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Food for thought

Dietary rules and
social organization
in ancient India

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The year was 1988. The South Korean government banned the slaughtering of dogs and the serving of dog meat in restaurants. The Olympics were coming to town and the South Korean government did not want to project to the world the image of an uncivilized dog-eating nation. A few years ago in England demonstrators prostrated themselves in front of trucks carrying British horses to France for slaughter. Then there are the cows in India: even Macdonald's had to change its menu when they went to India—lamb patties instead of the traditional beef. In insults too food looms large: the British call the French 'froggies', the Indians call despised groups 'dog-cookers' (Leach 1964; Wijewardene 1968).

Humans do take their food seriously, not just in a nutritional or medical sense but also in a cultural sense. Poor Koreans, a people with a long and distinguished culture, are forced to prove that they are 'civilized' to the rest of the world by changing their food habits. Anthropologists have long noted that among the wide variety of edible vegetables and especially animals available to a given social group, only a small fraction is actually consumed. Prohibited foods, whether by injunction or by custom, far outnumber permitted ones in most societies. Even in modern times, entire ethnic and religious groups are often identified by what and how they eat, whether it is Kosher or Halal; and even in the ultra-modern and culturally liberated American society, you can go to any grocery store and find usually only two kinds of bird meat (chicken and turkey) and three kinds of animal meat (beef, pork, and, perhaps, lamb). The question the cultural historian, just as the social-anthropologist, asks is: Why?

The French anthropologist Lévi-Strauss (1963, 89) put it in a nutshell when he said that animals are 'good to think'. They are food good not only for eating but also for thinking. The pioneering studies of the British social-anthropologists Edmund Leach (1964) on the English and the Kachin and Mary Douglas (1966, 2000) on Jewish food prescription of the Leviticus have taken Lévi-Strauss's work forward. The Sri Lankan anthropologist Stanley Tambiah (1969, 423–4) summarizes their conclusions:

Lévi-Strauss (1966, 104) has formulated a view ... that 'there is an empirical connection between marriage rules and eating prohibitions'. ... The theory [of Mary Douglas] argues that dietary prohibitions make sense in relation to a systematic ordering of ideas (a classification system) as exemplified for example by the abominations of Leviticus. Leach, partly building on Douglas, ... demonstrates

for the English and the Kachin the correspondence between three scales of social distance from Ego, pertaining respectively to marriage and sex relationships, spatial categories, and edibility of animals.

I think there is broad agreement among scholars that A) animal categories and food prescriptions have deeper meanings in relation to a society's construction of its cosmic and social world, and B) piecemeal attempts to justify the prohibition of individual animals and especially the use of what Mary Douglas (1966, 29) has called 'medical materialism'—trichinosis, for example, to explain the prohibition of the pig—are inadequate as explanatory tools. Tambiah himself has provided a rich ethnography of food prohibitions in a village in northeastern Thailand, an ethnography that underscores the parallel between animals that can and cannot be eaten, persons one can and cannot marry, and the spatial organization of the family residence.

Animals are such good food for thought because they lend themselves to classification. And classification, the placing of our experiences into distinct categories, is basic to human thought and rationality. The late E. H. Gombrich, the eminent art historian, postulates that 'all thinking is sorting, classifying'; and the philosopher George Lakoff concludes that 'An understanding of how we categorize is central to any understanding of how we think and how we function, and therefore central to an understanding of what makes us human.'¹

For the anthropologist living in a village, it is somewhat easy to discover the classificatory systems underlying the dietary practices and social interactions in that village. He or she can observe the villagers, can talk to them, and if some points are unclear, can question them. Those of us studying ancient cultures do not have that luxury; our knowledge is limited by what people of those cultures chose to tell us in the extant historical documents they have left behind. Our knowledge is further complicated by the nature of those documents: most are normative, most are written by an élite segment of society (in India the Brahmins), and almost all give the perspective of the male half of that society. To complicate matters further, while the anthropologist takes a snapshot of a particular time and place, our data come from different historical periods and often from unidentifiable geographical locations; we have to work diachronically.

¹ Cited by Smith 1994, 3–4.

Heeding all these caveats, I want to do three things in this paper. First, I will examine the animal classifications in the early vedic texts, in the dietary rules of the later legal texts (the *Dharmaśāstras*), and in the medical treatises.² Second, I will present as systematically as possible the dietary regulations and animal prohibitions that are largely based on these classifications. Third, I will propose a hypothesis that relates these regulations to broader social categories and relationships, especially those relating to social hierarchy and marriage.

1. ANIMAL CLASSIFICATIONS

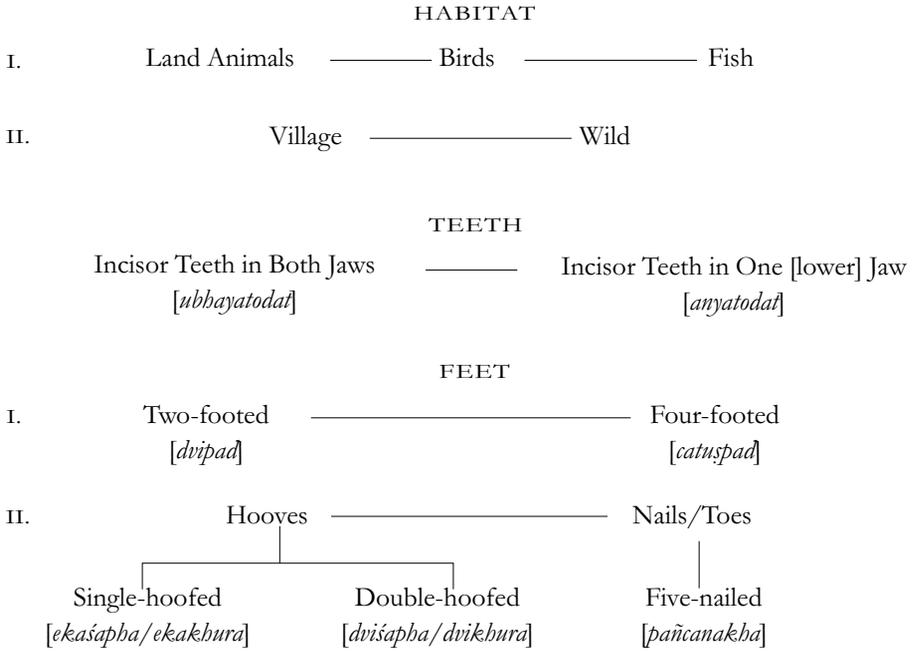
Paralleling the cosmological classification of earth, water, and atmosphere, the early vedic sources already contain a threefold classification into land animals, birds, and fish, a classification that is maintained in the later dietary regulations (see Chart 1).³ The well-known creation hymn, the *Puruṣasūkta* (*Rgveda* 10.90.8), on the other hand, presents a different classification: from the clotted butter of the primordial sacrifice were made the three kinds of beasts (*paśu*): those of the air, those of the wilderness, and those of the village.⁴ The distinction between the village and the wilderness will become significant in the dietary regulations.

² The early texts on Dharma go back probably to about the 3rd century B.C.E., the later ones to the middle of the first millennium C.E. The two medical treatises, *Caraka* and *Suśruta*, probably come from the first half of the first millennium C.E. For the sake of simplicity, I will call the *Dharmaśāstras* ‘legal texts’ even though their scope is much broader than the merely legal.

³ Later texts provide a comprehensive taxonomy of all living entities based on their modes of propagation: those born from a womb or placenta (*jarāyujā*), those born from eggs (*aṇḍajā*), those born from warm moisture (*svedajā*), and those born from sprouts (*udbhijjā*). See *Mānava Dharmaśāstra* 1.43–46; *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6.3.1.

⁴ ‘From that sacrifice, fully offered, was collected the clotted butter; it made the beasts of the air and of the wild, as well as those of the village.’ *tasmād yajñāt sarvabutaḥ sambhṛtaḥ pṛṣadājyam | paśūn tāṃś cakre vāyavyān āraeṇyān grāmīyāś ca ye ||* In this classification, birds

Chart 1. Animal classifications



are separated from the animals of the wild and the village. In the later dietary regulations, however, birds also are divided into the categories of wild and village. In the Puruṣa hymn, the term *paśu* is given its widest application; it includes both birds and land animals. The term is generally restricted to land animals, however; and even among them, *paśu* in the restricted sense applies to domestic animals, especially farm animals such as cows, goats, and sheep. The term *mrga*, specifically meaning the deer or antelope, is used to cover the spectrum of wild animals, and thus stands in contrast to *paśu*. The hymn is silent with regard to fish, which are a marginal category in most classificatory systems. For a detailed account of the vedic animal classifications and their connection to social structures, see Smith 1994: 241–86.

The most significant classifications, however, pertain to land animals, a category that also comprehends human beings. These classifications, moreover, have a ritual significance, because they specify which animals may be offered in sacrifice (*medhya*). In this they parallel the Jewish classifications in Deuteronomy and Leviticus. We have noted the distinction between village animals (*grāmya*) with the generic designation *paśu*, and wild animals (*āraṇyaka*) with the generic designation *mrga*. Only the former were *medhya*, fit to be sacrificed. Although wild animals and even birds are included in the list of animals at a horse sacrifice, they are not killed but released and their inclusion may have been purely for the sake of completeness so that the rite includes the sacrifice of all beings.⁵

Classifications pertaining to dental and foot structures (see Chart 1), however, are the most significant, and once again these parallel the Deuteronomic classifications based on the hoof and the chewing of the cud. The broadest of the two relates to dental structure: animals are divided into *anyatodat* (or *ekatodat*), literally those that have teeth only in one jaw but referring actually to animals that have incisor teeth only in the lower jaw, and *ubbayatodat*, those that have incisor teeth in both jaws. In the Puruṣa hymn it is said: ‘From it [the sacrifice] were born horses, as also whatsoever have incisor teeth in both jaws. Cows were born from it. From it were born goats and sheep.’⁶ Even though the text does not mention the class with incisors in the lower jaw, the *anyatodat*, it is clearly implicit; we have here a division of animals into two classes—those with two rows of incisor teeth headed by the horse and those with a single row of incisors, whose major representatives are cows, goats, and sheep, the most common farm animals. Again, although left unstated, the vast number of carnivorous animals with paws rather than hoofs also belong to the category of animals with two rows of incisors.

⁵ See, for example, *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* 3.9.1–4, where wild animals are said to be non-*paśu*; they are not fit to be sacrificed.

⁶ *tasmād aśvā ajāyanta ye ke cobbayatodataḥ | gāvo ha jajñire tasmāt tasmāj jātā ajāvayab ||* *Ṛgveda* 10.90.10. See *Mānava Dharmasāstra* 1.39–42 for a similar but more elaborate classification of fauna and flora within the context of a creation account. The ruminant animals, such as bovines and antelopes, have only a thick dental layer called ‘the dental pad’ in the upper jaw.

With reference to the feet, we have the ancient distinction between the two-footed, that is, human beings, and the four-footed;⁷ but this did not play a significant role in ritual or dietary classifications. Far more significant is the classification based on the structure of the feet, according to which animals fall into two broad categories: those that have five toes with nails (the *pañcanakha*) and those that have hoofs. Hoofed animals are further classified into those that are double-hoofed (or the cloven-footed; *dviśapha*, *dvikhura*) such as cows, goats, sheep, and deer, and those that have single or unparted hoofs (*ekasāpha*, *ekakhura*), namely horses, donkeys, and mules.⁸ A point to be noted is that the members of the single-hoofed category also fall into the category of animals having two rows of incisor teeth and are thus linked by their dental structure to the five-nailed carnivorous animals. The overlapping nature of the different classifications (see Chart 3) is deliberate, I think, and plays a significant role in the dietary regulations.

With regard to birds, the early vedic literature, to my knowledge, offers no classificatory system; it appears only in the later legal and medical literature. Two classifications that birds share in common with land animals are the division into the village and the wild, and into the carnivorous and the non-carnivorous. ‘Village’ in this context, however, does not refer to domesticated or pet birds but birds that normally inhabit villages, such as crows.⁹ A classification based on their feeding patterns divides birds into those that feed by scratching with their feet (*viṣkīra*) and those that feed by pecking (*pratuda*). The former are ground

⁷ See *R̥gveda* 3.62.14; *Atharvaveda* 2.34.1; *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* 4.3.4.3; 5.2.9.4–5.

⁸ It is interesting to note that modern scientific classifications of mammals are also based on foot structures. The one-hoofed animals fall into the class Perissodactyla, animals with an uneven number of toes; but most members of this class, except for the Tapir and the Rhinoceros, have only one toe. The two-hoofed animals fall into the class Artiodactyla, animals with an even number of toes.

⁹ This is another significant difference between the vedic and later usages. The term *grāmya* in the vedic texts refers to domesticated animals, whereas in the later texts on food regulations the term usually refers to animals living in the village, which are forbidden, and not to farm animals, which are permitted. The differing meanings of *grāmya* in the vedic and post-vedic classifications of animals may also reflect the changing meaning of the term *grāma*. Although it refers to a settled village in later Sanskrit,

feeders such as partridge, quail, and fowl; the latter probably refer to tree feeders, and medical texts associate them with fruit eaters. Another broad classification is based on foot structure; it divides birds into the web-footed (*jālapāda*) and those with unwebbed feet, the former clearly encompassing all water birds. Less common classifications include night birds, and red-footed and red-beaked birds.¹⁰

The two early medical texts, the *Caraka Saṃhitā* and the *Suśruta Saṃhitā*, also contain animal classifications, again within the context of dietary regulations; but for them these regulations are related to the health benefits of various meats rather than to socio-religious prescriptions. These texts include all animals—land animals, birds, and fish—within their comprehensive classificatory systems. These have been examined in great detail by Zimmermann (1987), and I will present here only a brief summary.

Caraka (1.27.35–87), the older of the two texts, gives an eightfold classification based partly on feeding patterns and partly on habitat and ignoring anatomical differences:

- 1) *prasaba*: those that take their food violently or forcibly. This category includes, as is to be expected, carnivorous animals and birds, but also cows, horses, and camels, because they tear off grass with their teeth.
- 2) *bhūmiśaya*: animals that live in underground burrows, including snake, frog, porcupine, and mongoose.
- 3) *ānūpa*: animals inhabiting marshy lands such as boar, rhinoceros, and elephant.
- 4) *vāriśaya*: animals inhabiting water, including fish, turtles, and crocodiles.
- 5) *vāricara*: animals operating in water, consisting of various kinds of water birds.
- 6) *jāṅgala*: animals inhabiting dry land, consisting mostly of different kinds of deer.

during the vedic period it is likely, as Rau (1997) has argued, that the term refers to a roving band of pastoral people who moved about with their animals. In this sense, the *grāmya* animals would clearly refer to these domesticated animals. Smith (1994, 254–55) is incorrect in assuming that *grāmya* is edible and the wild is inedible; this dichotomy is valid for the sacrifice (*medhya*) but not for food (*bhakṣya*): see note 14 below.

¹⁰ For these classifications, see *Āpastamba Dharmasūtra* 1.17.32–36; *Gautama Dharmasūtra* 17.28–35; *Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra* 1.12.1–7; *Vasiṣṭha Dharmasūtra* 14.48; *Mānava Dharmasāstra* 5.11–14; *Yājñavalkya Smṛti* 1.172–75.

7) *viṣkīra* (scattering birds) and 8) *pratuda* (pecking birds), categories we have already encountered.

The classificatory systems in the *Suśruta* (1.46.28–70) are more complex and better systematized. It gives first a system of six classes, some of which are found also in *Caraka*:

- 1) *jaleśaya*, aquatic.
- 2) *ānūpa*, inhabitants of marshy lands.
- 3) *grāmya*, those living in villages and for *Suśruta* probably meaning domestic or farm animals.
- 4) *kravyabhuj*, carnivores.
- 5) *ekāśapha*, animals with single or undivided hoofs.
- 6) *jāṅgala*, animals inhabiting dry land.

This order of enumeration, according to *Suśruta*, relates to the health benefits of each class; the ones mentioned later are healthier than those mentioned earlier. *Suśruta* then gives a more elaborate classification. All animals, including birds and fish, fall into two broad categories: *jāṅgala*, inhabitants of dry land, and *ānūpa*, inhabitants of marshy areas. The first group is further classified into eight sub-groups:

- 1) *jaṅgbāla*: fleet-footed animals such as deer.
- 2) *viṣkīra*: scatterers.
- 3) *pratuda*: peckers.¹¹
- 4) *gubāśaya*: animals living in caves, such as lions, tigers, and wolves.
- 5) *prasaha*: unlike *Caraka*, *Suśruta* includes in this class only carnivorous birds.
- 6) *parṇamrga*: arboreal animals such as the monkey.
- 7) *vileśaya*: animals living in burrows.
- 8) *grāmya*: village and farm animals.

The second group also is divided into five sub-groups:

- 1) *kūlacara*: animals living on banks, such as elephants, rhinos, boars, and some kinds of antelope.

¹¹ According to *Suśruta* [1.46.68], the *pratudas* live on fruits. This may explain their pecking habit and distinguish them from the ground feeding *viṣkīras*.

- 2) *plava*: birds that dive or swim.¹²
- 3) *koṣastha*: animals with shells, such as the conch.
- 4) *pādin*: aquatic animals with feet, such as crab and turtle.
- 5) *matsya*: fish, which are further subdivided into fresh water fish (*nādeya*) and sea fish (*sāmudra*).

The classifications given in the medical texts relate to the perceived positive and negative health effects of the animals of each class. This criterion contrasts with that of the legal texts, where animals are classified according to dietary regulations. Indeed, many kinds of animals that are prohibited in the legal documents are considered in the medical treatises not only as edible but also as providing health benefits.

2. DIETARY REGULATIONS

I turn now to the dietary regulations found in the legal codes, the *Dharmaśāstras*, regulations that relate closely to the classificatory systems we have examined. I want to begin, as any thick description should, with the vocabulary of these regulations. Although there are several terms used to prohibit the eating of a specific food item, two terms stand out both because of their frequency and because they assumed technical meanings within the discourse on diet. They are *abbakṣya* and *abhojya*, two terms that have very similar connotations in common usage but have acquired specialized meanings within dietary regulations. Because I have discussed these terms in detail in another publication (Olivelle 2002), I will only summarize my conclusions here.

A) *Abbakṣya* ('forbidden food') refers to items of food, both animals and vegetables, that are completely forbidden; they cannot be eaten except under the most dire circumstances.¹³ Generally, lists of forbidden food contain food sources

¹² Note that *plava* is used elsewhere with reference to a specific bird, a type of crane.

¹³ Manu (10.104-108) permits a man facing starvation to eat anything at all, giving the examples of Ajigarta, Vāmadeva, Bharadvāja, and Viśvāmitra. This falls within Manu's

rather than cooked food served at a meal. Thus, carnivorous animals, village pigs and fowls, web-footed birds, garlic, red resins of trees are all *abbakṣya*.¹⁴

B-i) *Abhojya* ('unfit food'), on the other hand, refers to food that is normally permitted but due to some supervening circumstances has become unfit to be eaten. Lists of unfit food items contain not food sources but food that is actually served at a meal. Thus, food contaminated by hair or insects, food touched by an impure man or woman, food that has turned sour or stale are all *abhojya*.

B-ii) *Abhojya* takes on a secondary meaning referring not directly to food but to 'a person whose food is unfit to be eaten,'¹⁵ for example, a person during the period of impurity following a death (*āśauca*), a physician, or a hunter. Conversely, *bhojya* in the compound *bhojyāṇna* is a person from whom one may accept food. The *Gautama Dharmasūtra* (17.6–7), for example states: 'A man who looks after his animals or plows his fields, a friend of the family, his barber, and his personal servant—these are people whose food he may eat (*bhojyāṇmāḥ*), as also a merchant who is not an artisan.'

When anthropologists working in the field describe food prohibitions and how they relate to caste divisions—that is, from whom can you receive food or water—they are dealing with *abhojya*. Given the importance of food transactions in modern Indian society, the *abhojya* kind of food regulation becomes significant. I will not address here issues relating to *abhojya*, however, both because one can do only so many things in a brief paper and because in the world of the Dharma literature there was little by way of restriction on food transactions between various social groups. Indeed, it was taken as a matter of course that a

description of *āpaddharma*, rules for times of adversity. The term *abbakṣya* is also used in the Jain dietary regulations with reference to a standard list of twenty-two forbidden items (Cort 2001, 128–33).

¹⁴ The term *abbakṣya* parallels *amedhya*, which refers to any food that cannot be offered in a sacrifice, and more generally to non-ritual food. The two categories, however, are overlapping but not identical. Unlike in the Jewish prescriptions, sacrificability does not imply edibility and vice versa. The horse, for example, is *medhya* but *abbakṣya*, whereas a deer is *bbakṣya* but *amedhya*. Brian Smith (1994, 254) is not quite accurate when he appears to identify sacrificability with edibility.

¹⁵ Grammatically, *abhojya* as 'unfit food' is a Karmadhāraya compound, whereas *abhojya* as 'a person whose food is unfit' is a Bahuvrihi compound.

Brahmin could eat at the house of even a Śūdra, entertain people of all classes, and even have Śūdra cooks in his household. My focus today will be on the *abhakṣya* kind of food prohibitions, which alone relate to the animal classifications we have examined.

For this study I use the seven extant legal texts. They are, in approximate chronological order, the texts ascribed to Āpastamba, Gautama, Baudhāyana, Vasiṣṭha, Manu, Viṣṇu, and Yājñavalkya.¹⁶ They span about seven or eight centuries, approximately from the 3rd century B.C.E. to the 4th century C.E.

Legal texts present five categories of permitted and forbidden foods : land animals, birds, fish, milk, and vegetables. My focus will be on the first four and, within them, especially on land animals; prohibited vegetables are few in number and limited to mushroom, garlic, onion, some kinds of leek, and secretions from tree barks, especially those that are red in color.

2.1. Land animals

Land animals, as we have noted, are subject to more complex and extensive classifications than either birds or fish. Given that we are dealing with a pastoral society, these are the animals that humans came into contact with most frequently; further, humans themselves are land animals and are included within these classificatory systems.

Among land animals, two broad categories are prohibited (see Chart 2): animals with paws containing five nails (*pañcanakḥa*) and animals with single or unparted hoofs (*ekasāpha*). All our sources contain these prohibited categories, with the exception of Vasiṣṭha, who is silent with regard to the single-hoofed. The only class of animals, therefore, that is permitted is the cloven-hoofed; these animals constitute the paradigmatic food. Five animals falling within the five-nailed category, however, are explicitly permitted:¹⁷ hare, hedgehog, porcupine, tor-

¹⁶ *Āpastamba Dharmasūtra* 1.17.14–39; *Gautama Dharmasūtra* 17.22–38; *Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra* 1.12.1–15; *Vasiṣṭha Dharmasūtra* 14.33–48; *Mānava Dharmasāstra* 5.4–26; *Yājñavalkya Smṛti* 1.170–78; *Viṣṇu Smṛti* 51.21–42.

¹⁷ This exception is formulated in the well-known maxim: *pañca pañcanakḥāḥ bhakṣyāḥ*, ‘The five five-nailed may be eaten.’ I will discuss these below under 2.5.

Chart 2. Food regulations

COMPLETELY FORBIDDEN	FORBIDDEN WITH EXCEPTIONS	PERMITTED WITH EXCEPTIONS
Land Animals		
Single-hoofed animals [<i>ekasāpba/ekakehura</i>]	Five-nailed animals [<i>pañcanakba</i>]	Double-hoofed animals [<i>dviśapba/dvikehura</i>]
	Incisor teeth in both jaws [<i>ubhayatodat</i>]	Incisor teeth in one jaw [<i>anyatodat</i>]
Carnivores [<i>kravyād</i>]		Herbivores
Village [<i>grāmya</i>] Unknown [<i>ajñāta</i>] Solitary [<i>ekacara</i>] Camel Village Pig		Farm/Wild
Birds		
Carnivores	Web-footed [<i>jālapāda</i>]	Scatterers [<i>viškira</i>] Peckers [<i>pratuda</i>]
Village Unknown Solitary Nocturnal Village fowl		Wild

toise, and monitor lizard. Sometimes the rhinoceros is included in this list, although it has not five-nails but rather a tripartite hoof (see Jamison 1998).

Four of our sources contain food prohibitions based on classifications with teeth as the criterion.¹⁸ As a class, animals with incisor teeth on both jaws (*ubhayatodat*) are forbidden. Animals with incisors only on the lower jaw (*anyatodat*), on the other hand, are permitted with some exceptions, the most notable of which are the camel and the village pig. Note that the permitted category on the basis

¹⁸ Āpastamba, Baudhāyana, and Yājñavalkya do not give this classification.

of teeth, that is, animals with only one row of incisor teeth, coincides with the permitted category on the basis of foot formation, that is, animals with parted hoofs.

All but Āpastamba and Gautama¹⁹ also contain prohibitions based on habitat. In general, animals living in villages (*grāmya*) are forbidden, whereas those living in the wild as well as farm animals designated as *paśu* are permitted. This rule applies equally to land animals and birds, and it overrules all other criteria of permissibility. Thus, the pig or boar, which is permitted because it has both parted hoofs and a single row of incisors, is forbidden when its habitat is the village, whereas its wild counterpart is permitted (see Tambiah 1969, 450: Proposition 1). Likewise, the village fowl is forbidden even though it belongs to the permitted category of *viṣkīra*, birds that scratch with their feet. These provisions must have become sufficiently standard by the grammarian Patañjali's time (2nd cent. B.C.E) for him to use a stock example repeatedly: *abbakṣyo grāmyakukkuṭo 'bhakṣyo grāmyasūkarah*—'it is forbidden to eat a village cock; it is forbidden to eat a village pig' (on Pāṇini 1.1.1 [5:16]; 1.1.1 [8:10]; 7.3.14 [320:22]).

All but Gautama specify that carnivores are forbidden, even though most authorities apply this to birds rather than to land animals. The reason probably was that carnivorous land animals already fall into the proscribed categories of five-nailed animals and those with incisors on both jaws.

Other broad categories of land animals and birds prohibited in some of our sources are the solitary (*ekacara*), the unknown (*ajñāta*), and those that are not specified (*anirdiṣṭa*), probably referring to animals and birds not listed specifically as permitted.²⁰

¹⁹ These two authors, however, do prohibit the village pig and the village fowl. With regard to the varying meanings of the term 'village' (*grāmya*), see note 9 above.

²⁰ Aśoka's edicts, the earliest inscriptional evidence we have, confirm at least some of these dietary prescriptions. In his first rock edict, he says that at the time of writing only three animals were killed in the royal kitchen: two peacocks and one deer. The deer falls into the double-hoofed category, and the peacock to the scattering (*viṣkīra*). Alberuni's observations in the early 11th century also broadly confirm the textual rules: 'As matters stand thus, it is allowed to kill animals by means of strangulation, but only certain animals, others being excluded. The meat of such animals, the killing of which is allowed, is forbidden in case they die a sudden death. Animals the killing of which is allowed are sheep, goats, gazelles, hares, rhinoceroses, the buffaloes, fish, water and

2.2. Birds

As we have noted, some forbidden categories, such as carnivores and those living in villages, include both land animals and birds. Of the categories specific to birds, those that scatter their food with their feet, or more accurately, scratch the soil in search of food (*viṣkīra*), and birds that peck the food with their beaks (*pratuda*) are permitted to be eaten, whereas web-footed birds are generally forbidden.²¹ Gautama (17.19, 34) forbids night birds (*naktaṃcara*) and those with red feet or beaks (*raktaṭapādatuṅḍā*), classifications that were not picked up by other authorities. Unlike land animals, however, bird classifications play a less prominent role in the lists. Many sources, such as Manu and Vasiṣṭha, simply list individual birds that are forbidden or permitted, a pattern repeated in the case of fish.²² It was harder, I assume, to produce comprehensive classifications of birds and fish. Lawyers found it easier to simply list prohibited species. A comprehen-

land birds, as sparrows, ring-doves, francolins, doves, peacocks, and other animals which are not loathsome to man nor noxious. That which is forbidden are cows, horses, mules, asses, camels, elephants, tame poultry, crows, parrots, nightingales, all kinds of eggs and wine.' *Alberuni's India*. tr. E. C. Schau, reprint (Delhi: Low Price Publications, 1989), II, p. 151. Prohibition of eggs is noteworthy because the legal texts are completely silent about eggs, from which we must deduce that eggs were practically never eaten in ancient India; laws generally forbid what is commonly done.

²¹ Gautama (17.35) states: 'Birds that scratch with the feet or peck with their beaks and that do not have webbed feet may be eaten' (*bhaksyāḥ pratudaviṣkīrājālapādāḥ*). There are some exceptions, however; some kinds of cranes, such as the Lakṣmaṇa, are permitted: *Āpastamba* 1.12.36.

²² Vasiṣṭha (14.41–42), for examples, gives this list of forbidden fish: 'These are forbidden to be eaten: among fish, the Ceṭa, the Gavaya, the porpoise, the alligator, and the crab, as also grotesque fish and snake-head fish.' Vasiṣṭha (14.48) has an even longer list of forbidden birds: 'Among birds, the following are forbidden: birds that agitate, scratch with their feet or are web-footed; Kalaviṅka sparrow, Plava heron, Haṃsa goose, Cakravāka goose, Bhāsa vulture, crow, Pārāvata dove, Kurara osprey, and Sārāṅga cuckoo; white dove, Krauñca crane, Krakara partridge, Kañka heron, vulture, falcon, Baka egret, and Balāka ibis; Madgu cormorant, Tīṭṭibha sandpiper, Māndhāla flying fox, and nocturnal birds; woodpecker, sparrow, Railātākā bird, Hārīta pigeon, Khañjarīṭa wagtail, village cock, parrot, and Śārīka starling; Kokila cuckoo and carnivorous birds; and those living in villages.'

sive analysis of bird prohibitions will have to examine closely these forbidden species, some of which are difficult to identify from their Sanskrit names; space does not permit me to do so here.

The problems inherent in bird classifications, however, are exemplified in the way later authorities, such as Vasiṣṭha, Manu and Yājñavalkya, handle the two major categories of birds: those that scatter (*viṣkīra*) and those that peck (*pratuda*). All the more ancient sources declare that these birds are permitted, whereas these later authors state just the opposite.²³ The reason for this reversal is unclear, but it may well have to do with a misunderstanding or a fresh interpretation of these classes. At least some commentators, for example, take the ‘peckers’ to be carnivores, such as hawks and woodpeckers.²⁴

2.3. *Fish*

When it comes to fish, our sources, unlike the Hebrew authors of the Deuteronomy and Leviticus, totally give up on broad classifications, resorting instead to listing individual fish. Here also we detect an interesting change from the older to the younger sources. The older sources appear to assume that all fish, except those explicitly forbidden, may be eaten.²⁵ The only broad category of forbidden fish in them is the rather vague one of misshapen or grotesque fish (*vikṛta*).

Manu and later writers, on the other hand, do not appear to favor the eating of fish. Indeed, in them the process is reversed; all fish except those listed are forbidden. Indeed, Manu (5.15) says: ‘A man who eats the meat of some animal is called “eater of that animal’s meat”, whereas a fish-eater is an “eater of every animal’s meat”. Therefore, he should avoid fish.’²⁶ Yet, possibly bowing to tradition,

²³ See Vasiṣṭha 14.48; Manu 5.13; Yājñavalkya 1.172–73.

²⁴ Sarvajñanārāyaṇa, for example (on Manu 5.13) takes *viṣkīra* to be birds that scratch the earth for worms. Govindarāja, Kullūka, and others take *pratuda* to be birds such as the woodpecker and *nakḥaviṣkīra* to be carnivores such as hawks.

²⁵ Baudhāyana is the exception. He lists permitted fish species, implying that others are forbidden. The lists contained in Baudhāyana, which are overly systematic, bear the stamp being reworked, however. Baudhāyana, more than any other ancient legal text, has been subject to reworking and additions.

²⁶ *yo yasya māṃsam aśnāti sa tanmāṃsāda ucyate | matsyādaḥ sarvamāṃsādas tasmān matsyān vivarjayet ||*

even Manu (5.16) permits certain kinds of fish, especially in ancestral rituals: ‘The Pāṭhina and the Rohita fish may be eaten when they are used in an offering to gods or ancestors; Rājīva, Siṃhatuṇḍa, and Saśalka fish may be eaten at any time.’ One possible reason, besides the geographical locations of these authors, for this shift in attitude with regard to fish may have been the view that fish are by nature carnivores, as exemplified in well-known maxim of the fish, the bigger fish eating the smaller fish.

2.4. *Milk*

Milk is the most restrictive of all food items. The milk of most animals—women and other five-nailed animals, single-hoofed animals such as mares, and even most animals with parted hoofs, such as sheep and deer— is explicitly forbidden. The only permitted milk is that of cows, buffaloes, and goats.

2.5. *Anomaly and animal classifications*

The subject of anomaly was the focus of Mary Douglas’s work on animal categories and purity. Impurity and anomaly imply a classificatory system within which they stand out as exceptions and exceptional; the impure is the ‘out-of-place’. When an animal breaches the boundaries of its assigned category, it becomes anomalous and the focus of attention and ritual. Birds without feathers, fish without scales, or cloven-footed animals that do not chew the cud were all anomalies to the Hebrew thinkers. Several classes and individual animals singled out for prohibition in the Indian legal texts, likewise, are anomalies within the Indian classificatory systems. Before examining the anomalous species, I want to look at a few animals that fall within the classifications we have examined (see Chart 3). The dog and the lion are representatives of five-nailed animals with two rows of teeth. Every feature of the dog makes it inedible, while the only feature of the lion that puts it in the edible category is its habitat, which is the forest. The goat and the deer represent the edible classes of animals, the former living in the farm and pasture land and the latter in the forest; they lack any inedible feature. It is apparent that a single negative feature is sufficient to make an animal inedible, as in the case of the camel; its village habitat alone makes it inedible.

Moving beyond the paradigmatically inedible and edible classes, we come to the single-hoofed class of animals. Like the five-nailed carnivores, animals of this

Chart 3.

	Dog	Lion	Goat	Deer	Horse	Camel	Pig	Rhino
One row incisors			○	○		○	○	○
Two rows incisors	●	●			●			
Hoofed			+	+	+	+	+	+
Single-hoofed					●			
Double-hoofed			○	○		○	○	
Triple-hoofed								+
Five nails	●	●						
Two horns			+	+				
One horn								+
No horns	+	+			+	+	+	
Carnivore	●	●						
Herbivore			○	○	○	○	○	○
Village	●				●	●	●	
Farm			○					
Forest		○		○			○	○

● = Prohibited ○ = Permitted

class have two rows of incisor teeth, but unlike the former they have hooves rather than nailed paws. Like their cousins in the farm and the field (*paśu*), they have hoofs, but unlike the former, their hooves are whole and unparted and they have two sets of incisor teeth. Interestingly, the edible farm animal has double

hoofs (*dviśapha*) and a single row of incisors (*anyatodat*)—2+1, a pattern reversed in the single-hoofed animal, which has single hooves (*ekaśapha*) and a double row of incisors (*ubhayatodat*)—1+2. Unlike the former, the latter do not have horns, a characteristic they share with the five-nailed animals. Finally, this class includes only two species—the horse and the ass, with the mule as a cross—and has no wild counterparts.²⁷ The camel is another anomalous animal, and it is singled out for explicit prohibition. In the Leviticus it is singled out because, although it is cloven-footed it does not part the hoof. This feature of the camel’s anatomy is passed over in silence by the Indian texts; it is taken to be a full representative of the class with double-hoofs and one row of incisor teeth.²⁸ As such it falls squarely within the edible class. But it is anomalous in that it is not a farm animal but lives in the village, and, like the horse and ass, it is also used exclusively for transport. Again like the horse and the ass, and unlike its double-hoofed cousins, it also has no horns. The camel falls into Tambiah’s (1969, 451) Proposition 3: ‘An animal that is placed in a class because it shares certain dominant properties of that class may yet be seen as exceptional or anomalous and therefore ambiguous as food or inedible (even if other members of its class are edible) if it shares one or more characteristics with animals of another class which carries strong values and is considered inedible.’ As a transport animal living in the village and possibly near the house (see below 3.2.2), the camel shares characteristics with the inedible single-hoofed class of horse and ass. Besides the camel, the village pig and the village fowl are the two other animals singled out for prohibition. The pig fulfills all the requirements of the edible class; it is double-hoofed (*dviśapha*) and has a single row of incisors (*anyatodat*). The fowl belongs to the ed-

²⁷ Hunn (1979, 109) makes a similar argument for the anomalous status of the hyrax, hare, camel, and pig within the Hebrew taxonomy. They are all sole representatives of their classes within the Middle East. There is a wild ass in India, but it is limited in range to the deserts of the Rann of Cutch and Baluchistan (Prater 1997, 227). The animal is not noted in the ancient Indian texts.

²⁸ Although camels have two incisor teeth on the upper jaw, the Dharma texts regularly include it within the category of animals with one row of incisor teeth (*anyatodat*). Camels and donkeys, furthermore, were probably associated with lower classes. Brahmins, for example, are forbidden to ride in a cart drawn by a donkey or a camel: *Mānava Dharmaśāstra* 11.202.

ible class of scatterers (*viṣkīra*). Both species, however, have two varieties, the one living in villages and the other inhabiting forests. The former become anomalous because of habitat and fall under the category of forbidden animals. These animals, when they invade the human habitat of the village, fall into Tambiah's (1969, 450) Proposition 2: 'An unaffiliated animal, if it is seen as capable of leaving its location or habitat and invading a location or habitat of primary value to man, will be the focus of strong attitudes expressed in the forms of (1) a food taboo and (2) a bad omen or inauspicious sign.' In the Indian case, however, even affiliated animals become the focus of such attention when they invade human space.

Conversely, the anomalous is also a feature of animals that are permitted, even though they belong to categories that are forbidden. The five five-nailed animals (*pañca pañcanakbāh*) offer the classic example. The five animals are: porcupine, hedgehog, hare, tortoise, and monitor lizard (*śvāvidh*, *śalyaka*, *śaśa*, *kacchapa*, *godhā*).²⁹ Why are these five singled out as edible when other five-nailed animals are forbidden? Even making allowance for the artificiality of the alliterative *pañca pañcanakbāh*, there must be something that makes this group both distinctive and different from other five-nailed animals. Zimmermann (1987, 174) has given a plausible answer; both *Caraka* and *Suśruta* list all but the tortoise among animals living in burrows (*bileśaya*, *bhūmiśaya*). The tortoise and the monitor lizard are actually reptiles laying eggs, and distinguished from the mammals that are the most common five-nailed animals. Although I have used the term tortoise to translate the two Sanskrit words *kacchapa* and *kūrma* used in our sources,³⁰ the Sanskrit can refer to both the land dwelling tortoise and the aquatic turtle. The turtle in particular would have been viewed as anomalous within the five-nailed class of land dwelling carnivores. The tortoise/turtle also lack teeth, having only horny plates; thus it does not fall within the broad category of animals with two rows of incisors (*ubhayatodat*) to which all other five-nailed animals be-

²⁹ As Zimmerman (1987, 174) has noted, the first two Sanskrit terms, *śvāvidh* and *śalyaka*, are ambiguous; both can refer to porcupine, hedgehog, or pangolin.

³⁰ Āpastamba, Gautama, Bauddhāyana, Vasiṣṭha, and Yājñavalkya use *kacchapa*. Only Manu uses *kūrma*. It is unclear what, if any, distinction was conveyed by the two terms.

long. Four animals of the group, moreover, are herbivores,³¹ whereas the five-nailed as a class is regarded as carnivorous. In their diet, habitat, and, in the case of some, anatomy, these animals breach the boundaries of the category to which they belong.

That the singling out of the anomalous reinforces the categorical boundaries it violates is exemplified in the way legal texts explain the injunctive force of the oft-repeated rule: ‘The five five-nailed should be eaten’ (*pañca pañcanakḥāḥ bhakṣyāḥ*). They consider this rule to fall into the category of *parisaṃkhyāvidhi* developed in the exegetical tradition of Mīmāṃsā. Rules of *parisaṃkhyāvidhi* are actually negative or exclusionary rules presented in the garb of a positive injunction. Such an injunction states explicitly: ‘Do Y among X’, but what it actually means to say is: ‘Do not do X, excepting Y’, where Y is a sub-category of X. Thus when the rule says ‘The five five-nailed should be eaten’, what it means to say is ‘No five-nailed animal, except the five, may be eaten.’ The intent behind such an interpretation is that no one is obliged to eat even these five five-nailed animals, which would be the result if the rule was interpreted literally. Singling them out is intended solely to reinforce the prohibition of the five-nailed class.

The rhinoceros is even a greater anomaly. It is neither single- nor double-hoofed but triple-hoofed, the only animal in India to have this feature. Although it falls into the category of odd-toed animals (Perissodactyla) just as the forbidden five-nailed class, it has only one set of incisor teeth. It has not two but only a single horn, again a unique feature in India that has drawn a lot of attention in religious writings.³² It also wanders alone and thus falls into the prohibited category of solitary animals. In the legal texts, the rhinoceros is listed frequently

³¹ The monitor lizard (*Varanus bengalensis*) is a carnivor, although it is unclear whether the ancient Indians were familiar with its feeding habits. On the monitor, see W. Auffenberg, *The Bengal Monitor*. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1994.

³² For example, the very ancient Buddhist text *Khaṅgavisaṅgasutta* of the *Suttanipāṭa*. For an examination of a folk tale involving the rhinoceros and masculinity, see William S. Sax, ‘Fathers, Sons, and Rhinoceroses: Masculinity and Violence in the *Pāṇḍav Līlā*,’ *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 117 (1997): 278–93.

with the five five-nailed animals as exceptions to the prohibition of the five-nailed class, even though it does not have five nails.³³

I think Zimmerman (1987, 183) is correct in assuming that the rhino's meat was consumed primarily within the ritual context of an ancestral offering. Clearly, the rhino was not an animal that one could have for dinner on a regular basis. I am not aware of any evidence from ancient India that the rhino or its horn was viewed as an aphrodisiac, although one cannot discount the possibility that this widespread Asian belief may have been present also in India.³⁴ It is evident, however, that symbols of fertility are prominent in ancestral rituals. In most Dharma texts rhino meat is recommended as the preeminent food at an ancestral offering. These texts list the length of time that the ancestors will be satisfied with specific kinds of food, and they are unanimous in stating that when rhino meat is offered the satisfaction of the ancestors lasts for ever.³⁵

3. ANALYSIS OF ANIMAL PROHIBITIONS

I want to turn now to the social significance of the regulations regarding permitted and forbidden animals. The works of Edmund Leach, Mary Douglas, Stanley Tambiah, and others, even if one takes exception to some aspects of their arguments or conclusions, have demonstrated an unmistakable link between animal prohibitions in a given society and the symbolic worlds relating to the cosmos and society created by that society. In the case of the Hebrews and their dietary regulations in the Leviticus, Mary Douglas relates the animal prohibitions to their central cosmogonic narrative which depicts god as setting boundaries to land, water, and air:

To grasp this scheme we need to go back to Genesis and the creation. Here a

³³ For possible historical and linguistic reasons for the inclusion of the rhinoceros within this group, see Jamison 1998.

³⁴ Caraka (1.27.84) says that rhino meat is *balakrt* ('giving strength'), where strength may well include sexual potency. Suśruta (1.46.53) gives longevity as a characteristic of rhino meat.

³⁵ Āpastamba 2.17.1; Gautama 15.15; Manu 3.272; Yājñavalkya 1.260; Viṣṇu 80.14. The skin and horn of rhinos were also used in ancestral rites.

three-fold classification unfolds, divided between the earth, the waters, and the firmament. Leviticus takes up this scheme and allots to each element its proper kind of animal life. In the firmament two-legged fowls fly with wings. In the water scaly fish swim with fins. On the earth four-legged animals hop, jump, or walk. Any class of creatures which is not equipped for the right kind of locomotion in its element is contrary to holiness.³⁶

Animal prohibitions relate in a special way to individuals with whom sexual relationships and marriage alliances are forbidden. Lévi-Strauss (1966, 104) has formulated a conviction shared by many that ‘there is an empirical connection between marriage rules and eating prohibitions,’ a view reiterated by Leach (1964, 42–43): ‘it is thus a plausible hypothesis that the way in which animals are categorized with regard to edibility will have some correspondence to the way in which human beings are categorized with regard to sex relations.’

3.1. *The ancient Indian cosmos*

Given the complexities of ancient Indian cosmogonies and cosmologies, I want to limit myself here to some of their features that might have a bearing on dietary regulations. A theory that closely relates the cosmic process of rebirth to human diet is the famous doctrine of the five fires (*pañcāgnividya*) expounded in several

³⁶ Douglas 1966, 55. Hunn (1979, 104), who has attempted to integrate ecological and thus materialist principles into the explanation, supports Douglas’s argument: ‘Symbolic anthropologists rightly reject piecemeal explanations which seek to explain each animal’s role by reference either to “etic” properties of the particular animal or its material impact on the human society involved. A different explanatory principle might need to be invoked for each animal. The assertion that pigs are prohibited as food because they may pose a threat of trichinosis is a familiar example. Not only are such approaches logically inelegant, they fail to provide an explanation for cultural variation, since immutable characteristics of the organism are cited by way of explanation. They explain too little and they explain too much: too little in their restricted application to only one, or a small set, among the species prohibited, too much in their implied universal applicability.’ I agree with Hunn that it is impossible and unnecessary to integrate every food prohibition into an overarching model. Different explanatory models, even materialistic and ecological ones, may be applicable in specific cases, as we see in the Indian examples.

vedic texts.³⁷ According to this doctrine, a dead person rises up as the smoke of cremation, goes to the heavenly worlds of the sun and the moon, and returns in the form of rain. The rain water is absorbed by plants, and when these are eaten by a man they are transformed into semen and deposited in a woman to take a new birth. This rebirth theory takes into account only the eating of vegetables, which is here the paradigmatic ‘food’; meat eating is outside its purview.

In the case of vegetables, we have seen that there are very few dietary restrictions. Restrictions increase as we go up the food chain. We detect what could be called a ‘bottom line’ in these restrictions: all land animals, birds, and fish that eat other animals rather than vegetables are strictly forbidden. Thus, when we go beyond the vegetable kingdom, the paradigmatic food is the meat of vegetarian animals.³⁸

Unlike the Hebrews, then, in India it is not a question of whether a particular species has the physical characteristics specific to its habitat, but whether it participates in the specific characteristics of paradigmatic ‘food’: vegetables or vegetarian animals.³⁹

The other significant aspect of Indian cosmology is the division of the land into village (*grāma*) and wilderness (*araṇya*). The distinction of animals along these lines, we have seen, is already noted in the most famous account of cosmogony, the Puruṣasūkta. In the dietary regulations, animals and birds of the village (*grāmya*) fall under a blanket prohibition. We have noted that ‘village’ animals within these

³⁷ The classical formulation is found in *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 6.2.9–16; *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 5.4–10. For further details, see H. W. Bodewitz, ‘The *Pañcāgnividyā* and the *Pitryāna|Devayāna*.’ *Studies on Indology: Professor Mukunda Madhava Sharma Felicitation Volume*, ed. A. K. Goswami and D. Chutia, pp. 51–57 (Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1996); L. Schmithausen, ‘Zur Textgeschichte der *Pañcāgnividyā*.’ *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens*, 38 (1994): 43–60; P. Olivelle, ‘Young Śvetaketu: A Literary Study of an Upaniṣadic Story,’ *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 119 (1999): 46–70.

³⁸ The medical texts, however, take a very different stand. Not only do they assume that carnivorous animals are eaten, they also give the medical and dietary properties of each and even call such meat the most nourishing. Zimmermann 1982, 159–79.

³⁹ At least animals *perceived* as vegetarian, because it would have been difficult for ancient Indians to have an accurate understanding of a particular animal’s diet, especially in the case of wild animals. Indeed, vedic ideology views carnivores as ‘eaters’ and the herbivores as ‘food’.

rules are distinguished from ‘farm’ animals, which are the vegetarian animals providing the paradigmatic non-vegetarian food. This geographical divide provides a map of edible animals: they live in the field or the wild, not in the village.

Taken together, these two principles are at the root of dietary regulations and underlie the rationale for the classification of animals. Five-nailed animals with two rows of teeth identify all the carnivores, the paradigmatic ‘eaters’ that are ‘non-food’, whereas the double-hoofed animals with a single row of incisor teeth identify the herbivores, the paradigmatic ‘food’ that are ‘non-eaters’. The anomalous single-hoofed category comprehend solely animals whose habitat is the village. When such classifications fail to exclude a particular animal, then they are singled out. So we have the double-hoofed camel singled out because its habitat is the village; the double-hoofed pig is also single out, because it is forbidden if its habitat is the village and permitted if it is wild. I think the old classification of birds into scatterers (*viṣkīra*) and peckers (*pratuda*) also points to an attempt at generalizing vegetarian birds. By contrast, the web-footed birds, besides breaching the divide between air and water, are viewed as carnivores by nature. Here also particular birds, such as fowls, are singled out, because although they are edible because of their feeding habits, they become inedible if their habitat happens to be the village.

3.2. *Diet and society*

The connection between animal prohibitions and marriage regulations, a principle articulated by Lévi-Strauss, is never explicitly drawn in the Indian legal texts or by their commentators. Such connections, if they exist, fall into what Mary Douglas has termed ‘implicit meanings’.

What is explicit in the texts, from the earliest vedic literature down to the legal texts, is the close parallel Indian thinkers have drawn between eating and power. Eating, for them, was a metaphor for the exercise of social power, control, and exploitation. This has been amply demonstrated by Brian Smith (1990). The vedic texts repeatedly call the Brahmins and especially the Kṣatriyas—that is, the unified upper crust of society consisting of the priestly and political powers—the eaters, and the Vaiśyas and the Śūdras—that is, the commoner and working classes, including slaves—the food. The *Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad* (2.9) contains this petition:

The Brahmin is one mouth of yours [i.e., of the creator god Prajāpati]; with that

mouth you eat the kings. Make me a food-eater with that mouth. The king is one mouth of yours; with that mouth you eat the Vaiśyas. Make me a food-eater with that mouth.⁴⁰

In the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* (7.29) we see social hierarchy described from a Kṣatriya viewpoint: a Brahmin is a seeker of food, to be moved at will; a Vaiśya is a tributary to another, eaten by another, oppressed at will; and a Śūdra is the servant of another, removed at will, to be slain at will. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (13.2.9.6–8) compares the common people to the vagina and the royal power to the penis, the people to the corn and the royal power to the deer, juxtaposing nicely the acts of sexual and dietary dominance. This social fact of the higher and the powerful eating the lower and the weak is expressed in the well-known maxim of the fish (*matsyanyāya*), where the big fish eat the small fish. Manu (5.29) articulates this ecological principle well: ‘The immobile are food for the mobile; the fangless for the fanged; the handless for the handed; and the timid for the brave.’⁴¹

Regulations pertaining to marriage reflect, I believe, a similar ideology of hierarchy and power. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (1.3.8.5–6) calls the husband the eater and the wife the one to be eaten; the wife is the husband’s food. The legal texts permit a man to marry women only from groups hierarchically lower than his own. Here we encounter possibly the most significant principle of Dharmaśāstric classification: the rule of *anuloma* and *pratiloma*. Literally, ‘along the hair’ and ‘against the hair’, paralleling the English ‘with the grain’ and ‘against the grain’, the rule establishes the legitimate and illegitimate directions of sexual relationships. When the male is hierarchically superior to the female, the union is *anuloma* and legitimate, whereas the opposite is *pratiloma* and illegitimate. Thus, for example, a Brahmin male may marry, besides a Brahmin woman, also women of the three lower classes, whereas a Kṣatriya male may marry only from his own

⁴⁰ *brāhmaṇas ta ekaṃ mukhaṃ tena mukhena rājño 'tsi tena mukhena mām annādaṃ kuru | rājā ta ekaṃ mukhaṃ tena mukhena viśo 'tsi tena mukhena mām annādaṃ kuru |*

⁴¹ *carāṇām annam acarā daṃṣṭriṇām apy adaṃṣṭriṇaḥ | abastās ca sabastānām śūrāṇām caiva bhīrvaḥ ||* This maxim of the fish is also invoked to legitimize the institution of kingship, because without a king ‘the stronger would grill the weak like fish on a spit’ (Manu 7.20).

and from the two lower classes; he may not marry a Brahmin woman. Anthropological studies of both north and south India confirm the practice of hypergamy prescribed in the textual tradition. You eat your inferiors both in socio-political relations and in marriage alliances. Giving a girl in marriage is a public statement that the groom's family is socially superior to one's own.⁴²

Let me, then, present a hypothesis about food prohibitions within Brahmanical ideology that correlates them first to the power structures of society and second to marriage regulations.

3.2.1. *Dietary regulations and social hierarchy*

The first is the easier to establish. Animals with two rows of incisor teeth and with five nails in each paw are considered to be eaters, being mostly carnivorous, and animals with cloven hoofs are considered to be food. The former are identified with the eating classes of society, namely Brahmins and Kṣatriyas, and the latter with the paradigmatic food, namely the Vaiśyas and by extension other lower classes. A vedic text makes this connection explicit: 'Plants and trees are food and animals are food-eaters, for animals eat plants and trees. Among these [animals], those that have a double set of incisor teeth and are established as belonging to the same class as humans are food-eaters, other animals (*paśu*) are food. Therefore, the former somehow surpasses the other animals, for the eater is somehow superior to the food' (*Aitareya ,raṇyaka* 2.3.1).⁴³ We can relate this to social reality when we recognize that the paradigmatic *paśu*, which in its restrictive sense refers to cloven-footed farm animals, is the goat; in all likelihood in ancient India as today, goat was the most common meat. Within vedic classificatory systems, moreover, the goat is closely associated with the Vaiśya (Smith

⁴² Harmon (1985) has noted with reference to South India that Śaivites present Śiva as marrying Viṣṇu's sister and thus as his brother-in-law, establishing an implicit superiority of Śiva, the wife-taker, over Viṣṇu, the wife-giver.

⁴³ *oṣadbivanaspatyo 'nnaṃ prāṇabrto 'nnādam oṣadbivanaspatin hi prāṇabrto 'danti | teṣāṃ ya ubhaytodantāḥ puruṣasyānuvidhā vibitās te 'nnādā annam itare paśavas tasmāt ta itarān paśūn adbiva carantī adbiva hy anne 'nnādo bhavati*. A similar thought is expressed in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (3.7.3.1–6) where the two-footed humans are seen as eaters and the four-footed as food.

1994, 270–73). Indeed, farm animals as a class are connected with the Vaiśya in that it is he who is their customary herdsman.⁴⁴

The horse, a single-hoofed animal with two sets of incisors falling squarely into the forbidden category, on the other hand, is the Kṣatriya animal par excellence. More generally, the ‘eaters’ with two rows of incisors and five-nailed paws, are identified with the social ‘eaters’, the powerful upper classes of society.

3.2.2. *Diet, sex, and marriage*

When we come to the marriage regulations, however, the picture becomes more complex and perhaps more interesting and significant.

We can identify five broad categories of potential sexual partners who fall within the regulatory system presented in the legal texts, from groups closest to the Self or Ego to those who are farthest; in the columns of Chart 4A, we move from the closer to the farther as we from left to right. The first group I will call *sayoni*, those sharing the same womb; but I include here individuals from the same family. In an extended family, these would include grandparents, parents, siblings, brothers- and sisters-in-law, and the like.⁴⁵ These form a single unit sharing home, rituals, and property. Marriage or sex among members of this group is strictly forbidden; sex within this group is viewed as the most grievous

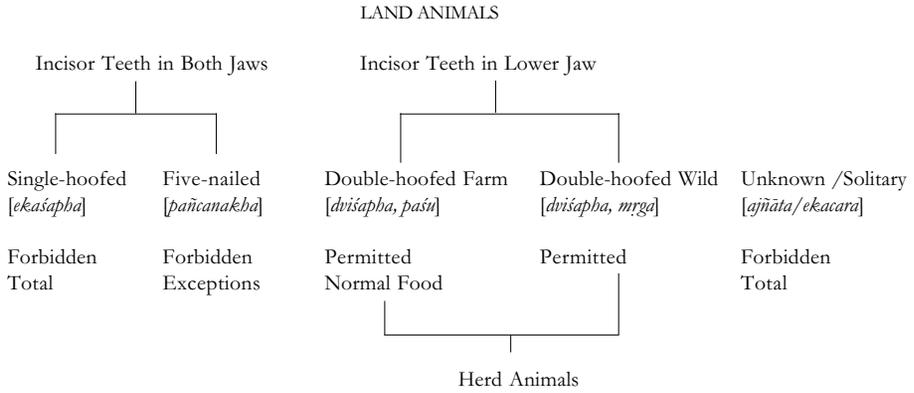
⁴⁴ Both farm animals and Vaiśyas share the characteristic of the ‘many’. Brian Smith (1994, 271) says: ‘Goats and sheep are animals that herd together, and it would seem to be partly their aggregation and numbers which lead to a connection between them and the Vaishya qualities of earthly abundance (*bhūman*) and material increase (*puṣṭi*).... The two species are said elsewhere to be the beasts which are “most manifestly” like the prolific creator god Prajāpati, in that “they bear young three times a year and produce two [offspring] three times [per year]” (*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 4.5.5.6, 9).’ Indeed, as Smith (1994, 270) observes, all the double-hoofed animals—cow, goat, and sheep—are connected with Vaiśyas. Manu (9.328), moreover, enjoins the Vaiśya: ‘“I don’t want to look after farm animals”—a Vaiśya should never entertain such a wish, and when there is a willing Vaiśya, under no circumstances shall anyone else look after them.’

⁴⁵ Clearly sex between father and mother is permitted, because before marriage they did not belong to this group of forbidden persons. The prohibition is between siblings, between parents and children, and in an extended household, between father-in-law and daughter-in-law, and between brother-in-law and sister-in-law.

Chart 4A. Marriage regulations

Family [<i>śayana</i>]	Relatives [<i>śapinda/sagotra</i>]	Group Members [<i>śavarna/śajāti</i>]	Non-Group Members [<i>asavarna/asajāti</i>]	Outsiders [<i>antya</i>]
Forbidden Total	Forbidden Exceptions	Permitted Ideal	Permitted	Forbidden Total

Chart 4B. Food regulations



Village
[*grāmya*]

Carnivores
[*kravyād*]

Camel
Village Pig

BIRDS

Village [<i>grāmya</i>]	Carnivores [<i>kravyād</i>]	Scatterers/Peckers [<i>viśkira/pratuda</i>]	Unknown /Solitary [<i>ajñāta/ekacara</i>]
Village Fowl	Web-footed [<i>śālapadā</i>]		Nocturnal [<i>nakṣara</i>]
Forbidden Total	Forbidden Exceptions	Permitted Normal Food	Forbidden Total

MILK

Cow, Goat
Buffalo

of sins, one that causes loss of caste (*pātaka*). Next comes a somewhat ill-defined and elastic group of individuals who are closely related to the father or the mother and who fall under the categories of *sapiṇḍa* and *sagoṭra*.⁴⁶ Marriage among members of this group is prohibited, but this prohibition is not absolute and there are significant exceptions. In the south, for example, cross-cousin marriage is permitted. The exact extension of these relationships, moreover, has been a matter of controversy. From the third group, occupying the middle and consisting of individuals not closely related yet belonging to one's own class or caste, come the ideal marriage partners. Beyond this group are those belonging to social classes other than one's own. Hypergamous marriage and sexual union with such individuals are permitted. The final group constitutes the fringes of society and includes a variety of outcastes, tribals, and foreigners (*mleccha*). Some legal texts label these groups collectively as *antya* or lowest; at least in the older legal texts Śūdras do not fall into this group.⁴⁷ We thus have total prohibitions at the two extremes of this spectrum—the closest and the farthest from the Ego—with the middle providing the most suitable marriage partners.

Animal prohibitions present a much more complex picture. There are multiple and overlapping categories, as we have seen, some based on habitat and diet and others on dental and foot structures.

Nevertheless, I think we can detect a correlation between animal categories and social groups within the contexts of diet and marriage (see Chart 4B). Animals with two rows of incisors, we have seen, are viewed as eaters and not as food. This broad group contains two divisions based on foot structure: those with five-nailed paws and those with undivided hoofs. Of these two, the single-hoofed, we have noted, is an anomalous class. We can draw a parallel between the forbidden single-hoofed class and the immediate family within which

⁴⁶ For information on these two kinds of kinsmen, see Kane 1962–75, II: 452–500.

⁴⁷ Marriage with Śūdra women is explicitly permitted. Significantly, the *Arthaśāstra* (3.13.1–3) lists Śūdra among Āryas, who were not subject to slavery, distinguishing him from Mlecchas, who were.

sex amounts to incest. Within both groups no exceptions are permitted⁴⁸ and both are quite restricted groups. All animals of the single-hoofed class live in the village. Further, it is most likely that these animals, used for transportation and carriage, actually resided adjacent to the owners's house;⁴⁹ they were members of the family.⁵⁰ It is this characteristic, we have noted, that makes the authors single out the camel as prohibited. Although it falls under the edible classes because of both foot and dental structures, it nevertheless lives in the village and probably near the home. These animals are also trained in a way other animals are not. They are *vinīta*, subject to *vinaya*, or the rules of training and good behavior, parallel to the rules to which humans are subject.⁵¹

All animals and birds grouped under 'village' (*grāmya*) also come under a blanket prohibition; they can never be eaten. Eating the village fowl and the village pig, for example, are singled out as particularly abominable; these are anomalous in that, though they fall into the categories of scattering birds and two-hoofed animals that can be eaten, they happen to have the village as their habitat.

Broadly then, we have two competing and overlapping criteria in animal classification, the one based on habitat and the other on anatomy. The imagined geography of ancient Indians can be viewed as consisting of concentric and ever widening circles emanating from the center, which is the village. Surrounding the village are the cultivated fields; beyond them are the pasture lands; then the forest. Even the forest, as Zimmerman (1987, 50) has noted, was probably differentiated; the deer and the antelope (*mrga*), the double-hoofed object of the hunt, oc-

⁴⁸ The horse is, of course, an exception within the context of the vedic horse sacrifice. But this is never explicitly mentioned in the dietary regulations. Manu (5.11) appears to allow for some exceptions, but this is a problematic verse and there is no explicit mention of the horse.

⁴⁹ The well-known *Hitopadeśa* story of the dog and the ass during a robbery illustrates this point (Book 2, Story 2). The dog refused to awaken the master because he has not been well fed; so the ass attempts to awaken the master. This story illustrates the fact that the ass was kept near the house.

⁵⁰ Tambiah (1969) also draws a parallel between animals that live under the house and persons with whom marriage is not permitted.

⁵¹ To some degree the draught ox also is trained, but I think their participation in the farm-animal group defines their status with regard to edibility.

cupied 'humanized' areas, sometimes even game reserves (*mrgavana*) for the royal hunt, whereas the deep dreaded forest was inhabited by vicious animals. We can see these circles emanating from the center, the Self/family in terms of marriage and the village in terms of food, where eating and marrying are totally forbidden. In the pasture lands and the deer fields live the edible animals, corresponding to the close and distant groups with which marriage alliances are permitted.

The five-nailed animals with two rows of incisor teeth in a special way represent 'us'; humans also belong to this group (see *Aitareya Āraṇyaka* 2.3.1 cited above). Significantly, however, some animals belonging to this group are permitted, such as the group of five. Here we have a prohibition with limitations, paralleling the marriage prohibition within the somewhat elastic boundaries of *sapinda* and *sagotra*, which also represents 'us' in the sense of a kin group.⁵²

Within Brāhmanical ideology, the paradigmatic food is the farm animal, technically called *paśu*. It has double-hoofs and a single row of incisor teeth. These animals live neither in the wilderness nor in the village; they occupy the ideal not-too-distant and not-too-far geography of the farm and pasture land, paralleling individuals of one's own class or caste who are not closely related. These represent the 'other', best for eating and for marrying.

The double-hoofed farm animals have their wild counterparts, which are also permitted. Just as there is a blanket prohibition of village animals and birds, so there is a generic permission to eat wild animals and birds, so long as they fall within the permitted categories in terms of teeth, hoofs, and diet. When we eliminate the five-nailed and carnivorous animals, then, we are left with the Artiodactyla family encompassing wild oxen, sheep, goats, deer, antelopes, and hogs. These wild counterparts of farm animals are permitted, but it is clear that they do not constitute the normal or the normative meat; such wild animals, for example, are not *medhya* or fit to be sacrificed. Here we have, I think, a parallel to the third category of marriage partners, those from other classes or castes. They

⁵² One common feature of prohibited categories, whether single-hoofed or five-nailed, is that they do not have horns, whereas all the permitted categories, both farm and wild, have a pair of horns. This is a feature, however, that is passed over in silence in our sources.

are not ideal, normative, or normal; but they are (sometimes grudgingly) permitted.⁵³

Finally, we come to the fringe groups of society, the *antya*, with whom marriage alliances are forbidden. These groups find parallels in several categories of prohibited animals that belong to the fringes of the classificatory systems.⁵⁴ First, there are the unknown (*ajñāta*) animals, which are forbidden because their classification is unknown or dubious. Clearly, such animals belong to the wild category; it is unlikely that village or farm animals could have been categorized as unknown. Then there are the animals and birds that wander alone (*ekacara*) rather than in herds; these are also forbidden. It has been noted repeatedly that in traditional societies, and especially in India, marriage is not a union between two individuals but an alliance between two families or clans. One does not marry a person or eat an animal that lives alone and unattached to a larger group or herd.⁵⁵

CONCLUSIONS

The anomalous, when singled out for special attention, affirms and reinforces the normative categories. Animals normatively and normally fall into two broad categories: the *eaters* having incisor teeth in both jaws and five nails in each paw,

⁵³ Indeed, a Brahmin husband is forbidden to employ a wife from another class as his ritual partner in sacrifices. Such wives are also, in a sense, *amedhya*, unfit to participate in the ritual.

⁵⁴ Although the dog is not singled out in the lists of prohibited animals, it is viewed with particular abhorrence in Brahmanaical literature. Its close association with the Cāṇḍāla in lists of diverse kinds appear to connect them also with the fringe groups of society.

⁵⁵ The parallels to marriage restrictions in the case of birds, and especially fish, are more difficult to draw. By and large, I think, several of the criteria for the prohibition of birds and perhaps fish are drawn from those pertaining to land animals. Given the scope of this paper, however, I will not deal with regulations with respect to birds, fish, or milk. I agree with Hunn, however, in his criticism of Mary Douglas, that a comprehensive theory with regard to all food restrictions in a given society is not only impossible but perhaps undesirable. We must allow for the probability, that several criteria, including medical and ecological, may play a part in these regulations.

and the *food* having a single row of incisor teeth and double hoofs in each foot; the former are meat eaters, the latter are grass eaters; the former eat the latter. As the many tragic endings of double-hoofed animals in the *Pañcatantra*, the Indian book of animal tales, exemplify, there can be no friendship, no close social intercourse between grass-eaters and meat-eaters, between the eaters and the food. Marriage, however, appears to be quite a different matter; it is not so much a friendship as a consumption. At the broadest level, then, it is across these dividing lines that eating and marrying alike take place.

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