

## Banning Slaughter Houses: Not a Hasty Move

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*The change in guard of Uttar Pradesh has set the stage for a new chapter in UP politics. But will the fulfilling of election promises result in serious negative economic repercussions? The case of the ban on illegal slaughter houses is a case in point.*

The decision to shut down illegal slaughterhouses is a welcome move, given that these meat shops contributed not only to land pollution, but air pollution caused by the tannery units operating without license. According to notifications brought out by the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEF&CC), slaughter houses are divided into two categories based on their size. The larger ones with integrated meat processing units have to meet more stringent norms, than the small and medium slaughterhouses. Currently in a majority of slaughterhouses, the left over parts of the animal after slaughter such as rumen, intestinal contents, and the inedible meat are left to rot in the open in landfills and near water bodies (especially near large rivers like the Ganga). This has been the practice, largely led by the illegal abattoirs, which openly flout norms.

Of the 72 government-approved abattoirs across the country, 38 are in Uttar Pradesh, according to UP Pollution Control Board based on NoCs issued. This includes four government-run facilities, of which only two – in Agra and Saharanpur, respectively – are functional. Hind Agro IMPP in Aligarh was one of the first plants, set up in 1996. According to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) statistics there are 126 such units in operation out of which only 27 have any treatment plant.

Most of the 38 slaughterhouses in Uttar Pradesh cater to exports. The buffalo meat from India is in much demand in Gulf countries because of two reasons – its low cost, and the assurance for buyers in Muslim countries that it is *halal*, which is, the animal has been slaughtered in a manner Muslims consider ritualistically appropriate. Under these circumstances, the local demands are met by illegal or standalone slaughterhouses. This has led to the mushrooming of unauthorised slaughterhouses which discharge their effluents into the drains from which the water percolates to the ground and to the river, mixing with the tributaries of Ganga and Yamuna.

The Indian buffalo meat industry has flourished because of the country's large buffalo population which has grown from 43.4 million in 1951 to 108.7 million as per the livestock census of 2012. This growth has resulted in the increase in the share of buffaloes to 21 per cent in total livestock population. Uttar Pradesh accounts for the highest share (28 per cent) of the total buffalo population, followed by Rajasthan (12 per cent). Uttar Pradesh has emerged, undoubtedly, the leading buffalo meat-producing state. The state houses around 60 per cent of the total standalone slaughter houses, standalone meat processing units and fully-integrated meat processing units.

According to United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), globally, the beef/buffalo meat industry is dominated by the United States, which accounts for around 20 per cent of the world's total beef production as well as consumption. India accounts for around 7 per cent of the world's total beef production. Due to its low consumption level at 4 per cent, India has emerged as the largest exporter. Further unlike elsewhere where beef predominates, in India buffalo meat accounts for the bulk of the domestic beef market. This makes buffalo meat an attractive export commodity for India.

The Indian buffalo meat industry is unorganised and fragmented in nature. The key regulatory bodies are the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) which falls under the ambit of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India (GoI) and Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) administered by the Ministry of Commerce.

### **The export value chain**

Traders collect buffaloes from different farmers directly or buy animals from livestock markets and sell to exporters. These traders play a crucial role as assemblers and suppliers of buffalo in quantity to exporters. As demand for buffalo meat has increased, many exporters are feeling the need to forge better linkages for an interrupted supply of buffalo for meat production.

Processing starts with slaughter of the buffalo brought by the trader at an abattoir. The trader is paid on the basis of carcass weight. The carcass is then converted into boneless meat and bones. The hide is sold to the tanning industry. Boneless meat is packaged in food-grade polythene film, frozen (at  $-18^{\circ}\text{C}$ ), packed in cartons and kept in cold storage for export. Cartons are dispatched in refrigerated containers for shipment.

Butchers play an integral role in the value chain by performing slaughtering operations. A butcher is the lowest level worker at the slaughter house who performs the slaughter (*halal* method) and dresses the meat for further processing. The definition can be extended to include workers who handle carcasses and meat in meat processing establishments and in retail meat stalls. Any other worker engaged in the meat industry as animal attendants, sanitation staff, by-product handlers, meat packaging staff and support staff working in effluent treatment plants (ETP), cold rooms, and machinery units is a non-butcher. Butchers play an integral role in the value chain of buffalo meat production both for domestic and export market by undertaking slaughtering operations. Slaughter of animals being a subject on the state list, slaughterhouses are managed by civic bodies like corporations, municipalities and panchayats.

From 2000, India's export of beef, specifically water buffalo meat, also known as carabeef has expanded rapidly. In 2014, India moved ahead of Brazil to become the world's largest exporter. From 1999-20 to 2013-15, India's beef exports have grown at an annual rate of about 12 per cent, rising from an average volume of 0.31 million tonnes to an estimated 1.95 million tonnes. (*Overview of The Indian Buffalo Meat Value Chain*, FICCI)

Exports have been mostly to middle-income markets in Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa. The largest share goes to Southeast Asia in Vietnam. Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines account for the rest of the bulk of shipments to the region. (APEDA)

As per regulations, both buffalo meat as well as its producers should have requisite licensing and registration, which is issued by various government agencies. Any deviations from standard practices can result in the cancellation of licences/registration, thus impacting the operations of the facility.

The entire public reaction to the ban on slaughterhouses because it purportedly targets a particular religious community and its profession is ill-founded. Any policy change produces trade-off situation and in this scenario, it is the meat export industry and the numerous lives associated with it on the one hand and the fate of the future generations affected by pollution of today on the other. From a human rights perspective, the government has no right to deprive an individual his/her

source of earnings without producing an alternative situation. However, from a utilitarian perspective, policy decisions are hardly that even handed.

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