Derailing White Revolution

What is the issue?

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The gau raksha activism is actually derailing the benefits of India's white revolution.

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How much of India's milk today comes from cows?

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- Out of a total production of 132.64 million tonnes (mt) in 2013-14, excluding milk from goats, 70.44 mt — or 53% — was accounted for by buffaloes.
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- The balance 62.19 mt — or 47% — was from cows.
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- Even within the 62.19 mt, the share of crossbreds — cows containing genetic material of 'western' breeds like Holstein Friesian, Jersey and Brown Swiss — was 33.89 mt.
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- Indigenous cattle contributed 28.31 mt, or just over a fifth of India's bovine milk output.
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Can indiscriminate slaughter lead to the reduction in cattle population?

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- It is the other way round.
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- Slaughter bans make it difficult for farmers to dispose of unproductive animals that are giving less milk, or happen to be male.
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- Since these curbs apply only on cattle and not buffaloes — whose meat can be sold and exported freely — farmers prefer rearing the latter.
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- The fact that **buffalo milk fetches better prices due to its higher fat (about 7%) and solids-not-fat (9%) content** — as against 3.5% and 8.5%, respectively for cow milk — further reinforces this preference.
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But how important really is ease of disposal of non-milking animals for the dairy farmer?

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- A typical crossbred cow will deliver its first calf and start producing milk at 27-28 months. Farmers usually don’t keep a cow beyond 5-6 calvings, when milk yields plummet and the returns do not justify the costs of feeding and maintenance.
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- By this time, the animal would be 7-8 years old and still has another 5-6 years to live.
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- The farmer will obviously want to, then, sell.
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- And the only interested buyer here would be the butcher or the trader supplying to slaughterhouses.
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Why can’t he take the animal to a gaushala or pinjrapole (cattle shelters)?

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- A dairy farmer who has, say, 20 cows would seek to replace 5-6 old animals with new stock every year.
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- **Regular herd turnover — disposal of cows past their productive age and induction of fresh milch cattle — is what ensures a certain minimum level of milk sales round the year.**
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- Now, assuming a desired annual herd turnover or replacement rate of

25%, this requirement clearly cannot be met by cow shelters.
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- Even taking 6 lakh animals in all the shelters of Gujarat, they are a fraction of the state's 99.84 lakh cattle population, as per the 2012 Livestock Census.
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- While more such homes could plausibly be built, the question arises: Wouldn't government money be better spent on schools and hospitals than gaushalas?
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So, is culling or selective slaughter the only solution?

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- It is, perhaps, the only sustainable solution. Farmers today keep cows only for milk.
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- By guaranteeing a market for unproductive cattle, the butcher is actually providing a valuable service to the dairy farmer.
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To what extent will laws like the latest one in Gujarat — providing life sentence for cow slaughter and 10-year term for transportation, storage or sale of beef — spoil this seemingly symbiotic relationship?

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- Tough anti-slaughter laws — and, equally important, governments and gau rakshaks determined to implement them — will most certainly throw cattle traders, transporters and butchers out of business.
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- But it would also render **cattle rearing increasingly unviable in some states that produce over 56% of the country's milk.**
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- In the long run, milk output can increase only through commercial dairying, wherein farmers keep at least 20 animals that are mostly crossbred cows.
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- This has been the trend even in Gujarat, where average herd sizes are going up and dairying is no longer a subsidiary occupation to regular crop agriculture.
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- Gau rakshak activism of the kind seen now has the potential to undermine the gains from the White Revolution and the move to commercial dairying.
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Source: Indian Express

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