affected by the ban do? They tell us to drive autos or change our trade. We are supporting many people who have lost livelihood because of the ban. Now many traders have gone below the poverty line. People feel hopeless and helpless about what they can do going forward. The lockdown itself has affected livelihood very badly. Then on top of that we have this law which hasn’t even been thought through in terms of its impact.”

The pandemic has made people’s lives miserable, according to another member of the Association, and in this context, the impact of the Act has been particularly devastating

“People don’t have enough food to eat and the cost of everything has increased but the government has done nothing to help people affected by the ban. Instead, they are being fined for everything. Many people who couldn’t pay rent have been thrown out of their houses. Some live in autos, some on the streets and some under tarpaulins. And now the law says that we are criminals.”

The question that was raised by several people we interviewed was: What will the government do to support those affected by the ban as they have a right to work? One of the meat shop owners said that if the government is asked to give people jobs, they may only be given the job of ‘coolies’, and that they were not willing to give up butchery which has been their traditional occupation for generations. Khaja, a member of the Association felt that

“After the BJP came to power, a series of decisions have been made that have made the life of the common person miserable. Now people who could earlier support their own families and even some of the other poor in the community have been reduced to
Many of the small eateries and street vendors whose livelihood depended on beef trade now have no alternative form of employment, especially during the difficult Covid times. In the Russel market area which was a thriving stretch of street vendors, small eateries as well as larger eateries has been hit by the combination of the cattle slaughter ban as well as the draconian Covid-19 related lockdown. They have not received alternate livelihood options either from the Karnataka government or the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP).

The people interviewed in this report felt very strongly that this Act would destroy small businesses and traders, while promoting the interest of large beef export companies. According to the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA)\(^5\) India exported 10,85,619.93 MT of buffalo meat products to the world valued at Rs. 23,460.38 Crores/3,171.19 Million USD during the year of 2020-21 mainly to Hong Kong, Vietnam, Malaysia, Egypt, Indonesia. There are 24 meat processing plants, of which 13 are 100% export oriented units and in the last one-year, three new export oriented units of buffalo meat processing have been approved and are reportedly under implementation.

Most people interviewed feel that there is only one sector that benefits from the cattle slaughter ban, and that is the routing of meat as well as cured hides/leather, often by a collusion of police and ‘gau-rakshaks’, to large export companies owned by rich business people in India who sometimes use Muslim names as front for their organisations.\(^5\)

The company Al Kabeer Exports Pvt. Ltd seems to be well known to most people interviewed and it is apparently the largest beef exporting company in the country with the largest slaughterhouse, over 400 acres in Rudraram village in Telangana.\(^5\) Although seemingly Muslim in name, the owner is Satish Saberwal. Similarly Arabian Exports Pvt. Ltd is owned by Sunil Kapoor, MKR Frozen Food Exports Pvt Ltd is owned by Madan Abbott. Al Noor Exports Pvt Ltd is owned by Sunil Sood, AOB Exports Pvt. Ltd by OP Arora, Standard Frozen Foods Exports Pvt. Ltd by Kamal Verma. As one beef trader inquired:-

“The underlying idea is the takeover of the leather and meat business by big companies. Small businesses will shut down. It will move from Muslim hands to the Jains and Brahmans. The Jains say don’t kill animals. How do they manage to run leather businesses?”

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\(^{51}\) Also see, *Times of India*, “Bengaluru: Once-busy beef markets turn quiet after new law,” February 17, 2021.

\(^{52}\) Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA):AgriXchange.


\(^{54}\) Ibid.
While it is okay for anyone to own a company and export products, in this specific instance of Muslims who consume beef and owning small businesses being vilified, non-Muslims who own similar businesses on much large scale, under Muslim names, are left alone. This only shows a duplicity in how the cow has become a communal tool.

**Consumers**

15% (or 180 million) Indians, which includes Dalits, Muslims, Christians, Other Backward castes (OBCs) and Adivasis consume beef (Natarajan and Jacob, 2018), which is one of the cheapest nutrient dense foods. In fact, grass-fed Indian beef is much sought-after in other countries because it is lean, unlike stall-fed cattle. 100 gm of lean beef provides 54% of the daily protein requirement (See Box 4.1 below). The significant aspect of nutrients obtained from beef is that they are readily digestible and almost completely absorbed. This is unlike grains, soya, legumes, pulses and most fruits and vegetables, which because of lower digestibility, make both macro and micro-nutrients largely unavailable for the body’s requirements.

The importance of beef as a source of important nutrients becomes even more important in the context of the high levels of malnutrition in Karnataka in general, and among the marginalized communities of the state, a majority of which consume beef.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nutrient (in gms)</th>
<th>Gms</th>
<th>Percentage Of Daily Requirement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Protein</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riboflavin</td>
<td>0.2 mg</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niacin</td>
<td>6 mg</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vitamin B6/Pyridoxine</td>
<td>0.5 mg</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vitamin B12</td>
<td>2.8 mcg</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phosphorus</td>
<td>225 mg</td>
<td>22.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potassium</td>
<td>380 mg</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zinc</td>
<td>6.4 mg</td>
<td>42.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Even before the pandemic, the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) 5 (2019-20) and Comprehensive National Nutrition Survey (CNNS) (2016-18), had painted a worrying picture of nutritional indicators in Karnataka. These are expected to take an even more adverse turn post-Covid because of the large-scale loss of livelihoods and closing down of social security schemes like the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) and Mid-day meal scheme during the multiple lockdowns.

In Karnataka, only 12.8% children within the age group of 6-23 months were receiving an adequate diet; 35.4% under-5 children were stunted and 32.9% were underweight. The data on anemia for Karnataka as reported by NFHS5, has been presented in Table 4.1 below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4.1 Anemia statistics in Karnataka</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children age 6-59 months who are anemic (&lt;11 g/dl)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non pregnant women age 15-49 years anemic (&lt;12 gm/dl)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pregnant women age 15 - 49 years who are anemic (&lt;11 g/dl)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men age 15-49 years who are anemic (&lt;13 g/dl)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, National Family Health Survey - 5

Further, the CNNS shows that of children aged 6-23 months, only 21% of children were fed an adequately diverse diet containing four or more food groups. Overall, only 9% of children aged 6 to 23 months received iron-rich foods and this was influenced by the mother’s diet, education, religion and eating practices of the mother.

Among children aged 2 to 4 years, flesh foods (1%) were the least commonly consumed food groups. The consumption of vitamin A-rich fruits and vegetables ranged from 29% in Andhra Pradesh to 94% in Meghalaya. Prevalence of Vitamin-A deficiency was 18% among pre-school children, 22% among school age children and 16% among adolescents. Vitamin-D deficiency was 14% among pre-school children, 18% in school age children and 24% in adolescents. Nearly 1/5 pre-school children (19%), 17% of school age children and 32% adolescents had zinc deficiency. The prevalence of Vitamin-B12 deficiency was 14% among pre-school children, 17% among school age children and 31% among adolescents. Nearly one-fourth (23%) preschool children, 28% school-age children and 37% adolescents had folate deficiency. These are just the common deficiencies. Many cannot even be measured adequately.

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This shows that even though India is a majority meat eating country (Natarajan and Jacob, 2018), the access to nutrient dense foods are extremely limited and, if policies had been responsive to the existing nutritional situation, these foods would have been made more available, accessible and affordable to communities rather than removing even existing food sources.

Consumers of beef who we interviewed felt the majoritarian narrative ignored both the nutritional as well as the cultural aspects of beef. Prior to the cattle slaughter ban, a kilogram of boneless beef used to cost about Rs 250-300 compared to mutton which was about Rs 800/kg. Organ meat, which is nutritionally dense, was even cheaper. Khasim Qureshi, AIJQ says that Rs. 50 worth of soup bones can provide a nutritious meal to an entire family. He says the nutrition from beef is healthy and cheap. People have to spend much more money to buy foods like masala dosa and it is difficult to feed a family if one does not have access to cheap and nutritious food. A representative of the Beef Merchants’ Association also expressed surprise at the attempt at infringement of people’s right to eat the food of their choice.

“How can they stop people from eating foods that they choose to eat? People have that right. No one is forcing a gau rakshak to eat meat. How did they make this a national animal? There are so many people possessing and selling drugs, but they are just fined and let off while people like us are being targeted.”

Adrian Rodrigues, a resident of Bengaluru also felt that the ban on slaughter was restricting people’s right to choose their food

“Why shouldn’t people eat what they want? Why enforce one set of religious views on another. If you don’t want to eat something no one can force you. Why force someone else to follow your food preferences?”

People in Karnataka consume beef for different reasons and in different ways. For some, it is a main ingredient of cooking, while others enjoy beef dishes as a snack. Bliss Rijji, a student and a member of the North-east Association, described the importance of beef in their dietary culture and felt that the government should rethink the ban because of its impact on the affordability of beef:-

“We sometimes buy internal organs or meat and prepare it with some fermented vegetables. It’s easy for us to prepare and keep this, since we work long hours. Beef is still available but we feel that the cost has gone up. Banning food is not good. We feel homesick if we don’t get food that we like.”

People we spoke to see clear connections between the cattle slaughter ban and the change in cost of beef as well as other meats. Many ask what the government has done to replace beef as a
cheap and tasty source of nutrition for many people. They ask if the government has done anything proactively to reduce the cost or subsidise other meats or eggs? As one consumer asked

“If the cost of beef goes up, so will the cost of mutton and chicken because people would shift to these meats. Beef is nutritious and eaten by many families. It is good in proteins, vitamins and minerals. TB patients are often asked to eat beef to recover their strength. 1 kg of beef is equivalent to quarter kg mutton in terms of cost.”

Another consumer also questioned the government’s intent behind imposing a ban without taking any other mitigating measures

“First of all they have not reduced the cost of other meat like chicken, goat etc., but the issue is also about people’s choice of food. People should be able to eat the food that they want. 2% of the population is imposing what the rest 98% should eat and depriving people of their rights.”

In their Public Interest Litigation (PIL) filed at the High Court of Karnataka, the Dalit Sangharsha Samithi (Bheemavaada) states that the 2020 Act violates the fundamental rights of the citizens of India, particularly of the Dalit and minority communities under Articles 14, 19 and 21 of the Constitution

“For the members of these communities, beef has a specific importance as a source of nutrition and as part of their cultural ethos, and the Act is in violation of the right to food inasmuch as an intrinsic part of this right is the right to nutritious food. It must be remembered that there is a definite caste/class dimension to beef eating, as it provides a relatively cheaper source of nutrition.”

The Petition quotes the Special Report submitted by the Karnataka State Backward Classes Commission (Karnataka State Commission for Backward Classes, 2010) under the Chairmanship of Dr. C S Dwarakanath, to argue that the Act is intrinsically discriminatory and liable to abuse. The Special Report had analyzed the impact of a similar Bill in 2010 on communities categorized as Backward Classes and had concluded that the Bill curtails the right to Food, employment and work

“Beef provided essential nutritious food at affordable rates for poor and backward classes, especially those minority communities such as Muslim, Christian, Buddhist, Pinjara, Nadaf, Chapparband, Darvesu, Jaatagaara, etc who are listed under categories IIB, I and IIIB, and the Bill would seriously affect them. In rural areas, people from Dalit, minority and the backward class communities, who engage in

56 In Karnataka, the Muslim community has also been included as Other Backward Classes under Category IIB. See, https://bcw.karnataka.gov.in/storage/pdf-files/caste%20list.new.pdf
hard manual labour, require nutrition from animal-based food. These groups need proteins derived from meat to be able to continue undertaking hard manual labour and a ban on eating cattle meat will put restrictions on their food practices.”

AJ Khan, State Secretary, Dalit and Minority Sene also pointed out to the fact that even among the Hindus, there are communities who consume beef and a ban on slaughter which affects availability and affordability of beef will affect the nutritional health of these *bahujan* communities

“Cattle meat is the food of *bahujans*. It is not a food or meat eaten only by Muslims. What we have to understand is that people who are backward economically, educationally, socially and who do not have the capability to earn a lot, eat this meat which is available cheaply. The intent is not to give trouble to any other religion. According to our traditions which we know till now, we have eaten mainly aged animals. Even with the earlier 1964 Act, we have not given trouble to anyone. So now what the government has brought in is only for their political mileage. We see in the news every day that malnutrition is a big problem especially in children. Because our communities are poor, we feel that malnutrition is some serious issue but that is not the case. We should know that the major source of nutrition is this kind of meat – whether mutton or beef. If the government is interested in protecting the cow then they also have to make some arrangement for the nutritional needs of our children. There also the government has not fulfilled its responsibility. You give nutrition for us and our children by giving a 50% subsidy for mutton. We will support cow protection. Give us a 50% subsidy for mutton and chicken in ration shops directly.”

Surekha Rajput, member of the state committee of Janwadi Mahila Sangha felt that the ban was an attack on the right to food of the poor, because beef provides high level of nutrition

“Muslims may be their primary targets but it is just not muslims who eat beef. Dalits, adivasis, and several Hindu communities also eat beef. This is an attack on the right to food of all these communities. So their target may be Muslims but it sill affect the right to food of all the poor communities.”

Thus, across the value chain, beginning from the farmers to the consumers of beef, the debilitating impact of the Act is already being fact. Given the experience of the actors across the whole chain interviewed for this report, a natural question that arises is: why possible rationale could there be behind enacting such a destructive law? We evaluate the justifications provided by the government for enactment of the 2020 Act in the next section.
5. Are the Justifications Provided for the Act Valid?

The stated objective of this new Act is to preserve and improve the breed of cattle and to organise agriculture and animal husbandry in terms of Article 48 of the Constitution. The Cabinet Note submitted by the Department of Animal Husbandry and Fisheries to seek approval for the Draft Karnataka Prevention of Slaughter and Preservation of Cattle Bill, 2020 is remarkable in its lack of detail. A short section which lays down the justifications for the Act is reproduced below:

1. As per the 2019 Livestock Census, 2,38,296 cattle are being slaughtered every year. Delay in bringing the bill by even a day will lead to slaughter of 662 cattle per day.
2. Prevention of illegal slaughtering and illegal transportation of cattle is the need of the hour.
3. Livestock of the state is decreasing instead of increase in a drastic alarming manner. This bill will be instrumental in stopping the decline.
4. Present trend is to sell male bullocks, aged cows and unwell cattle to illegal slaughter. But now it will be served by its bull power, cow dung and urine. It will make available cheap source of fertiliser, energy, rural products, health and hygiene.
5. This bill will become a milestone in preventing farmer suicides by providing cheap agricultural input and additional sources of income generation.
6. The bill will be an instrument for the conservation of indigenous breed.

There is really nothing in the Cabinet Note to indicate how the above conclusions were arrived at or what the basis of these assertions were. As the previous sections indicate, the Act has had devastating consequences on lives, incomes and livelihoods across a chain of activities related to the cattle trade, but the Cabinet Note shows that these adverse impacts have not even been acknowledged, leave alone demonstrating any concern about mitigating these. In this section, we attempt to show that the stated justifications for the enactment of the Act do not hold when scrutinized based on the available facts. Worse, they may actually end up undermining the goals of preservation of cattle, especially the indigenous breed.

Let’s first have a look at the Livestock Census data for Karnataka. The trends in the cattle and buffalo population in Karnataka are shown in Figure 5.1 (the detailed figures are available at Table A.3 in Appendix). Over the last two-and-a-half decades, the population of indigenous cattle and buffaloes has gone down steeply, while exotic/crossbred cattle have gone up. But the increase in the number of the cross-breed cattle was not sufficient to offset the decrease in the

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57 Statement of Object and Reasons, the Karnataka Prevention of Slaughter and Preservation of Cattle Act, 2020.
58 AHF 261 AD 2015, Copy obtained under the RTI Act 2005.
59 The analysis of the Livestock Census data provided here is based on an Interview with Dr. Abdul Samad.
population of indigenous cattle, hence overall we see a decline in population of cattle as well as buffaloes.\textsuperscript{60}

\begin{figure}[ht]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{trends_cattle_buffalo_pop.png}
\caption{Trends in the Cattle and Buffalo Population in Karnataka (1997-2019)}
\end{figure}

According to the farmers and butchers we spoke to, the slaughter of cows as mandated by the 1964 Act, has not been in practice. In spite of that, the number of indigenous cows in Karnataka has decreased, while the numbers of crossbred cows has increased. The Cabinet Note offers no cogent explanation of why the 1964 Act has failed in increasing the number of indigenous cows. If it is because of ‘illegal slaughter’, why has that not depressed the number of crossbred cows? Clearly, something else is at play here.

Between the 2012 and the 2019 Livestock Census, the drop in total bovine population was 15,33,425 which comes out to be a reduction of 2,10,960 bovines per year over the 7 year period between the two counts (2012-19). Presumably, this is the figure relied on in the Cabinet Note to claim that ‘(d)elay in bringing the bill by even a day will lead to slaughter of 662 cattle per day’.\textsuperscript{61} The unproven assumption here is that prohibiting the slaughter of bulls,

\textsuperscript{60} The cattle population in Karnataka is 8.47 million of which 46\% are of the exotic/crossbred variety while 54\% are of indigenous/non-descript variety. The total cattle population in Karnataka has shown a decrease of 11\% in 2019 since the 2012 Livestock Census. The bovine population of Karnataka, which includes cattle and buffaloes has shown a steady decline between the Livestock Census years 2007 and 2019 as shown in Figure 3.4.

\textsuperscript{61} There is a mis-match between the figure quoted in the Cabinet Note (2,38,296) and the figure obtained from the publicly available Livestock Census data for Karnataka (2,10,960). Additionally, in the terminology used by the Livestock Census, the term ‘cattle’ doesn’t include ‘buffaloes’. The combined term used for cattle and buffaloes is ‘bovines’ but the Cabinet Note conflates this and the usage of the term ‘cattle’ included buffaloes well.
bullocks and buffaloes would help increase the numbers of bovines in the state, especially those of the indigenous cattle. We discuss this assumption here.

The sale of cattle for slaughter is integral to the cattle rearing activity of a farming household. The decline in numbers of cattle in general, and male/indigenous cattle in particular, is not because of ‘illegal slaughtering’ but because of the choices related to herd size and composition made by farmers themselves. There are different reasons for the trends in population of male and female cattle.

As far as the reasons for trends in the female cattle population are concerned, the state policies incentivizing milk production has made cross-breeds the primary choice of the dairy farmer in Karnataka. As Veerasangaiah from Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha explains:-

“What is important is that when the farmer sells milk, it is guaranteed that he or she will earn 22-23 Rs per liter of milk. Because of this guarantee of minimum income, these families rear cattle. Once they rear the cattle, they may replace these cattle or buffaloes almost every year. They procure the cattle when it has just delivered, so it will give milk for 8-9 months. After this period, it may get pregnant again and start lactating only after another 8-9 months. To avoid taking care of the cattle during this period, farmers sell them at the cattle markets/santhe and get new ones that have just started lactating by paying another 5-10 thousand rupees more.”

The milk yields of indigenous and non-descript cows was estimated to be 2.36 and 2.38 kg/day, while it was much higher at 6.67 kg/day for crossbred cows. For buffaloes, the yield ranged between 3.08-3.46 kg/day. While cross-breed cows comprised 55% of total population of in-milk cattle in 2018-19 in Karnataka, their contribution towards milk output was 77.56%. Indigenous and non-descript cows comprising 45% in number of in-milk cows, contributed 22.5% of the total milk output i.e. proportionately lower amount. In 1992, the total in-milk cow population was 18.81 lakh of which cross-breeds comprised just 9.78%. By 2019, the population of in-milk cows had gone up to 27.89 lakhs, of which 65.48% were cross-breeds. Thus clearly, encouraged by the milk procurement policies of Government of Karnataka and Karnataka Milk Federation, farmers have responded by replacing indigenous low-yielding breeds with high-yielding crossbreeds like Jerseys and Holstein Friesans.

A different trend is visible in the male cattle population primarily used for draught, transportation and breeding purposes. The population of both the indigenous and crossbred male cattle has seen a decline, the downward trend in indigenous male cattle has been quite

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steep. Figure 5.2 below shows the Male-Female ratio of Cattle (Crossbreed and Indigenous) and Buffaloes.

Figure 5.2: Male-Female Ratio for Crossbreed and Indigenous Cattle and Buffaloes

The M-F ratio for the indigenous cattle, while declining and declining at a faster pace, is still quite high at 62 male cattle for every 100 female cattle. The M-F ratio for the crossbreed cattle is much lower at 3 per 100 crossbreed female cattle reflecting the fact that the crossbreed male cattle serves as a poor draught animal. Hence, the farmers prefer culling the male calves/adults of the crossbreed. The decline in the indigenous male cattle population has been largely due to the structural changes in India’s agriculture involving replacement of animal-derived draught power with machinery. Surekha Rajput who comes from a farming family in Vijayapura and is a member of Janwadi Mahila Sangha, explains the historical trend

“Earlier farming was completely dependent on the male cattle. Now in the name of modernization of agriculture, machinery like tractors etc. have become very common. Earlier for farm work, the farmer used to rely on ox power, but now because of the introduction of tractors, reliance on animal power has come down. The proportion of work done by machinery has increased while that by human and animal power has declined. All this has happened in the name of modernisation of agriculture.”

The Report of the Working Group on Animal Husbandry and Dairying for the XIIth Five-Year Plan (GoI, u.d.) confirms this:-

“Driven by the structural changes in agriculture and food consumption patterns, the utility of livestock has been undergoing a steady transformation. The non-food
functions of livestock are becoming weaker. Importance of livestock as source of ‘draught power’ has declined considerably due to mechanization of agricultural operations and declining farm size.”

The latest NSSO data on income and expenditure of agricultural households demonstrates this cardinal principle of cattle farming. Among the agricultural households in Karnataka who engage in animal husbandry, the average monthly receipt from farming of animals was Rs. 4,436 with a major portion from milk sales (63.8%) and the second biggest source of income from the sale of livestock (20.3%).

Thus, the declining trend in the population of male bovines and indigenous female bovines reflects preference of the farmers, the keepers of the livestock, for younger, productive high-milk yielding crossbred female cattle in their herd, while they prefer to cull less preferred bovines and sell them for slaughter, for their economic value. A farmer would typically constantly seek to have the highest yielding herd possible within her budget constraints. For this, a constant renewal of the stock, i.e. replacement of old less-yielding or dry stock with younger, higher-yielding stock is essential, as Utharappa, a farmer from Sakin Gidigara village explained

“We are all farmers here at the cattle market today. No other farmer will buy animals that are sick. We have to sell them to the butchers, if we need money for our home expenditure. The situation is very serious. We are struggling. Tell them to shut down the cattle market, if they want to protect the animals. If the market is open, people will come to do business. Tell the government to take back this Act.”

Thus, a functioning cattle market is absolutely essential to sustain this replenishment cycle by making a good resale value for the live cattle (male and female) possible. Two kinds of buyers come to the cattle markets: farmers and cattle traders who supply the cattle to slaughterhouses. The former are interested only in productive cattle and buffaloes. As far as farmers are concerned, the only economic option for non-productive bovines is sale for the purpose of slaughter.

As the previous section has demonstrated, the 2020 Act has criminalized the cattle trade, driving parts of it underground. By placing a ban on sale of cattle for purposes of slaughter, the government has taken away the option from the farmers to sell their cattle during times of distress (droughts) or financial need. More importantly, the prohibition has reduced the market resale value of the bovines (to zero if the prohibition is enforced strictly and significantly if the trade is driven underground with a part of value of the animal sold goes to

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63 Statement 5.5.1, NSS Report No. 587: Situation Assessment of Agricultural Households and Land and Livestock Holdings of Households in Rural India, 2019

http://mospi.nic.in/sites/default/files/publication_reports/Report_587m.pdf

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illegal exactions by police and ‘gau rakshaks’). The burden of maintaining unproductive animals would fall on the farmers. Yousuf Kanni of Jamaat e Islami reiterated this logic:

“We know that if cattle are dying, farmers will try to quickly sell them. Otherwise they (farmers) have to spend a lot to dispose of or bury dead cattle. The cost of maintaining a cow is 215 rupees a day in the city and 38 rupees a day in the villages. Farmers don’t have land to graze unproductive cattle. 45% of farmers in Karnataka have less than one or two acres of land. How will they maintain unproductive cattle on this land? They are most affected by this law. Farmers from Belgaum, Chamarajanagar, Koppal have already protested against the law.”

Going by this common logic, if slaughter of cattle is prohibited, it can lead to farmers being forced to reduce their herd size which contributes further to a decline in cattle population. For example, in those states where cattle slaughter was banned, but not buffalo slaughter, there was a decline in cattle population over the 2012-19 period, but a rise in buffalo population.\(^{64}\) A comparison of the trends in cattle numbers in Karnataka and states without any prohibition on cattle (West Bengal and Assam) shows that the no-ban states outperform Karnataka (see Table A.4 in the appendix).\(^{65}\) The population of cattle in the no-ban states has shown an increasing trend while in Karnataka, there has been a negative trend. In Karnataka, the female cattle, whose slaughter is prohibited by law, shows a declining trend while in the states with no such restrictions, the female cattle numbers saw positive change. Hence, clearly, a well functioning market where livestock can be sold for a good price for slaughter, has a multiplier effect on the animal production cycle by making animal farming more viable. The farmers respond by increasing their herd sizes and maintaining a more efficient herd, by regularly culling less productive animals and using the income earned from their sale to add a younger animal to their stock. In absence of the option to sell their cattle for slaughter, the farmer is saddled with unproductive or less productive cattle. In other states, farmers have been able to maintain their dairy activities by shifting partially to buffaloes, but in Karnataka the slaughter prohibition on buffaloes below 13 years of age, has made the economics of even buffalo rearing less viable, so where would the Karnataka farmer go?

There are two principal justifications offered by the government to counter the argument that a prohibition of slaughter would lead to an increase of economic burden on the farmer. The first sensational argument made by the government in support of the ban is that the economic value from the dung and urine of an otherwise unproductive cattle can compensate for the loss of income from inability to sell the animal for slaughter. However, the fact is that despite such claims, the economics doesn’t add up. From the interviewees with the farmers presented in the previous section, it becomes clear that the farmers don’t find it viable to maintain old bovines


\(^{65}\) Based on an Interview with Dr. Abdul Samad.
for their dung and urine, and find culling of older and unproductive bovines an economically superior option. As Hanumappa, a Lambani farmer articulates

“When we have expenses, we manage by selling these animals. Now the vehicles are being stopped everywhere so people are not ready to buy the cattle. The government should make arrangements for these cattle and pay us what is due. We have land we have to cultivate. We need money to feed people, we need money to maintain the farms. Urine and gobar will not give us much profit. How do we feed the cattle? I have to repay loans. To transport the cattle each time I have to spend 1000 rupees one way. The cost of fuel is so high now.”

A member of the Karnataka Beef Merchants Association also emphasized the role of sale of cattle to meet distress expenditure:-

“They have not even considered the implication of bringing such laws. 6-7 cattle are specifically reared by the farmers to sell during times of difficulty like sickness or marriage. Now by talking about preservation, you are preventing farmers from selling these livestock during a crisis. Neither has there been a thought for the families affected nor those who depend on this trade.”

Clearly, most farmers would prefer to abandon the unproductive cattle rather than maintain them, as has been the response of the farmers in other states with such similar laws.66

This brings us to the second justification made by the government: the availability of adequate numbers of gaushalas for the farmers to take their unproductive cattle to. While this may address the stray cattle problem, the economic loss to the farmers from being unable to sell the unproductive cattle remains, as pointed out by Veerasangaiah (Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha)

“After 13 years of age, cows and buffaloes stop giving milk. Now we are told that these kinds of animals should be given to the gaushala free of cost. First of all there are no such gaushalas currently in Karnataka that can take care of the cattle properly. Let us assume they open some. Who is going to compensate the farmer for the loss of income?”

The Cabinet Note pegs the financial cost of implementation of the 2020 Act at INR 5240.18 crores. This includes INR 1208.50 crores for establishment of 2,417 gaushalas of capacity of 200 each, to house an estimated number of 4,83,415 stray and unproductive cattle. In terms of operating cost of these institutions, over a period of four years, the total financial expenditure is estimated to be 3512.32 crores. A strange proposal has been mooted in the Cabinet Note

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wherein to compensate for the loss of estimated 27250 metric tonnes of beef trade, sheep/goat units would be given to 86650 farmers with a 50% subsidy (1.2 Lakh per unit) costing the state exchequer and estimated 519.36 crores.

The Cabinet Note shows that the Finance Department had objected to the passage of the Act because of the huge the financial implications, stating that

“The decision may be reconsidered in view of huge financial implications. We can not agree (sic) this kind of expenditure when we are struggling to meet both end meet. Next 2 years we expect a contraction in Budget size and hence the decision of the Cabinet may be kept on hold by re-considering the matter.”

By the time the Act was passed, the target for the number of gausbalas was reduced to one per taluka i.e around 230 gausbalas instead of the 2,417 gausbalas which were deemed to be necessary in the Cabinet Note. By the time the budget for the year 2021-22 was passed, even this figure was reduced to one per district i.e. 31 gausbalas!67

Even the existing gausbalas are not without their problems. Dr. R Mohanraj from the Dalit Sangharsh Samithi (Bheemvada) informed us that he had visited some of the exiting gausbalas several times and they are in a pathetic condition. The animals are hardly fed and are in a sickly state. Additionally, several interviewees informed us that there was a huge mismatch between the number of cattle that was being seized by the police and handed over to the gausbalas and the actual physical number of animals in the gausbalas. There is a lack of reliable information on what actually happens to the cattle after they have been seized. A beef trader whose cattle had been seized recently by the police expressed that

“We need information from the government on how many animals have been saved or protected after the bill has been passed. What Goshala have these animals been left at. We should have fact finding teams to understand this.”

The question raised by several people interviewed was: What happens to all the cattle that are confiscated and taken away? Even though cattle in significant numbers are taken to the gausbala after seizure, there is no proper record of what happens to them. Several interviewees alleged that these seized animals were being sold illegally. As a member of the Karnataka Beef Merchants Association exclaimed

“In gausbalas, the animals are in pitiable conditions. They hardly get enough to eat. Only 20-30% animals that are seized by the vigilante groups actually go to the gausbalas. The rest are sold by the vigilantes. It is a big mafia and the police are part of this.”

67 The Hindu, ‘Gausbalas to be established at district level’, March 31, 2021.
Clearly, the government doesn’t have the financial wherewithal to establish adequate numbers of gaushalas to house all the abandoned cattle. Additionally, the lack of monitoring of the operations of these gaushalas poses another administrative burden for the government.

Thus, as this section shows, the justifications provided by the government for enactment of the 2020 Act betrays a complete lack of understanding of how the cattle production cycle works, and the utter disregard for the destructive impact it is going to have on the lives, incomes and livelihoods of the those who are part of the long chain of economic activities sustained by slaughter of cattle. The measures proposed by the government for mitigation of these adverse impacts are impractical and appear more as attempts to evade criticism rather than actually alleviate the distress caused by the Act.
6. The Communal and Discriminatory Agenda of the Cattle Slaughter Ban

While in official documents and in the Courts, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government in Karnataka has sought to justify the Act on shaky and unsubstantiated grounds, which do not hold up to scrutiny as seen in the previous sections, outside the requirements of constitutionality, the leaders of BJP have justified the Act on religious grounds. In this section we take a look at the politics around the Act. The politics around beef perpetuated by the current BJP government at the national and state level should be viewed in the larger context of targeting minorities economically, socially and politically. The Covid pandemic which led to large scale loss of employment and incomes, specifically saw livelihoods of Muslim businesses, both small and large, being targeted. The cattle slaughter ban in Karnataka is perceived by many as a concerted effort by a right wing government to bring the Muslim community to economic devastation. This doesn’t seem too far from the truth when the cattle slaughter ban in Karnataka is examined in some depth. What also becomes clear is that people across religious groups have been affected by this Act.

The projection of the cow as a sacred religious symbol enables violent vigilante mobs on the one hand, while automatically offering them immunity for ‘acts of good will’ on the other hand. This love for the cow however, is selective and politically motivated depending on the vote bank situation in different states. The fact that it is the same Bharatiya Janata Party, which calls for beheading of beef eaters in one state, encourages people to eat more beef than poultry in other states like Meghalaya and Goa, is not lost on people. Veerasangaiah from Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha, for example points to this contradictory politics

“BJP tells people not to eat this meat, not to eat that meat. In Meghalaya, the BJP party says that people should eat beef because it will make them strong, not sheep or poultry meat. Your BJP politician is himself giving such calls. But here in Karnataka, the government is doing jana droha (cheating the people) work.”

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71 *People’s Review,* “Sadhvi Saraswati Threats to Behead Beef Eaters in India – How This Fascist was Created?,” June 15, 2017.
72 *The Hindustan Times,* “Eat beef more than chicken, fish: Meghalaya BJP minister”, August 1, 2021.
A member of the Karnataka Beef Merchant’s Association asks why in some states like Goa and in the North East, in spite of the BJP being in power, there is no cattle slaughter ban. He asks “Is the cow a gaumatha only in Karnataka and not in Goa and North Eastern states?”

What leaves the affected communities hurt is that even so-called secular parties have not taken a strong stand on this issue, in spite of this affecting lakhs of people who are economically dependent on this trade. They feel that other than being vote banks, their needs and concerns seem inconsequential even for the opposition parties, as expressed by a member of the Karnataka Beef Merchants Association

“Secular parties don’t stand with us on these issues. They shout slogans, raise their voices, and stage walkouts. When they walk out, the remaining people get the required numbers and pass the bill. This is what happened with this anti cattle slaughter law as well. In spite of being 17% of the population of Karnataka, the Muslims have no say in what the government decides. Neither can someone from the Muslim community become a Chief Minister, nor be in any other position of power.”

There is a feeling among the traders that there is undue attention on those who buy the cattle, even legitimately, but not on those who sell the cattle in the first place, i.e. farmers and that comes in because of the religious discrimination aspect of how this law is being ‘enforced’ and ‘implemented’, as another member of the Karnataka Beef Merchants Association exclaimed:-

“Muslims only buy from farmers who are ready to sell. Still the vigilante groups will only target the Muslims on the highways. The farmers have got their money and are also safe. Also you should know that Muslims are only 20% of those who eat beef. The rest are all dalits, Christians and OBCs.”

The 2020 Act in Karnataka is seen as particularly vicious because of the steep nature of the punishment as well as how it enables violence, even homicide, by cattle vigilantes. The economic downside for the Muslim community has been widely noted, but it has also parallely criminalised many other individuals and communities who have worked with cattle for generations.

Veerasaangiaiah, a farmer and representative of the Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha agrees that the cow has become a political tool that is being used to instigate distrust and hate between Hindus and Muslims. He says that none of the people making the law can love cows the way farmers love them. While love for the cow may be an emotion for others, for farmers it is part of the work that they do. It is only after the animal gets old or unable to eat or walk, that the farmer makes the decision to sell, because they know from experience how difficult it is to take care of sick cattle. He further elaborates
“You people who sit in the sadan (legislature) and make laws, first understand the basic gnana (knowledge) of the rural areas. This is not an issue of meat, it is an issue of milk. It is an issue of farmers. It is an issue of daily wage labourers. It is the issue of all people who drink tea and coffee in Karnataka. It is an issue concerning all of us. During Bakrid, farmers who sell and traders who buy were both affected. We will put pressure on the government not to touch our livelihood. We will not allow it to happen. We have all the systems in place to take this protest forward. We have given notice to the government. We have given it to Yediyurappa. Now Bommai has come. We will give a warning to the Bommai government also.”

According to Veersangaiah, since during the lockdown, people have not been able to move freely, the impact of the ban would become even more pronounced in the coming months. However during Bakrid, it was very clear that farmers were unable to sell their cattle. The effect on farmers is often lost in this Hindu-Muslim narrative that is constantly pushed by the right wing government.

A member of the Beef Merchant’s Association says that whichever government is in power, it should understand that it has a duty to help people who are struggling and this should be done equally, not based on people’s identity. Muneer Basha from the Beef Merchants Association says that

“During the pandemic, Muslims worked tirelessly to help people - providing relief and oxygen cylinders. But we are readily called terrorists. We also have families. We also have parents. We also want to survive. We need to live in peace. The government wants our votes but they don’t want peace.”

Mr. Yusuf Kanni of the Jamaat-e-Islami talks about how targeting of Muslim communities is perpetrated in several ways. The citizenship and nationalism of Muslims are being constantly questioned. Whatever they do as legitimate citizens of the country is twisted around. The attempt to kill Muslim businesses has now expanded to differentiating jhatka and halal meat, the latter of which is practiced by the Muslims.

“Now they are talking about halal jihad. There are whatsapp messages being shared that Muslims are poisoning people using the halal method and that people should only buy jhatka meat henceforth. Who is stopping them from using the jhatka method? This is just one more way of economically targeting Muslims. We are citizens of India. Why this Hindu-Muslim politics all the time? There is a basis for

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Halal is an Islamic method of slaughter where a prayer is recited and the blood is allowed to flow out before the animal dies and which maintains the spinal cord intact. In the Jhatka method the animal is beheaded in a single stroke which causes immediate death of the animal.
halal method and that is to drain out any contamination or infection. Now everything we do is being used against us.”

Muneer Basha says that the media has so much control over what is projected and they use that to vilify the entire community. The constant reference to Muslims in the context of Pakistan or Afghanistan is seen as a deliberate effort to alienate the community:-

“Our grandparents have lived and died here and so will our grandchildren. What sense does it make to keep talking of Pakistan and Afghanistan? What is that to us who live here?”

The constant fear of attacks, of losing cattle, of being caught/harassed by the police in collusion with the gau rakshaks (cattle vigilante groups) has led the community to feel that they have no one to even hear their issues, leave alone challenge the system. This sense of abandonment and chronic fear can have several long term consequences that can adversely affect the individual, his or her family and the larger community. Muneer Basha from the Beef Merchant’s Association says that with this law, gau rakshaks have been given a green signal to attack Muslims. Even if they have weapons in their vehicles, they will not be questioned by anyone. He says that there is a sense of fear and uncertainty among the people who are being targeted and many hesitate to speak up even when they know that they have been wronged. One of the traders we interviewed asked,

“If Hindus and Muslims are both children of the same god, how can you kill someone in the name of religion? Won’t our God hold us accountable for killing someone from another religion? When people are not punished by the law, they will get away and commit bigger crimes.”

Dr. Abdul Samad, a veterinary scientist, averred that whenever a Chief Minister’s post becomes shaky, amendments have been brought to this law to divert attention from other more serious issues. AJ Khan State Secretary, Dalit and Minority Sene says that in the name of an animal, humans have been killed and the cow has been put into the forefront by the BJP for political gains at the national and state level.

The Muslim community in DJ Halli feels particularly upset about the way they were threatened during Bakrid which is the festival of sacrifice to symbolise the Prophet Ibrahim’s readiness to sacrifice his son for God. An animal is sacrificed and one-third of the meat is given to the poor or vulnerable who also look forward to this day as a community event. In view of Covid, many Muslim families had opted to have only a small event in their homes for which a small quantity of meat was procured. However, in DJ Halli there were incidents of members of the RSS accompanied by the police, going house to house and confiscating the meat and imposing a fine. As members from the Beef merchants association, DJ Halli narrated the incidents:-
“They told us not to kill cows and we have been following that. For Bakrid, we had some goat or ox or buffalo meat, but still the gaurakshaks came along with the police, beat people and even took away the meat. They made it very difficult for us to celebrate id. They (self appointed gau rakshaks) went to the police station and came with the police and took away meat from people’s houses. The question is where did all that beef go? No one is ready to ask those questions. Twice weekly, 6-7 of us go together to buy maybe 2 buffaloes, but they stop us on the way and harass us. We have to go many kilometers to Andhra Pradesh to procure the meat. The government should have the mindset to help everyone. They are destroying Muslim businesses.”

This was perceived by the community as very cruel, especially as they were trying to abide by all the Covid restrictions of avoiding large celebrations. This targeting must also be seen in the backdrop of annual ritual intolerance displayed towards the Muslim community during this festival.75

The traders are almost unanimous in stating that they are agreeable to conditions being placed on slaughter of the cow and that they have been following these practices since the 1964 Act was passed. They have no interest in hurting religious sentiments. However, they raise some legitimate questions about extension of the prohibition to other categories of bovines. Khasim Qureshi, AIJQ, for example questions the rationale behind bringing in the imported breeds into the ambit of the prohibition:-

“The Halikar and Amrita Mahal cattle are the indigenous breeds and they can be considered as sacred. What about the Jersey and Holstein Friesian which are not recognised as sacred? In fact they are the ones which are being used in large numbers by the farmers for dairy. Why bring religious sanction on foreign cows?”

Caste discrimination

Dr. R Mohanraj, leader of Dalit Sangharsh Samiti (Bheemvada), which has petitioned the Karnataka High Court against the 2020 Act, says that

“In the name of cow slaughter, human slaughter is taking place rampantly. We have repeatedly said that this law is an encouragement for murdering people. Not only that, it is encouraging communal unrest.”

Highlighting the spate of communal and casteist vigilante violence against Dalits, Adivasis, Muslims and other minorities in the name of beef, the petition says that the law provides even further impetus to this violence. The petition terms the provisions of the Act as ‘draconian’, which would have a grave impact on persons, especially those from socially and economically backward communities. The Petition further asserts that

"The Impugned Act disproportionately targets persons belonging to the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe and the Muslim community and other marginalized communities across the country. The Impugned Act has deleterious effects on the health, nutrition, livelihood, and cultural rights of disadvantaged communities, further subjecting them to vigilantism and institutionalized violence.”

Most of the people engaged in the most menial of occupations within this sector belong to the Dalit community. As a member of Karnataka Beef Merchants Association informed us:

“Most of the workers in this trade are Dalit. They are involved in loading, unloading, cleaning and work in the shops. Those involved in transporting- loading, unloading, driving, cleaning - are again dalits. 75% of the leather business in Karnataka is owned by Muslims but most of the workers are dalit.”

The fact that the government has taken away their livelihood overnight without even making any kind of alternative arrangement shows how caste operates within the power structure. The Backward Classes Commission, in its Special Report analyzing the impact on backward classes of a similar Bill introduced in 2010, had expressed following concerns that the Bill would

a. Elevate fundamentalist groups with vested interests, particularly the police, to the status of a ‘supreme authority’ by vesting them with powers of vigilance/policing.

b. Make backward class communities, such as farmers and animal rearers, criminals.

c. Will deal a blow to the leather industry, animal husbandry, goods transport and agriculture, which are the backbone of backward class communities.

d. Place financial Burden of rearing unproductive and barren cattle on the Farmers

In the interest of social justice, the Commission had recommended withdrawal of the 2010 Bill. Clearly, for the beliefs of ‘upper caste’ Hindus, a huge burden is being placed on the marginalized communities of the state.
7. In Conclusion

The Government of Karnataka has passed the Karnataka Prevention of Slaughter and Preservation of Cattle Act, 2020 in February 2021 with great urgency, without even taking cognisance of the serious adverse outcomes as documented in this report. A complete ban on slaughter of bulls and bullocks in addition to cows, while limiting slaughter of male and female buffaloes below the age of 13 years, has in effect, brought the entire industry dependent on this trade, to its knees. And that too at a time when the Covid pandemic and unplanned lockdowns have impacted many sectors and industries adversely. Instead of mitigating the devastating consequences, the BJP government in Karnataka has almost timed the Act to further decimate the Muslim, OBC and Dalit community which are largely dependent on the livestock sector in one way or the other.

By opening the door for the search and seize operations merely on suspicion, and extending these powers to transport vehicles carrying cattle, the government would not be oblivious to how this leads to a spate of cattle vigilantism and targeting, primarily of Muslim traders and transporters. That those affected have no recourse to judicial oversight means that the entire chain before procurement by the traders, i.e. the farmers and the chain after purchase i.e. the butchers, slaughterhouses, hide and skin curing workers, street vendors etc. faces looming economic distress and this has come up repeatedly in the report.

The economic chain from farmer to final products of cattle slaughter have been rendered criminal at multiple points and affects everyone along the chain. Farmers sell unproductive cattle based on their years of understanding. They also sell based on their financial needs, making livestock a 'bank on hooves' as the Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying (20-21) has recognised. The income to the state from Karnataka’s livestock and milk sector is too large for the Government to completely ignore, as it has done, in passing this Act. In fact, landless and marginal farmers are the most likely to be affected in terms of their income from animal husbandry. Thriving cattle markets in the state which were the hub of economic activity have seen markedly reduced footfall which has impacted both buyer and seller. Farmers have been vocal about how this is leading them to destitution and despair.

The provisions introduced by the 2020 Act will not only irreversibly destroy the meat industry in the state but also accelerate the decline in population of indigenous cattle. This decline has been observed in other states and in fact is the complete opposite of what the government claims will be achieved by this Act. The claim that cattle slaughter will reduce the indigenous cattle population and lead to farmer suicides is not borne out by facts and experiences of farmers themselves.

In fact in states which do not have rigorous cattle slaughter bans, the indigenous cattle have thrived. Not only that, criminalizing a normal, essential activity is what will lead it to go
underground encouraging the black economy. So in essence the law itself will lead to a rise in illegal activities. The groups affected by the ban have categorically said that they respect the Hindu sentiments of the cow, but bringing a blanket ban to cover ox, bulls and buffaloes shows that targeting minorities and Dalits seem to be the larger hidden agenda.

Those from the Muslim community who have been adversely affected by the Act see this as nothing more than another concerted attempt by a fascist government to break this community economically. When one looks at the rationale offered by the Government in support of the Act, one can see that none of them hold up to scientific scrutiny and in fact prove what the Muslim community has been articulating – that this is an Act that is essentially anti-Muslim in intent and implementation. Karnataka has already had several such incidents of communal violence and instead of making all efforts to protect the vulnerable citizens, the government has instead brought a law that further victimizes the same communities and makes them economically very vulnerable while enabling lynch mobs and self-appointed vigilante groups. This does not create faith in the government.

The dalit community, in the historical context of caste based occupation and oppression, has worked for generations with cattle meat, hides and many of its body parts. Instead of investing in infrastructure and machinery to modernise this trade so that the Dalit community can be economically uplifted, it is a form of caste discrimination that even existing sustenance livelihoods are being taken away.

Beef also forms an important food for the Dalit and Muslim community. The government has done nothing to make any other animal source food more affordable. In fact, the cost of even milk, and other meats is likely to go up, and this has also been observed during the lockdown. The nutritional indicators of Karnataka are alarming and expected to worsen as a direct consequence of the post Covid-19/lockdown economic downturn. It is also a fact that most of the social security and nutrition-support schemes have stopped functioning or have been completely inadequate in their functioning. At this time, bringing in a cattle slaughter ban shows how little the nutrition of people of the state matters to the Government. That buffalo meat is not preferred in Karnataka but other cattle meat seems to have not been of any consequence in creating this Act. In that, the Act is totally discriminatory against the beef eating communities in Karnataka.

At a time when nutritional indicators are expected to plummet following the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown, it would seem that the government would do all it can to bolster the economy and address the malnutrition staring at us in the face. To further take away livelihoods and an important source of nutrition seems to be neither rational nor ethical. The law has led to adverse physical, social and psychological consequences for farmers, transporters, slaughterhouse workers, tannery workers, loaders/unloaders, cleaners, sanitation workers,
butchers, small and large eateries, street vendors as well as a whole gamut of activities associated with these.

The Government which should be of the people and for the people should take cognizance of the enormous damage to livelihoods, nutrition and mental health that this poorly thought out Act has caused and revoke the Act in its current form. Further it should be ensured that no person or community involved in the cattle business will be harassed, threatened or abused for their occupational, cultural or nutritional choices. Those citizens of Karnataka who have been devastated by this Act should be compensated at the earliest in the interest of justice and fairness. It should be the violence in the cattle vigilantism that should be criminalized, not people’s livelihoods and food choices.
References


# Appendix

## Table A.1: Sources of Income for Agricultural Households in Karnataka, 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Land Size (ha)</th>
<th>Average Monthly Income of Agricultural Households (Rs)</th>
<th>Wage/Salary</th>
<th>Cultivation</th>
<th>Animal Production</th>
<th>Non-farm</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;0.01</td>
<td></td>
<td>8419 (61.63%)</td>
<td>250 (1.83%)</td>
<td>2764 (20.23%)</td>
<td>2053 (15.03)</td>
<td>13661 (100%)</td>
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<td>5077 (73.40%)</td>
<td>794 (11.48%)</td>
<td>241 (3.48%)</td>
<td>457 (6.61)</td>
<td>6917 (100%)</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>3887 (51.04%)</td>
<td>2873 (37.72%)</td>
<td>654 (8.59%)</td>
<td>180 (2.36)</td>
<td>7616 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.01-2.00</td>
<td></td>
<td>5033 (41.80%)</td>
<td>6475 (53.77%)</td>
<td>410 (3.40%)</td>
<td>120 (1.00)</td>
<td>12042 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.01-4.00</td>
<td></td>
<td>3774 (23.49%)</td>
<td>10744 (66.86%)</td>
<td>1220 (7.59%)</td>
<td>326 (2.03)</td>
<td>16069 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.01-10.00</td>
<td></td>
<td>7328 (23.49%)</td>
<td>12144 (59.04%)</td>
<td>203 (0.99%)</td>
<td>412 (2.00)</td>
<td>20568 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;10.00</td>
<td></td>
<td>4039 (6.61%)</td>
<td>51816 (84.84%)</td>
<td>5220 (8.5%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
<td>61075 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALL</td>
<td></td>
<td>4576 (40.88%)</td>
<td>5602 (50.04%)</td>
<td>649 (5.8%)</td>
<td>264 (2.36)</td>
<td>11195 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source:* NSS Report No. 587: Situation Assessment of Agricultural Households and Land and Livestock Holdings of Households in Rural India, 2019, Table 23A, pg A-901

## Table A.2: Percentage Increase in Income from Various Sources in 2018-19 over 2012-13

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage Increase in Income from Various Sources in 2018-19 over 2012-13</th>
<th>Wage/Salary</th>
<th>Cultivation</th>
<th>Animal Production</th>
<th>Non-farm</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Karnataka</td>
<td>70.93</td>
<td>13.63</td>
<td>8.16</td>
<td>-57.76</td>
<td>26.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>96.18</td>
<td>23.27</td>
<td>107.34</td>
<td>25.19</td>
<td>59.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

65
### Table A.3: Livestock Population in Karnataka over various Livestock Censuses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male (Crossbreed)</td>
<td>148435</td>
<td>154545</td>
<td>139171</td>
<td>192935</td>
<td>205182</td>
<td>125646</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male (Indigenous)</td>
<td>6155896</td>
<td>4511259</td>
<td>3676688</td>
<td>3763248</td>
<td>2771874</td>
<td>1751771</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male (Total)</td>
<td>6304331</td>
<td>4665804</td>
<td>3815859</td>
<td>3956183</td>
<td>2977056</td>
<td>1877417</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female (Crossbreed)</td>
<td>478242</td>
<td>1137963</td>
<td>1463300</td>
<td>2000107</td>
<td>2707335</td>
<td>3782516</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female (Indigenous)</td>
<td>6392141</td>
<td>5027367</td>
<td>4259808</td>
<td>4546230</td>
<td>3110131</td>
<td>2822468</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female (Total)</td>
<td>6870383</td>
<td>6165330</td>
<td>5723108</td>
<td>6546337</td>
<td>6539428</td>
<td>6591587</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Cattle</td>
<td>13174714</td>
<td>10831134</td>
<td>9538967</td>
<td>10502520</td>
<td>9516484</td>
<td>8469004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buffalo (Male)</td>
<td>739955</td>
<td>631578</td>
<td>464213</td>
<td>498332</td>
<td>360374</td>
<td>162092</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buffalo (Female)</td>
<td>3510947</td>
<td>3753606</td>
<td>3526720</td>
<td>3828648</td>
<td>3110131</td>
<td>2822468</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buffalo (Total)</td>
<td>4250902</td>
<td>4385184</td>
<td>3990933</td>
<td>4326980</td>
<td>3470505</td>
<td>2984560</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Bovine</td>
<td>17425616</td>
<td>15216318</td>
<td>13529930</td>
<td>14829500</td>
<td>12986989</td>
<td>11453564</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Livestock Census (various years)

### Table A.4: Comparison of Karnataka with No Ban States (West Bengal and Assam)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Karnataka</th>
<th>West Bengal</th>
<th>Assam</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Change in Cattle Population (2012-2019) (%)</td>
<td>-11.01</td>
<td>15.52</td>
<td>5.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in Male Cattle Population (1997-2019) (%)</td>
<td>-59.76</td>
<td>-48.01</td>
<td>-15.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in Female Cattle Population (1997-2019) (%)</td>
<td>6.91</td>
<td>50.96</td>
<td>79.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in Female Cattle Population (2012-2019) (%)</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>33.69</td>
<td>27.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex Ratio (M:F) (2019)</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Aged Cattle as %age of Total Male Cattle Population (2019)</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>3.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Aged Cattle as %age of Total Female Cattle Population (2019)</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>1.58</td>
<td>2.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex Ratio for Young Calves (2019)</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Livestock Census Data as suggested by Dr. Abdul Samad

Key questions
1. What was your average income before lockdown? After lockdown?
2. What was your average income before the cattle slaughter ban? After the ban?
3. Do you know what are the important clauses in the cattle slaughter ban in Karnataka?
4. What has been the impact of the ban on you personally? What has been the impact of the ban on other people you know?
5. Do you consume beef?
6. Do you know what are the punishments in place in the Law?
7. Has this cattle slaughter ban affected your mental health? Describe.
8. Have you experienced any threats or harassment or abuse from cow vigilante groups? Describe.
9. Are you aware of anyone in Karnataka who has experienced threats or harassment or abuse from cow vigilante groups? Describe.
10. Are you aware of anyone in any other State who has experienced threats or harassment or abuse from cattle vigilante groups? Describe.
11. Do you feel that this ban puts your life in danger? Describe.
12. How has this ban affected your ability to buy or sell cattle and/or cattle-based products? (live animals (cow, bull, bullock, young calves), meat, milk, leather, manure, urine etc.)
13. How has this ban affected your ability to buy or sell buffalo and/or buffalo-based products? (live animals (female, male, young calves), meat, milk, leather, manure, urine etc.).
14. What are your suggestions to improve the livelihood of people affected by the cattle slaughter ban?
15. What are your suggestions to protect people from being attacked/assaulted after the cattle slaughter ban?
16. What do you think are the long-term positive effects of the ban?
17. What are your average expenses for the kind of work you do? Has this changed after the cattle slaughter ban?
18. Do you rear buffalo or cow? Has the ban made any difference to this?
19. Has the number of people buying your product changed? How?
20. Is there more fear in buying or selling your product? Explain.
21. Do you feel that this ban targets certain communities? Explain.
22. Can you name some of the groups/individuals whose business is associated with yours?

Specific to farmers (in addition to the above)
1. What did you do with your non-productive female cow / male bullock/ young male calf, before the new slaughter ban?
2. How has this ban affected this?
3. What do you do now with the non-productive animals?
4. Has this ban affected your income? How?
5. Has this ban affected the market prices of cows/bulls/bullocks/buffaloes? If so, how?
6. The government said it will create a market for cow urine and cow dung. Has this happened? What is your opinion on this?
7. Are there gaushalas where you can go and leave your animal? Why do you or don’t you go and leave your animal at the Gaushala?
8. As a farmer, what do you think should be done about the ban?