

What's your beef with my freedom to eat it?

Bans on eating beef and pork are contested in India. Manav Bhushan discusses why this is an issue of caste discrimination and can be seen as a restriction on freedom of expression.



Hindus believe cows are holy and Muslims consider pork “haram” (forbidden). Both are staple foods for India’s lower caste Dalits who consider recent [bans](#) on beef in [some states](#) a result of caste prejudice and a restriction of their fundamental right to free expression. In April 2012 some students at Osmania University in Hyderabad started a [campaign](#) to allow beef to be served in their university canteen. Members of rightwing student groups met their initiative with stiff opposition and [violence](#). Yet the Dalit campaign [spread](#) to Jawaharlal Nehru University, which has been a bastion of leftwing student politics for decades.

Both political opinion and court verdicts have taken an increasingly conservative view on the subject of cow and bovine slaughter in recent years. Mainstream political parties and even India’s supreme court have [welcomed](#) and upheld restrictions imposed by state governments. Along with caste and religion, the debate over cow slaughter has class dimensions. The renowned academic Praful Bidwai has [argued](#): “the absence of beef will raise the food bill for the underprivileged”. The

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freedom to eat what you want is thus very sensitive, and its future appears more uncertain than ever before.

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