

Keeping clean and healthy with cow dung and urine

March 2 2010, by Rupam Jain Nair

"God resides in cow dung," says Kesari Gumat, as he walks through his laboratory where researchers mix bovine excreta with medicinal herbs and monitor beakers of simmering cow urine.

The lab in the western Indian city of Ahmedabad is one of a growing number of research centres which have embraced the sacred status of cows in India and sought to push it to a new level.

Promoting the practical alongside the spiritual, they have developed a line of dung- and urine-based medicines which they say can cure a whole herd of ailments from bad breath to cancer.

"These formulas are not new," Gumat said. "They are contained in ancient Hindu holy texts. We are just making them with a scientific approach."

The raw materials are generated on site from more than 300 cows which roam the compound housing the centre.

Visitors must remove shoes and socks before entering and brave a barefoot walk across a carpet of semi-soft dung drying in the sunlight.

"Walking on fresh cowdung is very healthy," Gumat insisted. "It kills all the germs and bacteria and heals wounds. And dry cowdung is a great scrub to get rid of dead skin and improve [blood circulation](#)."

The list of derivative applications is, according to Gumat, an extremely lengthy one, stretching beyond medicines to toiletries like soap, shampoo and toothpaste, as well as incense sticks and mosquito coils.

The products have been applauded by Hindu nationalist groups, the largest of which, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), unveiled its own urine-based soft drink last year as a "healthy" alternative to Coke and Pepsi.

"Gau Jal," or "cow water" was developed at the RSS Cow Protection Department, a research facility in the northern city of Haridwar on the banks of the holy river Ganges.

"This will end the market for carbonated fizzy drinks," predicted the facility's bullish director Om Prakash.

Gau Jal is currently awaiting government approval. In the meantime Prakash said his team was focusing on packaging, marketing, and preservation -- to prevent the drink spoiling in India's summer heat.

Cows are sacred to India's huge Hindu majority, precluding them from eating beef, but the animals' bodily waste falls into the same acceptable category as dairy products.

The dung is generally dried for over a week, then blended at a very high temperature to kill all harmful bacteria and germs. The final product, a dung powder, is mixed with variety of ingredients to make the medicines and toiletries.

The urine meanwhile is distilled to remove any impurities.

Raghav Gandhi, who heads the cow nutrition department at another research centre in Ahmedabad, stressed that the process begins long

before the waste is harvested.

"It might seem that all we do is collect cow excreta to make medicines but it is not so easy," Gandhi told AFP.

"We have to serve the cow on a minute-to-minute basis," said Gandhi who personally feeds his charges on grass dipped in milk, herbs with unrefined cane sugar and water containing essential salts.

He also sings to them.

"It's simple," Gandhi said. "What they eat is what they release. [Cow dung](#) stores all the vital nutrients and minerals. The urine is blessed with disinfectant properties."

Mainstream doctors are divided about the medical benefits, with some pointing out that the curative claims have never been validated by independent bodies.

But others see no harm in patients consuming a product that they believe is helping them.

"I've read about the benefits of cow urine and dung," said Mayur Patel, an oncologist working at the Gujarat State Cancer Research Centre.

"My patients take it and I allow them to do so. It's an alternative form of medicine and it has no negative effects," Patel said.

Ahmedabad housewife Nila Parmar, 42, has been kickstarting her day with a shot of cow urine for years, and she has no doubts about its efficacy.

"Trust me. I tried allopathy and homeopathy to cure my liver disease but

nothing worked," she told AFP.

"I kept changing doctors for over two years but it's gau mutra ([cow](#) urine) that did the trick."

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