

Skanda Vale: Expert Advice

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1 The basis on which this report has been prepared

1.1 My instructions

This report has been prepared in response to instructions from Ms. Mona Fawaz of the Treasury Solicitors to prepare report on the issues thrown up by the discovery that a bullock named Shambo owned by the Community of the Many Names of God, Skanda Vale, Carmarthenshire, has tested positive for bovine tuberculosis.

1.2 My academic and professional standing

I hold an MA in Social Anthropology from the University of Cambridge, and a PhD in Sociology from the University of Delhi, and I am also a Fellow of the Royal Anthropological Institute. During the course of my professional career I have held posts at the Universities of Bristol, Leeds and then in Manchester, and where from 1989 to 2003 I held the post of Senior Lecturer in Applied South Asian Studies in the department of Religions and Theology. My current academic post is as Director of the Centre for Applied South Asian Studies in the University of Manchester.

2 The issues at stake

2.1 The animal

Shambo the bullock is one of 55 bovines held on the Skanda Vale estate along with a wide range of other animals including goats, deer, guanaco and an elephant. On 24 April 2007 Shambo tested positive for bovine tuberculosis. Prior to being tested the bullock was kept in a cowshed with 6 other bovines. Once the test result was known, the bullock was isolated, and since been housed separately.

2.2 Recommendation by the relevant authorities

Pursuant to Section 32 of the Animal Health Act 1981 (the Act), as applied by section 4 of the Tuberculosis (Wales) Order 2006, a notice of intention to slaughter has been served on the Community of the Many Names of God following the test which showed that the animal in question was a positive TB reactor.

2.3 The response of the Community of the Many Names of God

The Community has argued on religious grounds that the order should not be implemented. More specifically they insist that:

As Hindus following the tradition of Sanathana Dharma, the Community worships God in his Universality encompassing all of life. They believe that all life is sacred and that the life of animals, like the life of humans, is a manifestation of God and part of the nature of God. The cow and bull have a very sacred part in Hindu life. They regard it as their sacred duty to care for and treat any sick living creature and could no more allow the slaughter of an animal cared for in their Community than they could the killing of a human being.

Their religious duty to respect of all living things is a form of religious observance, which is protected by Article 9 ECHR.

2.4 The opinion sought

I am instructed that

We are seeking expert opinion in connection with the question of whether:

- a) the an order by the Welsh Assembly to stay an order for slaughter of the animal might be justified in this case;
- b) entry on to the premises described as a shrine or temple for the purposes of removal of an animal with a view to slaughter, would conflict with recognised established beliefs.

3 The Community of the Many Names of God

3.1 About the Community¹

The Community of the Many Names of God was founded on the worship of God in his Universality in accordance with the spiritual teachings of Lord Krishna as in the Bhagavad-Gita. It was established as a monastic centre in Wales in 1973, although the Temple had been founded 20 years previously in London. The present 115 acre site was originally three adjacent farms and a small block of woodland which were separately purchased and amalgamated by the Community as the grounds of Skanda Vale Monastery.

Its first Temple dedicated to Lord Subramanian was registered as a place of public worship in 1975. The Community became a Registered Charity in 1980 (No. 511166) and is administered by a Board of Trustees whose Chairman is Guru Sri Subramanian, the Community's founder and spiritual director. The Community consists of a nucleus of both monks and nuns who take Franciscan vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, as well as some resident lay members. In addition, the Community provides spiritual refreshment to a large number of devotees living both in Britain and abroad. Recognizing the presence of God in all of creation, Skanda Vale is a sanctuary for all of life. The members of the Community

¹ The material in this section has been downloaded from the Community's website

in fulfillment of their spiritual practice look after a wide variety of birds and animals, many of whom have been saved from slaughter, including some unusual species.

3.2 Temples

Skanda Vale comprises three separate Temples, one dedicated to Lord Subramanian (Lord Murugan), one dedicated to Maha Shakti, the Mother aspect of God and one dedicated to Lord Ranganatha (Lord Vishnu), the Preserver in all his aspects. Fundamental to Skanda Vale is the worship of God in His universality, without recognition of any differences based on religion, culture or ethnic origin. God is one, though His names are many. Accordingly, the major religious faiths are represented in the three Temples, each depicting a different facet of the totality of God's association with humanity and all life.

3.3 Origins

The Community of the Many Names of God, Skanda Vale Temple can be traced back to the Kataragama and Badulla Temples in Sri Lanka. The Kataragama Temple was built on the instruction of the Lord himself and for many centuries up to the present day the devotions and festivals in the Temple have been conducted by the same family of priests given authority by the Lord to uphold the tradition of worship for perpetuity. Guru Sri Subramanian, having been given his mandate directly from the Divine, sought and received blessings and divine authority from these ancient places of worship. Guruji then set out to fulfill his mandate by establishing Dharma in the west, unifying faiths and nationalities in the worship of God without involvement in commercialism. He has developed his spiritual work relying totally on the grace of God to sustain him.

3.4 Guru Sri Subramanian

In 1952 Guru left Sri Lanka for a tour of the Middle East and Europe, arriving in England in 1953 where he settled in London. For the next ten years he taught meditation as a means of promoting greater understanding between religions. In 1970 Guru combined his own spiritual background and experience with that of Rev. James Keeler, Moderator of the Presbyterian Free Church of Scotland, and of Dr. Mulalasekera, Sri Lankan High Commissioner to the Court of St. James and devout exponent of Buddhism, to found the Community of the Many Names of God. Shortly afterwards in 1973 a remote hill farm in Wales was purchased and renamed Skanda Vale, offering a tranquil location for the Temple and providing the space for the Community to grow. In 1978, an adjacent farm was purchased increasing the area of Skanda Vale to 100 acres. The farm house became the residence of Guru and as founder and

spiritual head of the Community, in the tradition of Sanathana Dharma, he established a Temple in his home welcoming ever increasing numbers of pilgrims to worship alongside him.

3.5 Guru Subramanian and the community he has inspired

Once located in the South Asian religious context from which he emerged, Guru Subramanian is a charismatic mystical teacher of a straightforwardly recognizable kind. Although a product of local developments in Sri Lanka, and of the famous shrine of Kataragama in particular, he fits precisely into the category of a *panthic* teacher which I discuss in considerable detail in my introductory chapter entitled "*Panth, Kismet, Dharm te Qaum: Four dimensions in Punjabi Religion*", which was published in a book entitled *Punjabi Identity in a Global Context*, edited by Pritam Singh and Shinder Thandi, and published by Oxford University Press in Delhi in 2000.

The following citations from that chapter will serve to indicate my usage:

The term *panth* is a familiar term in vernacular Punjabi, where it is used to identify those who follow a particular spiritual teacher although it would be easy enough to find an English equivalent for the concept of *panth*, I have deliberately avoided doing so. My preference is not to translate, but instead to continue to utilise the vernacular term as an analytical category in its own right. This does not obviate the need for formal definition, however, and with this in mind I shall use the term *panth* to refer to *a body of people drawn together by their commitment to the teachings of a specific spiritual master, be he living or (more usually) dead...*

the Punjabi religious scene includes a large number of spiritual masters who have gained a *panthic* following, and although each such master teaches in his own distinctive way, virtually all nevertheless share a similar goal: to find some means of penetrating the self-produced veils of ignorance and insensitivity which obstruct our awareness of the ultimate congruence between our individual microcosmic selves and the universal macrocosm...

Hence the more comprehensively one penetrates its illusory veils, and the more richly one appreciates the Truth which it conceals, the more insignificant such differences become. From this perspective all Punjab's many *panths* emerge as variations on a theme, offering alternative routes to the same ineffable goal. Devotees of the Truth can therefore quite legitimately express themselves in either Muslim, or in Sikh, or in Hindu terms (or in a synthesis of all three) without feeling any sense of contradiction. (pages 15 – 18)

So far as I can see the founder and current leader of the Community of the Many Names of God, Guru Subramanian, is a *panthic* figure in precisely this sense. Not only does he operate within the context of a theological outlook which takes precisely such a universalistic, cross-religious outlook with respect to the path(s) along which the Truth can most usefully be pursued, but so does the Kataragama shrine in Sri Lanka from which he gained his initial

spiritual inspiration. Likewise the keeping of animals, together with the respect for, and indeed integration with, natural processes which Guru Subramanian he recommends to his followers are once again wholly in keeping with the *tantric/panthic* perspective outlined above. Last but not least the community's decision to provide spiritually inspired medical facilities to all comers is wholly in keeping with the *kismet* initiatives which *panthic* movements so often generate, just as I go on to discuss in my chapter on religious developments in the Punjab.

3.6 What religion?

A common feature of such Panthic movements is that that they cut across the *dharmic* categories to which Western discourse commonly describe as religions. Hence in historical terms the Kataragama shrine has long been as much Hindu as Buddhist, and can seamlessly be described as either. I also note that the Community's website suggests that the local initiative in the UK had precisely such cross-religious origins:

In 1970 Guru combined his own spiritual background and experience with that of Rev. James Keeler, Moderator of the Presbyterian Free Church of Scotland, and of Dr. Mulalasekera, Sri Lankan High Commissioner to the Court of St. James and devout exponent of Buddhism, to found the Community of the Many Names of God.

Likewise the website suggests that current practices of community members are inspired by the teachings of Saint Francis of Assisi, Lord Krishna, and of Gautama the Buddha. Meanwhile the three formal temples maintained by the community focus on Murugan (a manifestation of Lord Shiva), Shakti (Lord Shiva's female counterpart) and Ranganatha (Lord Vishnu in his source-of-all-existence format).

3.7 Placing Skanda Vale in context

In my view the best way of identifying the precise character of the commitment of members of this community, as well as the devotees who come far and wide to seek spiritual enlightenment, inspiration and support from its facilities is that enshrined its title: *The Many Names of God*.

To be sure many of the concrete manifestations of its members' efforts to gain spiritual insight are framed within aspects of Hindu, and above all Tamil Hindu, conventions. However to my mind to describe them in an unqualified manner as 'Hindu' is in my view most misleading. The Hindu tradition is not a single homogeneous entity. Instead it is much better understood as a tradition of very long standing, and which contains a large number of distinctive strands, by no means all of which are mutually compatible. Whilst a significant

number of those strands are manifest in the beliefs and practices which are currently deployed in Skanda vale, many more are not.

Hence if a precise identification of the character of the activities currently pursued by members of the Skanda community is required, then in terms of my own preferred analytical vocabulary, The Community of The Many Names of God is a typical example of *panthic* movement led by a mystically inspired charismatic teacher, in this case Guru Subramanian. Moreover so far as I can his followers, in interpreting their Guru's inspiration, have drawn largely – although by no means exclusively – on the symbolic resources of the Sri Lankan Tamil Hindu Agamic/Tantric tradition.

4 An analysis of the arguments advanced by the Community

4.1 The community's arguments

In seeking to support their application that the bullock Shambo should be excluded from the normal slaughter requirements, the Community have advanced a number of specific arguments. They include:

- i. As Hindus following the tradition of Sanathana Dharma, the Community worships God in his Universality encompassing all of life.
- ii. They believe that all life is sacred and that the life of animals, like the life of humans, is a manifestation of God and part of the nature of God.
- iii. The cow and bull have a very sacred part in Hindu life. They regard it as their sacred duty to care for and treat any sick living creature and could no more allow the slaughter of an animal cared for in their Community than they could the killing of a human being.
- iv. The bullock has now been housed in temple, into which it would be sacrilegious for outsiders to intrude in pursuit of his slaughter
- v. The religious duty to respect of all living things is a form of religious observance, which is protected by Article 9 ECHR.

4.2 My responses to each of the issues raised

- i. *As Hindus following the tradition of Sanathana Dharma, the Community worships God in his Universality encompassing all of life.*
There can be little doubt that this is a core feature of Guru Subramanian's teachings, as it is virtually all other *Panthic* teachers in South Asian contexts
- ii. *They believe that all life is sacred and that the life of animals, like the life of humans, is a manifestation of God and part of the nature of God.*
'Sacred' is a tricky word, especially when, as in this context, its meaning has been left undefined. In my view a fuller exegesis of the final clause in this statement would produce an outcome closely congruent with a statement which appears in

my own analysis which I cited earlier, namely: an awareness of the ultimate congruence between our individual microcosmic selves and the universal macrocosm.

All living things – including cattle – are part of that macrocosm, it follows, in accordance with the cosmological vision employed by members of this group, that they, like all living things are *ipso facto* ‘sacred’. But as theologians in the Hindu tradition have always recognised, since we humans are no less part of that macrocosm than any other form of being, it follows that in the process of living we not only interact with, but also *consume* parts of that macrocosm: hence living *of necessity* entails killing.

Different sub-traditions have come up with all sorts of solutions to that conundrum.

At one extreme the strictest Jains wear masks to cover their noses to prevent themselves from breathing in microscopic insects, sweep the ground before them to avoid stepping on such beings, and in the ideal extreme starve themselves to death as a means, amongst other things, of opting out of the killing process.

At the other end of the spectrum lies the deity Kali, otherwise known as Shakti, who herself represents the necessary inter-connectedness of life and death. Hence in many parts of South Asia devotees of Shakti offer animals in blood-sacrifice as they perform *puja* before her. In other words the very sacredness of animals in the sense understood here can make them suitable objects for sacrifice.

- iii. *The cow and bull have a very sacred part in Hindu life. They regard it as their sacred duty to care for and treat any sick living creature and could no more allow the slaughter of an animal cared for in their Community than they could the killing of a human being.*

The contents of this paragraph are in no sense a *sequitur* of the two paragraphs which precede it.

To be sure Hindus regard the cow as one of the most symbolically significant components of the animal world, on the grounds that as producers of milk cows are ‘mothers of the universe’. High-caste Hindus therefore avoid eating beef, and dead cows are regarded as highly impure.

Nevertheless virtually all wear leather shoes without qualm. Moreover whilst high caste Hindu farmers in India are indeed averse to slaughtering unwanted cows and bullocks, preferring instead simply to turn them loose, most also manage conveniently to close their eyes the fact that many are slaughtered by beef-eating groups such as low-caste Hindus and Muslims.

- iv. *The bullock has now been housed in temple, into which it would be sacrilegious for outsiders to intrude in pursuit of his slaughter*

Several points arise here, including

- The animal in question is a bullock rather than a cow
- There is no sign that the animal was given special attention as an object of worship prior to the discovery that it reacted positively in a TB screening test
- So far as I can see from pictures on the website, the bullock has simply been secluded from other bovines in a separate cowshed.

- The website contains details of three ‘temples’ – which in my view can more accurately be identified as three separate *mundirs* in which *murtis* of Murgan, Maha Shakti and Ranganatha receive daily worship in the form of *puja*
 - There is no sign that Shambo is located in such a *mundir*, or that it – or any of the other animals kept at Skanda Vale – are the object of *puja* in this sense
 - Hence if by ‘a temple’ the petitioners mean ‘a *mundir*’, and the phenomenon of a *mundir* is to be understood in objective rather than in subjective terms, Shambo is not being treated as a *murti*, nor is he housed in a *mundir*, but merely a cattle shed.
- v. *The religious duty to respect of all living things is a form of religious observance, which is protected by Article 9 ECHR.*

To assert, as do the petitioners, that they have a duty to respect of all living things as part and parcel of religious observances is one thing: but to extend that argument to suggest that they consequently have a religious duty, and hence rights under Article 9 ECHR a prevent a specific living thing of their choice from being slaughtered is in my opinion quite another.

There can be little doubt that the receipt of a directive ordering that an animal which they have chosen to protect within their menagerie should be slaughtered – even on grounds of public health – has caused many members of the community great distress. However in broad terms the experience of such distress is unexceptional. There are good reasons to suppose that the owners of many other animals who have found their animals subject to the prospect of slaughter on similar grounds will have been equally distressed, even if their distress did not have such an explicit religious component.

So far as I can see the only additional issue in this context is whether that additional dimension of distress is of sufficient weight to require the authorities to overturn their established procedures, given the provisions of Article 9 ECHR.

5 The legal issues

5.1 Article 9 ECHR

Article 9 reads as follows:

- i. Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and observance.

- ii. Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs shall be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

Although I am not a lawyer, the provisions of Article 9 would appear to give a straightforward answer to the issues at hand in this case. To the extent that the provisions of section 2 qualify the rights set out in Section 1, and do so quite explicitly with respect to situations in which rights of religious freedom might need to be limited in the interests of public safety and/or health, it seems to me that the objectors do not have a leg to stand on – always presuming that the policy of slaughtering all animals which test positive is indeed proportionate to the risk at hand.

In articulating their case under Article 9, the representatives of the community see to reinforce their case by suggesting that building in which Shambo is kept is a *mundir*, or in other words a place of worship. For the reasons set out in 4.2.iv above, I am not greatly impressed by that argument – although to be fair to the theological principles around which the Community of the Many Names of God is constructed, I would like to enter an important caveat at this point.

In the context of a theological perspective which begins from the position that the transcendent source of all existence is beyond the capacity of the human mind to comprehend, such that all the names through which humans have sought to comprehend that Source are of necessity insufficient representations of the Truth, and which in consequence also takes the position that all created existence is but a series of immanent manifestations of that transcendent Truth, it follows that every aspect of the way in which the Truth manifests itself is worthy of worship. If so, it follows that everything in the entire Universe is in principle a *mundir*. If I am right in thinking that this is indeed the position adopted by the Community of the Many Names of God, Shambo in his cowshed, and indeed every living thing in the entire Universe is – or at is at least in principle – worthy of designation as a *mandir*.

However even if I am a right in thinking that a cosmological vision of this kind lies at the heart of their concerns, at a purely legal level Section ii. of Article 9 would appear to trump the force of their theological concerns.

6 The questions to which those instructing me have sought answers

6.1 Some comments on the basis on which the questions posed have been formulated

Those instructing me have sought answers to a number of specific questions, which I will do my best to answer. However before doing so I would like to take the opportunity to comment on the way in which the questions have been formulated, and indeed on the way in which the representatives of the Community of the Many Names of God have argued their case.

Many of the questions posed are formulated around an implicit assumption that 'the Hindu religion' and/or 'Hinduism' is grounded in a single coherent set of agreed upon and textually grounded beliefs and practices. Although assumptions of this kind are commonplace, they are in fact as mistaken as they are misleading. From a historical perspective the term 'Hindu' is best understood as a geographical rather than a theological indicator: it is the Persian label for the religious practices of the population resident on the far side of the river Indus. To be sure from a historical perspective Hindus identified in that way have long shared a common cosmological outlook, with respect to which the Community of the Many Names of God appears to sit firmly in the mainstream. However the sources from which the Hindu tradition has emerged are many. Not only do they include *astika* (Vedic) and *nastika* (explicitly non-Vedic) and all manner of popular pre-Aryan strands, but when it comes to actual *practice*, the ways in which these various strands have actually been interpreted are legion.

Whilst I will consequently seek to provide answers to each of the specific questions posed as best I can, in the light of my comments above it should be emphasised that there is no such thing as a centralised Hindu 'church', and no single authorised Hindu creed or code of religious practice; the Hindu tradition is, and always had been deeply plural. Indeed this prospect is directly anticipated in paragraph 16 of my letter of instruction, which notes "We understand that there may not always be one clear attitude within mainstream Hindu doctrine". I could not agree more.

6.2 Responses to the first list of questions

a) Are the religious beliefs and duties as set out above a part of the Hindu religion?

The short answer is yes – in the sense that they fall well within the *range* of beliefs and duties which followers of many strands of the Hindu tradition regard as being incumbent upon them.

b) *Whilst the Hindu religion may require its followers to refrain from killing living creatures, does it require them to refuse to hand over an animal to prevent the slaughter of that animal by others in circumstances such as the present (where an animal tested positive for a particular infectious disease)?*

The initial premise of this premise requires an important caveat: it should read ‘to refrain *as much as possible* from killing living creatures’. Eating – and indeed the very process of breathing – necessarily involves the destruction of living things.

As to the second part of the question, the characteristic Hindu response in this sphere has been to avoid doing the killing oneself. The vast majority of Hindus have no compunction about wearing leather shoes. They ask no questions about where the leather comes from. Similarly the characteristic response of Hindu farmers to bovines which have ceased to be productive is to turn them loose. If others kill and eat such animals – as indeed they do – their former owners are not responsible for their fate.

c) *What is the religious rationale and significance (if any) for housing the bullock in a building described as a temple or shrine (rather than a building or unit with no religious significance, as is the case for the remainder of the livestock on the Community grounds)?*

In the light of an awareness that this was the likely fate of cows which had ceased to lactate, the construction of *goshala* (hostels for cows) became an increasingly popular charitable activity from the late nineteenth century onwards. However these initiatives only had the most marginal impact on the scale of India’s feral bovine population, or on the production of leather. So far as I can see the endowment of *goshala* has become much less popular in recent years – although some can indeed still be found in operation.

However these *goshala* were designated specifically for *cows*. Except when kept for breeding purposes or as draft animals, bulls and bullocks are remarkable for their paucity in India. Hindus for the most part avoid asking questions about just what happened to them.

Shambo is clearly not a cow, but a bullock. I can see little sign (at least from the Community’s webcam) that he is housed in anything like a *goshala*, not least because of the apparent absence of *murti* of Lord Krishna, the divine cow-herd.

d) *Does a building described as a temple or shrine for housing an animal have any generally recognised or accepted religious status for Hindus?*

Yes: a *goshala* is precisely such a site.

e) *How would the entry into that shrine or temple for the purposes of removing the animal for slaughter elsewhere, without the consent of the Community, be regarded within Hindu doctrine?*

I am not sure whether there is any answer to this question in doctrinal terms, other than that the purpose of the removal in this case would be to promote the welfare of other cattle – and badgers and human beings – by removing a potential source of virulent infection. If, however, Shambo is housed in a *goshala* – or at least is regarded as being so housed by the protestors, who I note do not use the term themselves – there are good reasons to suppose that some members of the community might be most disturbed by the forcible removal of the animal in question.

However so far as I can see there is one outcome which would be wholly compatible with *de facto* Hindu practice: namely if the animal to be released from its cowshed – and for the authorities just happening to be present to take custody of it when that occurred

f) *Would the situation be different if the bullock were not housed in a temple?*

The grounds on which representatives of the Community of the Many Names of God are seeking to resist the authority’s instructions would be rendered yet weaker still.

g) *Is it relevant that the bovine at issue here is a bullock, rather than a cow or bull? Our understanding is that the bullock was born and has always lived on the site, and that he was castrated whilst under the ownership and care of the Community. Is castration of bulls consistent with Hindu doctrine?*

The Community’s case would undoubtedly have rather more substance if the animal in question was a cow, and if there was any indication that a *goshala* was in existence prior to the discovery that Shambo had tested positively for TB.

h) *What is the practice or law in countries where Hinduism is the predominant religion in relation to sick bovines and other animals? Are they slaughtered?*

The issue of *cow*-slaughter became increasingly contentious following the imposition of the British Raj, since India’s new rulers were known to have a taste for beef. Hence demands to ban the slaughter of cows provided a convenient basis on which Indian nationalists could set about challenging the moral legitimacy of British rule; subsequently

it also became a convenient way of whipping up hostility towards members of India's substantial Muslim population.

Pious Hindus undoubtedly have a great deal respect for *go-Mata* – mother cow – whom they regard as one of the many forms of God. They dislike seeing cows treated with disrespect, most particularly before their very eyes; meanwhile they also carefully avert their eyes from any consideration of where the leather in the shoes and sandals comes from. Hence whilst cow-protection remains a popular political slogan in most parts of India, the country also supports a thriving leather industry.

6.3 *My response to the second list of questions*

- a. *Would the method/place of slaughter of the bullock affect the perception of it within the Hindu religion? For instance, would it be more acceptable to remove the bullock from its current location to, say: (i) elsewhere on the farm; or (ii) away from the farm to a slaughter house? Might it be more acceptable to slaughter the bullock via an injection, rather than a gun shot?*

When animals (typically goats and sheep) are slaughtered for food in Hindu context it is invariably by beheading, *jatka*. Non-vegetarian Hindus are careful distinguish *jatka* meat from that which has is the outcome of Muslim methods of slaughter, in which the jugular vein is cut to ensure that blood drains out of the carcass to produce meat which is *halal*. I do not know whether *jatka* facilities are available in the UK, but I would imagine that a gunshot to the head would be the least-worst option. I would also imagine that out of-sight slaughter and disposal would also be the least bad options.

- b. *Would a post mortem investigation be against normal Hindu religious practice in regards to animals? Post mortem investigations are routine in TB reactors.*

I am not a specialist in veterinary matters, and I would imagine that until very recently veterinary post-mortems were virtually unknown in India: hence prior to recent times the issue would never have arisen. However it has long been a matter of normal social practice for flesh destined for human consumption to be to be prepared by specialist butchers – but of course on non-Vegetarian Hindus would have used the services. I can only speculate as to whether or not veterinary post-mortems are carried out in contemporary India. However as concern for public hygiene becomes steadily more widespread, I would be most surprised if the Indian

authorities have failed to have set about bringing their domestic practices into conformity with international standards.

- c. *Does the Hindu religion require any particular method of disposal of animal carcasses? On-farm burial is not permitted under relevant animal by-products-legislation. The carcasses could be incinerated without a post mortem.*

My experience suggests that upper caste Hindus prefer to avert their eyes to such issues. However given that Hindus regard cremation as the preferred means of disposal of human remains, there are good reasons for supposing that incineration would be the most appropriate means of disposal in this case.



Roger Ballard

3rd June 2007