A photograph of a woman with blonde hair, wearing a pink bucket hat, glasses, and a red shirt, smiling and looking towards a brown cow's head on the right. The background is a light-colored wall with a wooden structure visible in the upper left.

CELEBRATING COW CULTURE

At the World Cow Conference, Hare Kṛṣṇa devotees inspire others with Śrīla Prabhupāda's vision of cow protection.

by Chāyā Devī Dāsī



ANOTHER COLD, dark day as I broke the ice on the water trough to allow the cows to drink the refreshing well water. Clothed in my Carhart overalls, with vest, scarf, boots, facemask, and insulated gloves, I could last a few hours helping Caitanya Dāsa feed out hay in the barn before the pain of freezing temperatures penetrated to my skin. It had been an exceptionally cold week, with temperatures holding at freezing and below.

My husband, Balabhadra Dāsa, ISKCON's minister for cow protection and agriculture and chief cowherd on our ISCON farm in West Virginia, was traveling to various cow protection programs in India and Europe to encourage, educate, and inspire other cowherds and learn from them as well. While he was away, Caitanya Dāsa and I were caring for the cows during the winter.

Balabhadra and I incorporated ISCON, The International Society for Cow Protection, in 1990. Śrīla Prabhupāda, our spiritual master, inspired us to protect cows throughout their lives so that they could live a peaceful life away from the stun gun and the butcher's knife. By nature, we both felt a connection with animals and affection for them. But after we learned from Śrīla Prabhupāda the spiritual and material significance of cows, our feelings solidified into action.

While spreading the hay in the feed aisle with a pitchfork, I meditated on the eager faces of Gita, Jaya, and Asha, three of our beautiful cows. I also thought about the email I had just received from Balabhadra from Vrindavan, India:

At the World Cow Conference in India, the author scratches a cow's neck, and the peaceful, protected cow enjoys the gesture of friendship.

Balabhadra Dāsa



Mr. Sadashiv Montimar came from Delhi specifically to meet me. He had come one month earlier to the Kṛṣṇa-Balarāma Mandir and spoken with Devāmṛta Dāsa, the temple president, about the Vishwa Gou Sammelan [World Cow Conference], a huge cow conference that his guru and temple are sponsoring in South India. Besides doing all of the things we talk about doing, they are protecting and breeding 27 of the remaining 33 Indian breeds of cows left in India.

Mr. Montimar told me that his guru, Shree Raghaveshwara Bharathi Swamiji, the guru of Shree Ramachandrapura Math, quotes from our articles and uses my name as a reference to the quotes. He gave me a lot of literature and a personal written invitation to attend the conference. It is a nine-day conference on all aspects of cow protection. They are expecting a half million people to attend over the nine days. The conference is April 21–29 in Hosanagara. It's not an undo-

able time frame, and it would definitely be reaching out to a huge field of new people who are all into cow protection in a big way. I think it is worthwhile.

In the twenty-first century, cow protection is a challenge, requiring a counterculture mindset, and therefore difficult to practice even without freezing temperatures. Cow protection originated in India, a warm climate where the cows can pasture all year long. In such a climate, as long as there's enough grazing land, there's no need to grow hay, harvest it, and store it before feeding it to the cows.

Understanding Cow Protection

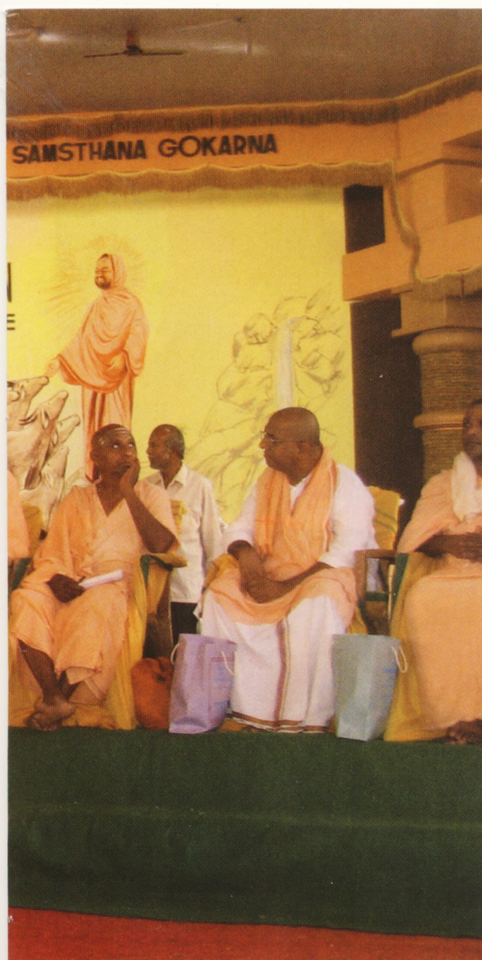
What exactly is cow protection? Hearing the term, people typically react in two ways. Some think protection is for endangered species, and since there are billions of cows, it's better to concentrate on whales

or the African elephant. Others think "cow protection" may refer to some pagan worship of animals—the "sacred cow" image.

The philosophical reason for cow protection is that all living creatures deserve protection from slaughter and other violence at the hands of humans. All animals are souls, the same as we are. They are all children of Kṛṣṇa, all dear to Him. With this view in mind, animal slaughter can be seen as a form of murder.

The cow is our mother. Vedic philosophy teaches that there are seven mothers: (1) the birth mother, (2) the wife of the spiritual master, (3) the wife of a *brāhmaṇa*, (4) the queen, (5) the cow, (6) the wet nurse, and (7) the earth. The cow is one of the seven mothers because she gives her milk to nourish us.

We should hold all mothers in a position of respect. Since we don't kill or eat our mother, we shouldn't kill or eat the cow. Likewise, the bull is our father because he can plow the earth to produce food



Chaya Devi Dasi

grains. One does not kill and eat one's father and mother—even when they are old and less economically useful.

Five thousand years ago Lord Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, appeared on earth to protect His devotees and to demonstrate His pastimes. Among those pastimes was His childhood role as a cowherd boy. The cows were very dear to Him because of their affectionate and gentle nature as well as their contributions to human society, and in return He was kind to them and protected them. We should follow His example.

Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "From the Lord's personal activities, human society should learn how to give protection specifically to the *brāhmaṇas* and cows. Then the protection of religious principles, fulfillment of the aim of life, and protection of the Vedic

Honored guests and speakers (left) listen to opening remarks at the conference. Below, organizers estimated that as many as one million people attended the nine-day event.

knowledge can be achieved. Without protection of cows, brahminical culture cannot be maintained; and without brahminical culture, the aim of life cannot be fulfilled. (*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 8.24.5 Purport)

Protecting the Bull

In contemporary practice the first principle of cow protection, surprisingly, is ox employment. The cow's main usefulness is seen as milk production, but she will not give milk unless she has a calf. Half of all calves are bulls and will never produce milk. The expense of feeding the bulls will be a deficit to the farmer unless he realizes their potential for alternative energy by employing them in activities like tilling the fields and hauling. Farmers in most countries make money by selling bulls for meat, either directly to the slaughterhouse; to the cattle industry, where they live in crowded feed lots until they are fat enough for profitable slaughter; or to the veal industry, where bull calves live a short life crammed into a tiny crate for sixteen weeks.

The cow is also sold for meat when she cannot produce the required quantity of milk. But regardless of milk production, the dung and urine of a cow or bull is valuable. Instead of slaughtering all bovines that do not produce milk, why not use their dung and urine in fertilizers, compost, medicines, pest repellents, cleaning products, and bio-gas fuel, to name a few useful and saleable items?

Śrīla Prabhupāda said, "Now, practically, in India they accept it, and it has been found by chemical examination, that cow dung contains all antiseptic properties. That is a fact. One Dr.



Govindānanda Dāsa

Goshal analyzed [it] in his laboratory . . . , and he found that . . . cow dung is full of antiseptic properties.”

The modern system of agriculture is ignorant of the alternative energy potential of the bull calf and the variety of useful bovine dung and urine products. Therefore, slaughtering becomes the only economically viable means of management. Most people, accustomed to this viewpoint and seeing no alter-

A rescued bull (below) seems to stand guard over a herd of rescued cows. At right (from top), cow urine is distilled for medicine, which is then bottled and sold at the conference.



Chaya Devi Dasi



Balabhadr Dasa



Himati Devi Dasi



Balabhadr Dasa

native, will throw up their hands and agree, even if they prefer a less violent solution. That's only because they don't have the facts. They don't know that the overall value of the ox is greater when he is used for work than when he's slaughtered for meat, and that even when not productive, a cow or ox produces useful urine and dung.

The Gou Sammelan

After much debate, we decided to attend the conference, mainly to represent Śrīla Prabhupāda in his country of origin. As his American disciples, we would give credence to the power of his teachings. We hoped to attain contacts for spreading cow protection. And we wanted

to learn more about cow care, the use of cow dung and urine for medicines, and the efficacy of these byproducts.

Late at night on April 20 we arrived at the Shree Ramachandrapura Math, founded by Śaṅkarācārya more than thirteen hundred years ago.

“Hare Rāma! Gou Mātā [Mother Cow]! Hare Rāma! Gou Mātā!” chanted a crowd of the *math's* disciples.

We replied, “Hare Kṛṣṇa! Hare Rāma!”

Then they chanted back, “Hare Kṛṣṇa! Hare Rāma! Gou Mātā!”

It was a spiritually potent beginning to an experience of a lifetime.

Shree Raghaveshwara Bharathi

Swamiji has dedicated himself to preserving the indigenous breeds of Indian cows. He has inspired not only the Sammelan but other social, cultural, educational, and environmental programs, many based on cow protection. One example is the *math's* Goubank, which gives Indian cattle to people on the condition that they will not sell them, cross-breed them, or practice artificial insemination. The bank accepts cattle when farmers find it difficult to maintain them. This helps the rural

farmer and also helps Swamiji achieve one of his objectives: to educate Indian farmers and others about the benefits of rearing and protecting Indian cows.

Throughout the nine-day conference, scientists, doctors, lawyers, farmers, activists, cow protectors, and other experts from around the world gave lectures, presenting their knowledge and understanding of cow protection. Some of the topics: scientific research and analysis related to the uses of cow urine; medicinal values of products of Indian-breed cattle; the role of indigenous cattle in organic agriculture; the relevance of bullock draught power in Indian agriculture and rural transport; and opportunities for cow-related products as an industry.

The Sammelan took place on approximately two hundred acres. On display were the twenty-seven Indian breeds the members of the *math* protect and breed for preservation. There were also exhibits of ox-powered machines and equipment; household items run on cow urine; cow urine and dung medicinal and beauty products; cow-related sculptures and paintings; and plays, music, and other forms of entertainment centered on the cow.

Our tour guide and president of the Ramachandrapura Math, M.K. Janardan, showed us reproductions of ISKCON Kṛṣṇa paintings in the exhibition hall. He said the *math's* members recognize Lord Kṛṣṇa as a cowherd boy and an example to be followed. When the Vishwa Gou Sammelan ended, Shree Raghaveshwara Bharathi Swamiji announced the

building of the world's tallest statue of Lord Kṛṣṇa in front of the *math* in appreciation of the event's success.

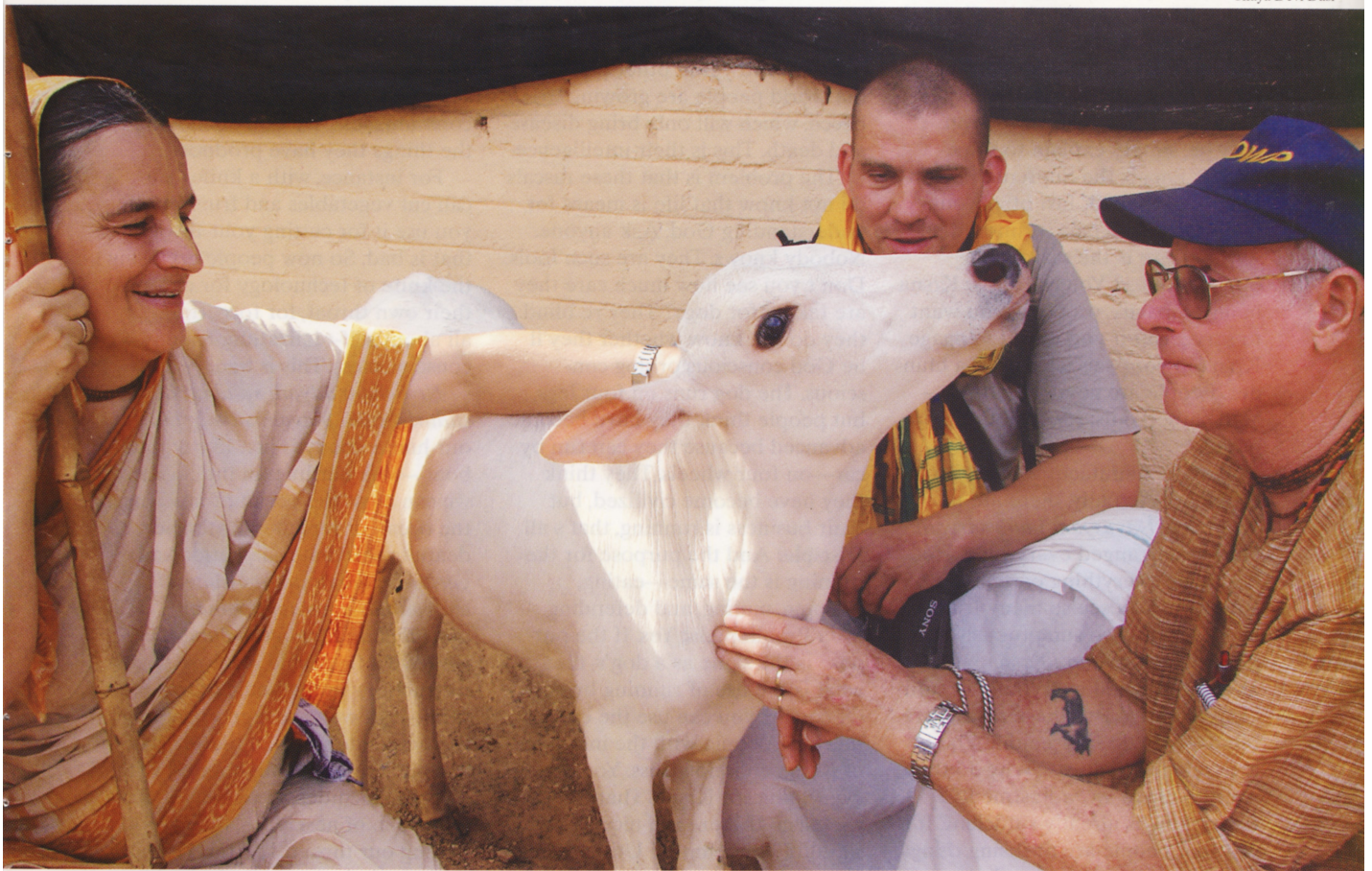
Spiritual Contribution

Balabhadra gave two lectures, one before a thousand people. He emphasized Śrīla Prabhupāda's vision of cow protection.

"Absolutely extraordinary speech," said Sunil Mansingha, chairman of one of the symposium sessions. "For the first time, a speech only about the spiritual aspect of cows. I feel so encouraged due to your enlightenment."

Mr. Mansingha is also the coordinator of the Govign Anusandhan Kendra in Nagpur, an organization that conducts scientific research on the efficacy and use of cow dung and

Chāyā Devī Dāsi



ISKCON attendees (from left) Hrimati Devī Dāsi, who serves the cows in Māyāpur, India; Govindānanda Dāsa, who takes care of them at the ISKCON farm in Hungary; and Balabhadra Dāsa, ISKCON's minister for cow protection and the president of ISCOWP.

urine in medicines and other products. Later, Balabhadra received an award for his spiritual contribution.

Balabhadra encouraged devotees from various ISKCON farms to attend the conference. Some of the devotees who attended were Govindanandana Dāsa and Rādhā Kānta Dāsa from the ISKCON Hungary farm and Hrimatī Dāsī and Dr. Nanda Krishna from ISKCON Māyāpur, India. Balabhadra and the devotees who accompanied him received much press coverage. “Cow Protection, ISKCON Fully Behind” was the trans-

lated title of one article. It appeared in several newspapers after a thirty-minute press conference that featured Balabhadra showing his arm tattoos of an Indian cow and Lord Nityānanda’s lotus feet. Rādhā Kānta, Govindanandana, and I appeared in several newspapers as “experts who have forayed into the field of cow protection and organic farming from Hungary and the USA.” We even had people come up to us and ask for our autographs, telling us they had seen us on TV. We were pleased to be representing Śrīla Prabhupāda, Lord Kṛṣṇa,

and the importance of cow protection.

We left the Vishwa Gou Sammelan once again reminded of the Indian culture in which the majority of the population consider the cow sacred and not meat for their hamburger. The association of thousands of people who came to the Ramachandrapura Math to honor the cow helped us face the challenge of presenting cow protection in the West. ❁

To learn more about ISCOWP and the Vishwa Gou Sammelan, visit iscowp.org.
