



Yorkton Film Festival

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MAD COW SACRED COW

Karma Films

Category: Best of Saskatchewan

Running Time: 53:24

Saskatchewan filmmaker, Anand Ramayya, has an interesting approach to filmmaking. He often goes on somewhat introspective journeys while letting us, the viewers, tag along.

Ramayya used the approach to good effect in his 2004 release *Cosmic Current*, and is back at it with *Mad Cow Sacred Cow*.

This time Ramayya, a man of Indian descent who was born and raised in Canada, explores how he grew up eating and enjoying beef. Yet in India, the cow has long been viewed as sacred.

The birth of the filmmaker's first child sets off the journey as he begins to consider the safety of food against the back drop of the Mad Cow Disease scare.

To Ramayya's credit, he launches into the film with no preconceived notion of where the story will take him. That is a good thing considering many hold very entrenched views on food safety and how livestock should be raised.

Along the way the information provided favours a system more based on small-scale operations and less beholden to mega multinational companies. However, Ramayya does a nice job of justifying the view. The camera takes the viewer from cattle operations in Southern Saskatchewan to the simple agrarian system in India. Not only is the cow believed sacred in India, but it is considered the heart of the farm economy, providing food by way of milk, energy by pulling the plow, and fertilizer with its manure.

Whether a cattle producer in Saskatchewan or India, what becomes rather clear is that the ability to carve out a living gets ever more difficult. Yet big business beyond the farm gate, from processor to fast food hamburger chains, seem to be doing quite well. Meanwhile there is increasing concern about food safety, even though small farmers still tend to do the things they have long done.

Ramayya lays out the story. He talks to common farmers, noted politicians and academics. The facts presented, as defined by those interviewed, are there for the viewer to digest. To the filmmaker's credit no conclusion is blatantly crammed down our throats. He leaves us to draw from the film what we will.

Being with Ramayya on his journey while being allowed to decide for ourselves what we think of the current beef and agriculture system is what makes *Mad Cow Sacred Cow* a compelling viewing.

By Calvin Daniels