

India's Sacred Cow: Her Plight and Future

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India's sacred cow is embedded in an economic, religious, religious and political morass. Her plight is a tragic consequence of many forces, from overpopulation to modernization, the outcome of which depends upon upon the path that India chooses to take as it becomes a player in the global marketplace. The spirituality of compassion is a boundless ethic that is the cornerstone of a truly equalitarian society that gives all of its members, human and nonhuman, equal and fair consideration. This is the challenge and the solution for all countries whose economic wealth is in part determined by the humane and sustainable utilization of animal and plant life, and for India in particular. All Indians, regardless of caste and creed, have a long history that links them with a sense of gratitude and reverence for cows. And it is this linkage that can move all to transcend their differences and become unified in their respect and commitment to enhance the health, welfare and protection of all cows and their offspring.

Introduction

India has the largest concentration of livestock in the world, having one-third of the world's cattle on approximately 3 percent of

the world's land area.¹ India is the world's second largest milk producer, with over half its milk coming from buffalo. Seventy-six percent of Indian people are rural, living in some 600,000 villages. The economic and social values of cattle are so great that cattle have long been seen as religious symbols and are regarded as sacred.

According to Professor N.S. Ramaswamy², two-thirds of cultivated land is ploughed by cattle and buffalo, and by hauling freight they save India some 6 million tons of diesel fuel annually. Dr. R.K. Pillar³ estimates that about 67 percent of all rural transportation is provided by bullock carts and that some 15 million bullock carts are in operation (2 million urban and 13 million in rural areas). In India's villages today, one can see the close relationship between cattle and their owners who have high regard for their animals as individuals, as vital family-providers, if not also actual family members. Hence the strong resistance to killing and eating such close animal allies. But this symbiotic alliance is breaking down as larger modern dairies are established and animals' individuality is lost, and as venture capitalists purchase bullocks and carts to be rented out, or leased to individuals who are complete strangers to the animals, and who have no emotional or economic interest in them.

Sadly, India's sustainable pastoral communities have become almost a thing of the past. There is not enough land for all to share. The combined effects of population growth, rural poverty, and ecological illiteracy have had devastating environmental and socio-economic consequences. Abandoned cattle wander everywhere searching for food, along with other cattle whose urban families are landless. Many are hit by traffic or develop serious internal injuries from consuming plastic bags, wire, and other trash.

India's cattle are extraordinary. They are beautiful. Some bulls are quite awesome. Many are colonial cross-breeds, half Holstein or Jersey. These are subject to more abuse in many ways than the hard working indigenous breeds that will soon become extinct if India goes the way of Western industrial agriculture and sacrifices its rural people and relatively self-reliant communities on the altar of 'progress'. These European cows suffer more because they are less able to cope with the climate and diseases to

¹ D.O. Lodrick, *Sacred Cows, Sacred Places* (University of California Press, Berkeley, California, 1979).

² 'Cruelty to animals', *Cartman Journal*, 1/2, (1988), p.18.

³ 'Modernization of bullock carts', *Cartman Journal*, 2/9, (1989), p.18.

which local breeds have acquired much resistance over thousands of years. When European cows' productive lives are over and they are turned out to graze, they may starve to death because having been stall-fed their entire lives, they don't know how to forage for themselves.

These formerly high-yielding dairy cows are also less able to digest much of the food they are given in the cow shelters. Their hardier native sisters do better and some are rehabilitated. The beautiful and productive herd of white cows that I saw in Jaipur were all rehabilitated in the regional gowshala. But these cows were being bred in order to give milk, and so, as the nation's herd increases, so does the suffering. India's 'white revolution' to help rural people make money with milk cows entails offering low-interest loans to purchase a milk cow. More cows mean more milk and lower milk prices and more starving male cows whose mother's milk is needed to pay off the government loan.

This 'white revolution' began in 1970, a nationwide dairy cooperative scheme called 'Operation Flood' that was initiated to increase milk production. The World Bank and the World Food Program provided most of the funds, but this scheme has caused many problems.⁴ Less grain and lands are available to feed people since more are diverted to feed dairy cattle owned by the rich. Also, fodder prices have increased, creating difficulties for poorer cattle owners and landless cattle owners.

India now has so many cattle, according to Professor Ram Kumar of the India Veterinary Council, that there is only sufficient feed for sixty percent of the cattle population. This means that of an estimated 300 million calves, bulls, and bullocks, some 120 million of these animals, especially in arid regions, and elsewhere during the dry season and droughts when fodder is scarce, are either starving or chronically malnourished.

This tragic situation is made worse by the taboo in most states against killing cattle, either for food, for population control, or even for humane reasons. While Moslem, Christian, and other Indians eat meat (buffalo, sheep, and goats, whose slaughter is permitted) the majority of Indians are Hindus, for many of whom the killing of cattle and eating of beef is unthinkable because this species is regarded as the most sacred of all creatures.

⁴R. Crolty, *Cattle, Economics and Development* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1980).

Cow Worship

Cow and bull worship was a common practice in many parts of the world, beginning in Mesopotamia around 6,000 B.C. and spreading to Northwestern India with the invasion of the Indus Valley in the second millennium B.C. by Aryan nomadic pastoralists who established the Vedic religion. What is remarkable is that such worship has persisted uniquely in India to the present day. Deryck Lodrick⁵ in his book *Sacred Cows, Sacred Places* concludes that revulsion against sacrifice, the economic usefulness of cattle and religious symbolism were factors contributing to the formulation of the sacred cow doctrine, but it was ahimsa (the principle of non-violence/non-harming) that provided the moral and ethical compulsion for the doctrine's widespread acceptance in later Indian religious thought and social behavior.

India can be seen as two nations in one: a majority of Hindus, for whom vegetarianism is linked to caste and ritual purity; and the meat-eating Moslems, who are seen as unclean and their touch polluting. Moslems regard Hindu worship of temple images heathen and immoral and their democratic views contrast with the caste system of Hindus. The elite abstain from eating meat. Yet in spite of their differences, they are still united in their opposition to slaughter modernization. From an ecological viewpoint and an economic one, Hindus and Moslems are highly complementary when it comes to cattle. One eats the male calves while the other takes the calves' milk.

Cow protection has become a highly politicized core of the Hindu religion. What was once a compassionate, symbiotic human-animal bond linked with virtuous behavior (personal purity) that brought with it such principles as ahimsa and vegetarianism for Hindus, and for Moslems the ritual codes of animal sacrifice that helped affirm community and family ties, now also serve political ends.

The consequence is much pointless animal suffering. As spirituality and ethics need to be rescued from religion, so India's sacred cow needs to be liberated from politics and anthropocentrism.

⁵Lodrick, *Sacred Cows, Sacred Places*.

The belief that certain beings and things are 'unclean' takes many twists and turns in India's mixed Hindu, Moslem and animistic tribal communities. The notion of being defiled or unclean is linked with certain religious totems and taboos, and with a person's caste and desire to maintain a socially prescribed degree of purity. Thus, orthodox Hindus, and especially Jains, would never make their homes impure by cooking meat for whatever dogs and cats they might have. Cats and dogs in Moslem households are generally healthier since they are not expected to live on rice and milk, but are given meat, eggs and fish by those who can afford it. But since dogs are considered unclean by orthodox Moslems, they are not allowed into the house, and physical contact with them is generally avoided.

These observations are not meant in any way to disparage these religious traditions but rather to point out how religious beliefs, totems, and taboos have a profound influence on the human-animal bond and on the health and welfare of not only cattle, but of other domestic animals. Religious beliefs that ultimately contradict nature's reality and which see the nature of other creatures as unclean or immoral, become life-negating rather than life-affirming, and cause great harm.⁶

Cattle Welfare Concerns

Because of a seasonal and regional lack of fodder (and water), and because of overstocking and overgrazing, many cattle suffer from chronic malnutrition. This in turn weakens their immune systems and makes them susceptible to parasitic infestations and other diseases. Large numbers of poorly nourished cattle create a potent medium for outbreaks of infectious diseases which necessitate costly vaccinations, which are too often ineffectual due to inadequate refrigeration, and other contagious disease control programs. The widespread notions that you only give fodder for a cow who is giving milk and deprive unwanted male calves of adequate milk only make matters worse.

There is also the widespread belief that there is no real cattle surplus, and that India would do better with even more cattle because their organic

⁶For further discussion, see M. W. Fox *The Boundless Circle: Caring for Creatures and Creation* (Quest Books, Wheaton, Illinois, 1996).

manure is so valuable to agriculture. The environmental damage in some regions from overgrazing is especially caused by 'scrub' cattle that are kept simply as manure-makers before they are driven to slaughter or die. Their sad existence in semi-starvation, often also chronically sick, will continue without mass public education and government assistance. The overall cattle population must be reduced; and health and productivity enhanced through genetic improvement, and by better nutrition by establishing emergency fodder banks and sources of water to see them through the dry seasons; and alternative sources of income provided for farmers who are reliant upon cattle manure as a major product, as by raising milk-goats and producing more fodder.

According to *India Today* (January 11, 1996), 'As long ago as 1955, an expert committee on cattle said in its report: "The scientific development of cattle means the culling of useless animals...by banning slaughter...the worthless animals will multiply and deprive the more productive animals of any chance of development."'

Ecologist Professor Paul Shepard asserts, 'One anthropologist wrote a long article defending the sacred cow on "ecological" grounds as a consumer of weeds and plant materials that otherwise went to waste....This is a flagrant but familiar abuse of the concept of ecology as maximum use instead of a complex, stable, biocentric community. If the sacred cow in India were not a manure and milk producer, its protection might diminish quickly. In any case, the celebration of maximizing of grazing/browsing/scavenging as a kind of vernacular wisdom is a form of cow-towing to the subequatorial Third World and exhibition of modern blindness to the ecology of the soil, its invertebrate and plant associations, as a truly productive environment.'⁷

Seeing the increasing desertification of pasture lands caused by overgrazing, and cattle having less and less grazing land as good land is put under cultivation, environmentalist Valmik Thapar foresees that if the cattle problem is not soon corrected, 'Finally there will be a clash because

⁷ P.Shepard, *The Others. How Animals Make Us Human* (Island Press, New York, 1996), pp 346-47. **Note:** Shepard is referring to anthropologist Marvin Harris, who argued in his book *Cannibals and Kings: The Origins of Cultures* (Vintage Books, New York,1991) that the Hindu Brahmins who once supervised the slaughter of cattle prohibited such killing for food in times of drought and food scarcity because people would not have any bullocks left to plough the land once the monsoons returned.

the land mass of the country can't sustain the growing human and animal population. Then the question will arise as to who is going to eat. Man or cow?'⁸(India Today, January 11, 1996)

Cattle Shelters

The first animal shelters in India began with the advent of Buddhism, to whom King Ashoka (269-232 BC) converted. Ashoka ruled over much of the Indian subcontinent, converting millions to accept Buddhism, and was the first to set up pinjrapoles and animal hospitals, although some historians believe that Buddha himself was the first to do so. Ashoka put compassion into action, by caring for animals in need, and into the law also, setting up wildlife preserves and punishments for those who abused and killed animals.

India now has thousands of gowshalas and pinjrapoles where as many as several hundred sick and injured cattle, spent milk cows, unwanted male calves, and broken bullocks formerly used for draft work are kept until they die. In 1955, a government census indicated that there were 3,000 such refuges in India, maintaining some 600,000 cattle and thousands of other animals from deer and dogs to camels and cats.

Gowshalas and pinjrapoles are located throughout India and are supported by taxes and charitable donations from the business community. Gowshalas are refuges for cattle, often linked with the Hindu cult of Krishna, while pinjrapoles serve as a refuge for a more diverse animal population, including birds, other wild animals, and even insects and microorganisms in collected piles of household dust.

Not all regions of India have sufficient cow shelters. They are most prevalent in northern and western India with very few in central regions like Orissa and Andhra Pradesh and in the southern states of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. These regional differences, according to Lodrick, may be due to the dominant influence of Aryan (Vedic) traditions in the North, and the older Dravidian cultures in the south. Pinjrapoles are mostly concentrated in Gujarat. Their spread to other regions are linked to the

⁸ *India Today*, January 11, 1996.

movement of Gujarati Jains (called Marwaris) who set up businesses in other states. Community and temple pinjrapoles in many regions were also established by the Marwaris and that explains why most gowshalas and pinjrapoles are located in urban areas. Many smaller cow shelters suffer from limited funding and public support. But there are some well funded regional ones in Gujarat and Assam, and in cities like Bombay and Calcutta according to Lodrick, that rehabilitate and breed animals to produce milk and make draught and milk animals available to the community. Some temple gowshalas and pinjrapoles located at popular Hindu pilgrimage sites are also well funded by donations given by devotees for darsan (cow worship).

Even though Indians know that the buffalo is a better quality milk producer than most varieties of cows, buffaloes are rarely found in gowshalas because they are considered unclean and not worthy of the same respect as cows.

As part of the Indian government's five-year plan during 1951-1956, state, rather than community-funded, cow shelters called 'gosadans' were set up as an alternative to slaughter to deal with the many problems from disease and suffering to competition for grazing and crop damage of ownerless, discarded cattle. Each gosadan was set up to harvest manure and process dead cattle into fertilizer and leather.

Pinjrapoles, gowshalas and gosadans represent a merging of religious and economic sensibilities, the sacred and the secular, that make eminent sense within the nexus of Indian society. In times of severe drought and famine, they also serve as emergency shelters for villagers' animals.

Regrettably, the gosadan scheme, though endorsed in subsequent five-year plans, never took hold, suffering from poor management, lack of funds and community support. Political support was divided since many felt that funds would be better spent on increasing the usefulness of productive cattle and in developing intensive dairy operations. The Gowshala Development Scheme implemented in the 1957-1961 five-year plan to provide subsidies to improve existing gowshalas were more successful during some periods than others since their implementation. Funding provided by the government has not, however, been sufficient to bring many gowshalas and pinjrapoles up from being mere holding facilities for dying animals and death-camps when animals starve to death for lack of

adequate food. The chronic seasonal shortage of fodder for productive animals in the community seals their fate. Providing funds to purchase feed for animals in pinjrapoles and gowshalas at such times, as I have experienced, causes social friction and antagonism when people lack the resources to feed their own productive animals.

The prevailing view that such a fate of starvation is better than having cattle defiled by the butcher's knife, does little to encourage local public support. Levying a tax on milk, hides, manure, bone and meat meal fertilizer, and taking a percent of the profits from wholesalers of these cattle products to help defray the costs of running a gowshala that serves the community, is the kind of initiative that is needed, but which politics in many regions would preclude. Bone meal from urban cattle who live in high density traffic areas, where leaded gasoline is used, becomes potentially toxic with accumulated lead.

According to Lodrick's study, all gowshalas that keep dry cows and cattle that cannot be rehabilitated for draught work, operate at a deficit. Attempts to make them more productive are not likely to significantly reduce this deficit and so without adequate community and government funding, as is the case throughout much of India, cattle suffer a fate surely worse than the butcher's knife.

The antipathy toward cattle slaughter can have absurd and cruel consequences. For example, according to the *Indian Express* (Coimbatore, February 25, 1997), local authorities 'tied up a huge wild bull on the rampage'. It was decided to auction off the creature for slaughter, which fetched much opposition from the devout. Someone killed the bull with some poison during the night to 'save it from being defiled by the butcher's knife'.

In spite of the excellent research, scholarship, and dedicated field work visiting animal shelters throughout India, Lodrick says nothing about the suffering of cattle in gowshalas or of other species in pinjrapoles. Lodrick sees, in spite of their economic inefficiencies, gowshalas and pinjrapoles persisting in India because cows are held to be sacred and because of the principle of ahimsa that prohibits killing, even for humane reasons. This prohibition is motivated less by compassion than by the belief that to kill is to make oneself impure. So rather than defile themselves by so doing, orthodox Jains and Hindus may inadvertently cause unnecessary and

prolonged suffering to animals who should be euthanized. While this principle of ahimsa has many virtues, its historical validity and context has changed as India has become more populated and multicultural (with many meat-eating Christians, Moslems, Westernized Hindu businessmen and tourists). Indian hotels import beef from Australia, which a devout young Hindu waiter in Bangalore told me filled him with shame when he had to serve it. His sensibility is to be respected, but the suffering of India's sick and starving cattle needs to be acknowledged by all of India.

Cattle Death Drives

Millions of old, spent cows, exhausted bullocks, and young male calves are driven on foot up to 300 miles, or are crammed into trucks for transit into Kerala, or in railroad cars to West Bengal where their slaughter is legal. Their often bleeding, worn down hooves make hardly any sound as they pass by. Veterinarian Dr. Ghanshyam Sharma from Sikkim, in the Northeast of India where cow slaughter is also legal, sees cattle coming in from Jamma, Kashmir, Bihar, and Nepal. He observes, 'Often entire hooves of these animals are snuffed out and gunny bags are tied around the wounded stumps and this way they walk.'⁹ Many sustain injuries being loaded and off-loaded during part of the journey or die in transit. Some collapse on the way, are beaten, and even have salt and hot chillies rubbed into their eyes and have their tails hammered, twisted, and broken to make them get up and keep walking. Some of those being transported get trampled and suffocate, or have an eye gouged out by another's horn. Water and fodder are rarely provided during their long journeys, and even at rest stops. An estimated one million cattle are taken every year into Kerala from other southern states to be slaughtered.¹⁰

Journalist Subhashini Raghavan, in his expose of these cattle death marches, found a complex network of middlemen traders, 'who are callused by constant exposure to cruelty' and they develop the attitude that 'if an animal is slotted for slaughter, it ceases to be a living being with pain, hunger and terror.' Raghavan found that vast numbers of cattle are made to walk hundreds of miles through pedestrian sideroads to escape

⁹Quotation from *The Hindu*, (April 16, 1995), article entitled 'The March of the Doomed'.

¹⁰ *India Today*, (January 11, 1996).

checkpoints, en route to regional markets from local markets and then on to transfer points where they may then be put into trucks. He concludes his article stating that, 'throughout the length and breadth of this birthplace of Ahimsa, the tragic march of the condemned continues unabated -- a poignant symbol of our callousness, in even denying the last comforts and dignity of those who lived their lives serving us.'¹¹

Cattle shelters -- gowshalas and pinjrapoles -- cannot possibly absorb all the unwanted cows, calves, and bullocks, since the cattle population is constantly increasing because a cow must have a calf to produce milk. The ecological damage of overstocking, overgrazing, and of millions of low-yielding milk cows and 'manure' cattle is turning some parts of India into desert, devoid of trees, topsoil, and wildlife. India's 40 million sheep, 120 million goats, 60 million buffalo, and expanding human population now estimated at 930 million, further compound this environmental devastation.

Cattle Slaughter

Belief in ahimsa (not harming) and in aghnya (not killing) possibly arose as a reaction against the Vedic religion and social order that sanctified animal slaughter, the Brahmans being the highest priestly caste that supervised the killing.

Between the eighth and sixth centuries BC a new wave of philosophical treatises emerged that included references to ahimsa, and also reincarnation and karma, that were not included in the Vedas. These treatises along with the emergence of the religious traditions Buddhism and Jainism that espoused ahimsa, were a challenge to orthodox Hinduism and may have led to the Brahmans prohibiting cow slaughter and promoting ahimsa. Yet still today thousands of animals -- buffalo, sheep, and goats especially -- are slaughtered in Hindu temples.

India is unique in having a specific provision in the Constitution against cow slaughter. Article 48 under the Directive Principles stipulates that the government must take proper steps to prevent cow slaughter. But as will be shown, this provision can jeopardize cow protection and welfare.

¹¹'The March of the Doomed'.

Except in West Bengal and Kerala, where cattle slaughter is permitted, the Cow Slaughter Act prohibits the killing of cattle under 16 years of age. The penalty for illegal slaughter of cattle is rigorous imprisonment for two years and a fine. Article 48 of the Constitution of India, Part IV, Directive Principles of State Policy, Article 48--Organization of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry, says: 'The State shall endeavour to organize agriculture and animal husbandry on modern and scientific lines and shall, in particular, take steps for preserving and improving the breeds and prohibiting the slaughter, of cows and calves and other milch and draught cattle'.

India does not want her cattle to suffer, and there is much guilt and denial. I was told that one top Indian environmental attorney said, 'There is definitely no cow slaughter in India because it is prohibited.'. I reminded him about the cruel cattle drives into Kerala and West Bengal, where cow slaughter is not illegal. But illegal slaughter of cattle is widespread, even in the nation's capital, Delhi, in backyards where there is no sanitation or meat inspection. That night I showed him a rough cut of my 22-minute video documentary *India's Animals: The Sacred and The Suffering*, and he sat there and wept.

According to one government study, 50 percent of small animal slaughtering and 70 percent of large animal slaughtering is illegal, taking place in clandestine facilities where there is no supervision of hygiene, animal welfare, or meat safety inspection.¹²

Of the 3,600 licensed abattoirs in India, only two are mechanized and hygienic, and these are facing strong public opposition.¹³

Other livestock like chickens, pigs, sheep, goats, and buffalo also suffer hardship and many diseases, but there are no prohibitions against their slaughter for human consumption or for humane reasons. To kill an injured or dying cow for humane reasons, one must first obtain a veterinary certificate, which is difficult and costly for remote rural farmers who rarely see a veterinarian, and not worth the bother for most passersby who may see a cow injured by the roadside. People who care for animals feel that

¹²*Report of the Expert Committee on Development of the Meat Industry* (Ministry of Agriculture and Co-operation, New Delhi, 1987)

¹³ *India Today*, (January 11, 1996).

nothing can be done when the local police are indifferent to animal cruelty and neglect. When there is no SPCA or Blue Cross animal shelter, or any means to transport injured and sick cows to receive proper care, and when euthanasia cannot be easily undertaken, cattle become the victims of religious sentiment in collision with reality. How can the authorities allow such animal suffering to continue, in violation of its own constitution? Article 51-A (g) of the Constitution of India states, 'It shall be the fundamental duty of every citizen of India to protect and improve the natural environment...and to have compassion for all living creatures.'. This is not in keeping with the predominantly religious sentiment that interprets compassion for living creatures as 'rescuing' cows and other abandoned cattle from slaughter and putting them into death camps where they starve to death or die slowly from infections and parasites.

The Euthanasia Question

Catholic nun Mother Teresa was known worldwide for her hospices for India's dying street people. Humanitarians would never contemplate euthanizing these people, and on the surface there is no difference between her hospices for dying humans and cattle shelters. Since there is so little food and basic resources for close to one billion people and 200-300 million cattle, the suffering of millions will continue unless, and until, the human and animal populations are reduced to the levels that can be adequately fed and cared for. In the interim India needs more human hospices and shelters for all domestic animals. Euthanasia to end intractable suffering is a bioethical imperative that should be endorsed by both religious and secular authorities.

Euthanasia of suffering animals, according to the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, is allowed if 'it would be cruel to keep the animal alive' but only if the court, other suitable persons or police officers above the rank of the constable concur. Because of the religious opposition to euthanasia, even of dying animals in severe pain, there is no legal requirement that the owner of such an animal should have it killed. Many orthodox Hindus and Jains oppose the killing of animals for any reason because they feel it is wrong to interfere in any way with another's karma or destiny. It would seem that the doctrine of ahimsa as it relates to the treatment of cattle has been corrupted to serve the interests of social status, caste distinctions and

politics, since lower Hindu castes, tribal peoples and non-Hindus (and non-Jains) do kill and consume cattle and other animals, be they healthy or in a condition that calls for immediate euthanasia.

Indians have reasoned with me that killing a sick cow is like killing your own mother and that is unthinkable. But would Indians put their own mothers into death camps where they will starve to death because what little food is available is reserved for those who are healthy and can work?

Many point out the parallel between gowshalas and Mother Teresa's hospices for the poor and dying people whom she rescued from the streets, to let death come with peace and dignity. But the analogy breaks down when one looks at the numbers: cattle and other animals are in the hundreds of thousands in shelters, far too many for most communities to even provide the most basics of humane care.

Because of religious prejudice, predominantly cattle and not buffalo or abandoned draught animals that no one will eat, like donkeys, ponies and horses, are taken into shelters. Sheep, goats, pigs, calves and buffalo are usually slaughtered and consumed by low caste Hindus, tribals, Christians, and Moslems (who eschew pork). But this is not to say that India is lacking animal shelters for such animals and also for abandoned camels, dogs, cats and injured wildlife, especially monkeys that sometimes survive accidental electrocution. The Animal Welfare Board of India, the chronically understaffed and underfunded government agency without any power to enforce animal protection laws, does help subsidize local Blue Cross and SPCA animal shelters and hospitals but without more support from the central government and from foreign animal protection organizations, the plight of India's animals will worsen as the human population increases and resources become ever more scarce and costly.

Vegetarianism, Religion and Politics

Vegetarianism in India, like ahimsa, has as much, if not more, to do with concerns about reincarnation, one's personal degree of purity, and place in society than with concern for animals. The Hindu and Jain sect taboo against killing animals has more to do with personal purity and caste than with the principles of ahimsa and aghyanya (non-killing). In the currency of

spiritual merit and advancement, dissociation from being involved in the slaughter of cattle and other animals for consumption leads to vegetarianism. But it is not total vegetarianism, since dairy products are consumed by most Hindus and Jains. Few are pure vegan (eating no animal products). Some Jains have agreed with me that to be consistent with their religious beliefs and with the ecological and economic dictates of the current situation, veganism is an ethical imperative. Abstaining from all dairy products would be more consistent with the principle of ahimsa that they hold so dear, than 'saving' spent dairy cows, calves and bullocks from slaughter and condemning them to slow death by starvation in gowshalas or pinjrapoles.

Yet it is in Jainism that the principle of ahimsa was first espoused, most notably is Mahavira (599-527 BC), a contemporary of Buddha, although earlier Jain leaders (tirthankaras) well before the time of Buddha, like Parsvanatha (circa 840 BC), renounced the world and established an ascetic community that practiced ahimsa. Some contemporary Jains get around the problem of ahimsa by becoming land owners and having others do the farming, clearing the land and killing wild creatures, ploughing the land and killing worms, and using all manner of pesticides.

Jainism reached its peak between the 5th to 13th centuries AD, spreading across much of India, then was superseded by Hinduism and Islam following the invasion of the subcontinent by the Moguls in the 11th century. Moslems killed and ate cattle, which was anathema to the non-tribal, upper castes of Hindu society. Cow protection and worship then gained political importance and popularity in opposition to Moslem rule and influence. Hindus and Jains will confide today that it is better to put a calf in a gowshala than have a Moslem eat it.

Cow protection became a political icon for Hindus in their conflicts with Moslems and also when under British rule. Moslems settled in India around the 13th century and can trace their roots to Mogul pastoralists and Arab-Islamic values. Their ritual slaughter of buffalo, sheep and goats is looked down on by Hindus, some castes of which, nonetheless, eat meat. According to Srinivas, the whole Brahmanic caste is vegetarian. Of the non-vegetarian castes, fish-eaters look down on those who eat goats and sheep,

who in turn look down on eaters of poultry and pigs, who look down on beef-eaters.¹⁴

Moslems, under British rule, fought successfully to have their religious freedom of ritual slaughter upheld. The British wanted pre-slaughter stunning for humane reasons, but this was not part of sacrificial ritual slaughter under Islamic law. Pre-slaughter stunning eliminates the need to cast the animal onto the ground prior to having its throat cut, thus eliminating much fear associated with being cast.

For Mohandas Gandhi, cow protection was an important aspect of Indian independence from British colonial rule, figuring in the return to traditional values. He wrote:

The central fact of Hinduism is cow protection. Cow protection to me is one of the most wonderful phenomenon [sic] in human evolution. It takes the human being beyond his species. The cow to me means the entire subhuman world. Man through the cow is enjoined to realize his identity with all that lives....Protection of the cow means the protection of the whole dumb creation of God....Cow protection is the gift of Hinduism to the world. And Hinduism will live as long as there are Hindus to protect the cow. Hindus will be judged not by their *tilaks*, not by the correct chanting of *mantras*, not by their pilgrimages, not by their most punctilious observance of caste rules but by their ability to protect the cow.¹⁵

In spite of the fact that the doctrine of ahimsa was advanced some 500 years BC by the Seventh Jain Saint Mahavira, and that Ashoka, influenced by Buddhism, was the first to build animal shelters in his kingdom (around 250 BC), Srinivas believes that humanitarianism (or what I would call compassion without self-interest) is a Western value. It is a value embodying concern for all human beings irrespective of caste, religion, age, sex and economic position; and for all beings irrespective of species, economic, religious or other human-centered value.

¹⁴M.N. Srinivas, *Social Changes in Modern India*. (University of California Press, Los Angeles, 1968).

¹⁵M. K. Gandhi, *How to Serve the Cow* (Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1954), pp.3-4.

Lodrick, in reviewing this history of animal care and shelters in India, concludes that, 'Buddhism, although the major vehicle for the spread of the ahimsa concept throughout India and indeed throughout much of Asia, never carried the doctrine to the extremes of Jainism. In Buddhist thinking, ahimsa became a positive adjunct to moral conduct stemming from the cardinal virtue of compassion, rather than the all-encompassing negative principle of non-activity of the Jains.'¹⁶

This inference by Lodrick, an Indian himself, may help explain the lack of compassion I have witnessed in a Jain-operated pinjrapole in the Nilgiris, South India, where cattle and other animals were saved from slaughter but allowed to starve to death or die from injuries and diseases that could have been easily treated. This is a point of concern since most pinjrapoles and gowshalas are funded and managed by Jains.

Humanitarian concerns over animal slaughter and attempts to modernize slaughtering facilities to make them more humane, sanitary, less wasteful and causing less pollution have been opposed by both Moslems and Hindus for religious and political reasons. Moslems see it as threatening their religious freedom (by the adoption of pre-slaughter stunning) and many Hindus see slaughter modernization as a threat to traditional values, totems, taboos, and even national identity and security.

Such opposition is reminiscent of the Hindu cow protection movement that arose in opposition to British rule and the proposed slaughter of cattle as part and parcel of economic development and modernization. Now under the pressures of trade liberalization and an emerging global market economy that is being pushed by the World Trade Organization, efforts to modernize livestock slaughter are being renewed; and opposition intensifies.

But in the name of ahimsa and compassion, animal slaughter in India is in urgent need of improvement. It is indeed tragic that religious and political factors should become obstacles to progress in animal welfare and protection in this modern day, and especially ironic since one would expect religious values and democratic principles to advance rather than obstruct such progress.

¹⁶ Lodrick, *Sacred Cows, Sacred Places*.

Social, Economic and Ethical Perspectives

India is urbanizing faster than any other country, and urban centers include a diversity of people and beliefs. Since the majority believe that it is unethical and sacrilegious to eat meat, especially beef and veal, those who do eat meat surely have a social and moral obligation to advocate for the development and adoption of more humane ways of slaughtering animals for local consumption than are currently being practiced.

Humane methods of livestock transportation, handling, pre-slaughter stunning and actual killing are long overdue. The flesh and other body parts of animals should be treated with respect since they are part of that which many should regard as sacred. Regardless of the potential risk to consumers, therefore, unsanitary conditions in slaughterhouses might then be seen as gross disrespect, a sacrilege.

India should consider prohibiting the importation of meat and other animal products from other countries that are using cruel, intensive methods of meat, dairy, and egg production -- so-called factory farming. Even if such prohibition were to be in violation of GATT and judged illegal by the World Trade Organization, an ethical reason for refusing certain imports could set a significant precedent for other countries to follow. Likewise, the adoption of such intensive, factory production systems in India as a production base for transnational corporations like McDonald's, Kentucky Fried Chicken, and Domino's Pizza should be opposed on all fronts.

The Indian veterinary profession needs to have full government support for developing the livestock and poultry sectors not primarily to produce meat for export and urban consumption, but to integrate livestock and poultry with ecologically sound and sustainable, humane and organic (chemical-free) crop and fodder production: and in the process enable the rural poor to become more self-reliant. It is unwise economically and ecologically, and also socially unjust, to raise any species of farm animal in India (or in any other country for that matter) primarily for meat. More meat for the rich means less bread or grains for the poor. A major goal should be to reduce the overall livestock population to facilitate ecological restoration. Increasing the productivity and health of milk cows and goats through selective breeding and husbandry improvements also needs more concerted and effective attention and financing. Meat from male offspring and non-productive females ought to be a by-product rather than a primary

product, and either be consumed locally or marketed to the meat-consuming sectors. The tempting rationale to raise livestock and poultry for their meat to supply urban markets and for export to gain foreign exchange revenue -- a rationale being vigorously promoted by multinational banks and transnational corporations as the way to prosperity for India and other developing countries - must be resisted, because it is not sustainable, even in the developed world.

Western influences and values (where cattle are simply valued in terms of economics) and attempts to modernize the Indian economy and social structure, have turned the 'Sacred Cow' into a symbol of conflicted values between religion and reality. But as one Hindu friend told me, Hindu worship of the goddess of wealth, Lakshmi, and the belief in material wealth (artha) as one of the roads to salvation, contradict the Western view that India's 'spiritualistic' values exclude Western materialistic values and thus limit India's hopes of economic modernization.

The flaw in the principle of ahimsa, when it takes precedence over compassion is that it becomes a contradiction. By excluding compassion from ahimsa and refusing to accept humane killing of incurably sick, injured and suffering animals, the principle of ahimsa is violated. The reason for this is purely selfish (ie., to avoid defiling oneself by defiling the animal in taking its life). This aspect of India's 'sacred cow complex' cannot be subject to the light of cool reason and compassion when broached to orthodox Jains and Hindus. After all, it is against the law. Though many will accept that the economic inefficiencies of India's livestock and dairy industries are in large part due to the dilemma as to what to do with millions of nonproductive cattle that compete with productive animals for feed, water, and veterinary care, and are short-changed for economic reasons, the resistance to killing nonproductive cattle who are suffering, or have no feed, results in great suffering.

Some Solutions: Eating with Conscience

Why not reduce all this suffering by reducing the cow population? The 'white' revolution of Operation Flood was aimed at stemming a bloody red revolution by loaning cows to the poor. It should have been a green revolution, not a revolution on the backs of the poor cows. The

revolutionary solutions require religious sanction and political agreement. Otherwise the collision between religion and reality will obliterate the last of India's pastoral heritage, and economic and social fabric. As I see it, most Hindus and Jains should become vegan -- consume no dairy products -- because a vast and expanding human population, in relying upon dairy products as a dietary staple, needs so many dairy cows. Each cow must become pregnant every other year in order to produce milk, and so much suffering results, especially to unwanted male calves and to cows when their productive lives are over.

It is incomprehensible to me that for reasons of law, Constitution, and religious doctrine, cows cannot be slaughtered legally in most states and so they starve to death, wander the streets and beg for food. Sometimes they may have an eye bludgeoned out or be hacked with a machete by an angry vegetable merchant for trying to get some of his produce. It is also incomprehensible to me that unwanted male calves are starved of milk. They sicken, spread disease, and suffer terribly. The most rugged survivors are castrated and turned into beasts of burden. Then when their productive lives are finished, they go to shelters along with the spent dry cows, to produce a little manure that is not worth enough to buy sufficient fodder, especially during the dry season. They die, often ravaged by disease or almost mummified by starvation and dehydration.

There are very few death camps for India's horses, camels, and donkeys, and none that I know of for pigs, sheep, goats, or buffalo. They are eaten. Why should cows suffer more just because of their high value in the religious currency of the culture? Is it unrealistic to suggest that those more affluent Indians who can afford to choose what they eat become vegan, eschewing all animal products, including dairy, in order to accord with the Constitutional right of their cows that is so widely violated, as well as the Constitutional duty of all citizens to improve the natural environment -- and have compassion for all living things? Much animal suffering would be reduced if more Indians 'eat with conscience' knowing that all animal produce they consume comes from animals treated humanely through their entire lives, and ideally from ecologically sound organic farming systems. Ironically, because of high pesticide residues, including DDT, the milk from India's cows is not acceptable for export to the west, according to Devinder Sharma.¹⁷ Hindus and Jains who endeavour to live by the principle of

¹⁷Nationally, it's not the milky way. *The Indian Express*, (September 20, 1997).

ahimsa of nonviolence and of not harming other living beings, need to more closely examine the consequences of their lacto-vegetarian tradition and exercise more compassion and conscience in their food choices.

Jains and Hindus must respect the Moslems, Christians, tribal people, and 'lower' castes who consume the meat of spent cows and abandoned male calves. Meat should not be a major byproduct of the nation's vast dairy herd, or from overgrazed land producing sheep, goats, and buffalo that Macdonald's and other multinational corporations are trying to capitalize upon in India today. Those who do consume meat in India should take action against inhumane slaughter, and follow the Siik practice of decapitation, and where that is not possible with big horned sheep, goats, and mature cattle and buffalo, to use a stun gun to render the animals unconscious before or immediately after their throats have been cut. Consumer risks of developing Creutzfeldt Jakob disease (CJD) after eating the meat of cattle afflicted with 'mad cow disease' is of concern in India where CJD is apparently on the rise, some 30 cases being on record.¹⁸

Attempts to modernize existing slaughterhouses to make the killing of cattle (in states where it is not prohibited) and of buffalo, sheep and goats more hygienic and humane, have been blocked for political and religious reasons. Some fear that slaughterhouse modernization will lead to increased export of meat. A resolution by the Animal Welfare Board of India in 1994 to ban meat exports was rejected by the Ministry of Agriculture, since the Parliamentary Committee of Agriculture is seeking to increase meat exports as a source of foreign exchange.

While orthodox Jains and Hindus may be forced to turn a blind eye to the economically efficient, if not inhumane recycling of 'useless' cattle into meat, hides, fertilizer and blood tonic, they and other humanitarians will agree that ethical limits should be set on all forms of animal exploitation. Animal suffering that results from religious rather than economic exploitation, as icons and totems of divinity, has yet to be addressed, as well as the suffering of other species that are not regarded as sacred but 'unclean', like buffalo, pigs, donkeys, and dogs. Animals should not fall victim to religious prejudice but should be embraced equally in the spirit of compassion and reverential respect for all Creation.

¹⁸B. Kurian, 'Mad cow disease strikes India.' *The Indian Express*, (September 24, 1997).

Dr. Sulekh Jain, former president of the Jaina Association of North America¹⁹ proposes that ahimsa has two basic dimensions: micro-ahimsa, as it relates to animals as individuals, and macro-ahimsa that concerns the entire life community - animals, people, and the environment. Both the micro and the macro dimensions of ahimsa need to be considered. For example, promoting the humane treatment of cattle (micro-ahimsa) and doing nothing to promote sustainable husbandry practices to reduce ecological harm (macro-ahimsa) is short-sighted and counter productive. Similarly, as in the United States and Europe, efforts to improve the transportation and handling of livestock (micro-ahimsa) is short-sighted when cruel intensive methods of livestock production that are harmful to the animals and to the environment are not addressed, along with the harm to consumers who unwisely regard meat as a dietary staple.

People also tend to confuse ahimsa with aghnya, the doctrine of non-killing. In the name of compassion, incurably ill and injured animals, those creatures suffering because of old age, and sometimes even those who are newborn, but cannot be provided adequate food, should be humanely killed. Compassion must take precedence over both aghnya and ahimsa, otherwise India will never develop a humane and sustainable agriculture. Her sacred cows will continue to suffer until humanity evolves into a more empathic state, or the entire system collapses.

Public and Political Initiatives

There are ecologically valid and humane reasons for India coming to accept the humane slaughter of cattle as a vital population-control measure, and to see the wisdom of establishing small slaughterhouses in states where cow slaughter is prohibited. But reason alone will not convince people who regard cows as sacred to permit their slaughter for local human consumption. There are no simple solutions to the plight of India's cows and their offspring, but with reason and compassion, much suffering could be alleviated. Terminally ill and injured cattle should be euthanized. Population control could be facilitated by putting a moratorium on breeding cows every alternate year and by applying appropriate biotechnology in artificial insemination to stop unwanted male calves from being born. Cattle and other animals should be used for draft work and

¹⁹ personal communication

allowed to roam free only in rural areas, not in cities and congested towns and highways.

Cow slaughter is culturally unacceptable as a way to reduce the adverse environmental and economic impacts of millions of relatively nonproductive cattle. Therefore much greater effort and resources are needed to provide feed, water, shelter, and make gowshalas and prinjapoles more humane and self sustaining. Most importantly, the transportation and overall treatment of cattle going to those states where slaughter is permitted must be greatly improved. Furthermore, thousands of cattle are being killed secretly under the most inhumane and unsanitary conditions in states where slaughter is banned. Because of public aversion to animal, and in particular to cow, slaughter, resistance to slaughterhouse modernization has meant great suffering for billions of sheep, goats, and buffalo, whose care and transportation to slaughter is no better than that of cattle, except that fewer are driven the great distances that cattle are because most are killed within the regions they are born and raised. Valuable by-products like blood, manure, and biopharmaceuticals like various hormones and enzymes, are discarded in primitive slaughterhouses and become hazardous sources of environmental pollution. Tanneries are also a serious source of chemical pollution of rivers and ground water resources. Slaughterhouse modernization to utilize every part of an animal, and slaughterhouse decentralization to permit the slaughter of livestock close to where they are raised and to thus reduce transportation costs, suffering, injury, and poor meat quality, are morally enlightened initiatives. But to raise livestock primarily for their meat and for export, and to modernize slaughterhouses for this purpose, is ethically unacceptable and should be opposed on every front.

Some Indians contend that if India cannot consume all the meat that is produced as a byproduct of her dairy and wool industries because of cost or personal aversion, it is surely not immoral to export such meat to gain foreign currency to go back directly to help provide more feed for India's livestock and for the poor and hungry to enjoy a better life. Such benefits are unlikely, however, since the profits will go to private corporations and wealthy traders.

Others have argued that provided the animals are treated and killed humanely, if their production is ecologically beneficial and sustainable, and does not divert land and food from those most in need, or adversely impact

wildlife and biodiversity, then their consumption may actually be necessary. But peoples' appetites, like human population growth and industrial expansion, must be constrained for the good of the entire life community of the Earth, including life in the seas that have been ravaged by pollution and over fishing. Any new initiative in food production especially involving animals, like shrimp and other aquaculture ventures, goat milk and rabbit meat production, should be humane, sustainable alternatives that are geared to helping local people become self-reliant. We have seen enough of the ecologically and socially damaging 'top-down' commercial scale aid and development programs.

Programs designed to promote the production and consumption of any plant or animal foods must be linked with family planning to curtail population increase. One more goat or five more rabbits per family should mean one less child, otherwise the goal of food security and agricultural sustainability will never be achieved.

Agricultural Modernization, Politics and Cattle Welfare

As India shifts to a more capital-intensive industrial agriculture, countless native cows become surplus and urban scavengers for their impoverished owners, and rare breeds become extinct. Many native peoples have been made landless by agricultural 'modernization' and migrate in increasing numbers to the cities along with their few animals and possessions. The high cattle population in the nation's capital Delhi is evidence enough. In 1995 some 50 cattle per day were killed or severely injured by traffic.²⁰

The Prevention of Cow Slaughter Act of 1955, which allows the slaughter of cattle that are diseased, disabled, or more than 15 years old, allegedly resulted in young, nonproductive cows having their legs hacked and broken so they could be legally slaughtered.²¹ The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) banned all slaughter of the bovine species when it gained control of Delhi in 1994, purportedly to tighten various laxities in the prohibition of

²⁰Kindness to Animals and Respect for Environment (KARE) *Expose Newsletter*, New Delhi, 4/1, (July 1995).

²¹Molly Morre, 'New Delhi's Council bans bovine slaughter', *The Washington Post*, (April 1, 1994).

cow slaughter. The BJP voiced Mohandas Gandhi who told all India in 1921 that, 'Hindus will be judged...by their ability to protect the cow'.

In order to deal with Delhi's cow population that was in conflict with the modern urban world, ten small cattle impoundment centers (go-sadans) around the outskirts of Delhi were planned to be constructed. All free-roaming cows would be rounded up and put in these cattle pounds. If unclaimed by their poor owners, who would have to pay a fine to get their animals released, the cows would then be sent to bigger go-sadans for 'rehabilitation'. Only three pounds were in operation in 1995, and one operated by a well known animal welfare organization was seen by observers as a filthy hell-hole of starvation and suffering.

Under an interstate quota according to Nikhil Moro, some 5,500 cattle are brought into Mumbai (Bombay) for slaughter. Moro writes, 'While transporting live animals to the abattoirs, calves' legs are broken and slung over their necks to prevent them from running amuck, and pregnant and diseased animals are treated with violent cruelty.'²²

During the tumultuous 1996 elections, the Vishnu Hindu Parishad (VHP) party, 'ignoring the facts and problems' of cattle overpopulation, starvation, disease and suffering, according to *India Today* (January 11, 1996), launched an anti-cattle slaughter campaign. At a rally one sadhu exclaimed, 'We shall cut off the heads of those who shed a single drop of cow's blood.' Another party leader proclaimed, 'The blood of cows has polluted every river'.

According to *India Today*, the VHP claims that:

- The trembling and wailing of the cows being slaughtered lead to earthquakes.
- Cow urine can cure cancer, impotence, sexually transmitted diseases, liver problems, tuberculosis, polio and obesity.
- Eating red meat causes blindness, skin diseases and heart attacks.

²²'Chilling Killings', *Bombay Times* (January 31, 1997).

- It also results in divorce because eating red meat causes precocious sensuality in children, which later leads to impotence and ultimately divorce.

Leftist opponents believe the VHP/BJP should do something to protect starving cows that wander the streets and get killed and injured by motorists in cities like Delhi where they are in power and remember that beef is an important protein source for the poor. According to a 1992 Indian Market Research Bureau survey reported in this article, 74.2% of urban households are nonvegetarian, the majority consuming mutton, fish, and chicken, and some 12.7% beef. (How much is buffalo meat is not clear.)

When the BJP won control of the central government in May 1996, the new President Shankar Sharma announced in his opening of Parliament address a total ban nationwide on cow slaughter as one of the new government's policy agendas. One member of the opposing Congress party rose to object, saying such a policy contravened India's secular constitution, which guarantees equal rights to all religions.²³

India is at a crossroads where the choice is between rural sustainability and industrial growth and productivity. It is clear which road India is now taking. India exports much animal produce -- millions of tons of milk, hides, meat, poultry and eggs -- even to developed countries like the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom. I learned of this from some faxed, undated documents that Ms. Maneka Gandhi gave to me during a 1995 lunch and business meeting in Delhi with fellow animal rightist and environmentalist Deanna Krantz.²⁴ I was surprised to read in these annual food export figures that Australia was listed as receiving 8.110 metric tons (MTS), the U.S. 0.250 MTS, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) 5.750 MTS of processed chicken. The UAE also received 457.460 MTS of live poultry and was the major recipient of most of India's sheep and goat meat (8,695.110 MTS). Only Malaysia received more buffalo meat than the UAE -- 24,714.959 and 17,427.834 MTS respectively of frozen buffalo meat, and 9,019.175 and 1,667.728 MTS for 'fresh' meat.

²³Jawed Naqri, 'Moslems in India protest plan to ban cow slaughter', *The Washington Post*, (May 25, 1996).

²⁴Deanna Krantz is my wife and director of the India Project for Animals and Nature (IPAN) based in the Nilgiris, Tamil Nadu, S. India, one of several programs of Global Communications for Conservation Inc., New York.

More recent data on the annual quantities of animal products that India exports were subsequently obtained for April 1996 - March 1997. I have taken a few examples to illustrate which of many countries receiving these animal products are the main recipients (figures in metric tons).

Meat of Bovine Animals, Fresh or Chilled (Carcases and half carcases):

France 33.9; Bahrain 199.4; Greece 121.0; Iran 771.0; Italy 12.0; Ivory Coast 32.0; Malaysia 643.9; Netherlands 66.0; Oman 753.1; United Arab Emirates 1,472.0; USA 25.0 MTS.

Under the category **Boneless Meat of Bovine Animals, Fresh or Chilled:**

Australia received 2.4; France 256.8; Greece 149.8; Ivory Coast 128.4; Malaysia 3,713.4; Philippines 4,457.2; Switzerland 24.8; United Arab Emirates 758.1; and the USA 15.8 MTS.

Meat of Bovine Animals, Frozen (Carcases and half carcases):

France 57.0; Iran 1,962.0; Malaysia 1,456.6; Netherlands 39.0; United Arab Emirates 8,058.5; USA 377.2 MTS.

Under the category **Boneless Meat of Bovine Animals, Frozen:**

France 196.7; Germany 50.9; Greece 1,535.4; Iran 3,351.4; Jordan 1,693.6; Kuwait 2,614.7; Malaysia 49,231.1; Netherlands 200.7; Philippines 20,864.2; Turkey 1,354.9; United Arab Emirates 20,873.8; United Kingdom 265.0; USA 812.8 MTS.

The total annual metric tonnage of beef exported for April 1996 - March 1997 was reported to be 113,289.260 MTS.

Of the sheep and goat meat exports during this same period, it is notable that the USA imported some 332.726 MTS. The USA was the sole importer of meat/edible meat offal salted in brine, dried/smoked, edible flour and meals of meat/meat offal, meat and edible meat offal of bovine animals totaling 6 MTS.

Bones, Horns and Bone Meal:

Some 119,467.557 MTS of bone and horn products from livestock are exported to Europe and Japan and the USA, to be used for various purposes including cosmetics and food additives.

Export of Dairy Products

Between April 1996 - March 1997 India exported 186.7 MTS of powdered whole milk, some 15 MTS going to the Netherlands, and 91 MTS to the USA.

The USA received 11.5 MTS of powdered milk designated for babies, and the federal Republic of Germany 22 MTS.

The USA received 15.5 MTS of cream (of a total export of 236.642 MTS) and 18.6 MTS of other processed dairy products. Of the 142.2 MTS of exported butter, the USA received 1 MTS, the UK 90 MTS, and Canada 1 MT. The USA also imported 22.245 MTS of cheese products.

Eggs

Of the 2,326.972 MTS of processed egg products exported, the USA received 2 MTS, the most going to the United Arab Emirates 1,037.825 MTS, and Oman 555.829 MTS. Oman also received 2,155.032 MTS of 'fresh' eggs (additional figures on fresh egg exports not available).

To what degree these imports of animal products and byproducts into the industrial West accord with these countries' food, health, and safety regulations is an open question. Another is which processed and convenience foods for infants, adults, and companion animals actually include these various imported products from India's livestock population? Other questions pertaining to social justice, adequate nutrition for India's poor and underprivileged, and the appetites of richer nations surface when we reflect on the above export figures from one of the poorest and most overpopulated countries in the world. It also concerns me that the multinational corporations, in importing these animal products and byproducts (that only enrich the coffers of a handful of indigenous traders and brokers) are undermining the livelihoods of farmers in their own

countries. This is the reverse process of the industrial West 'dumping' its own agricultural surpluses on poorer countries that undermine the fair market price for locally produced foods and has the same pernicious consequences.²⁵ The rich get richer and the poor get poorer.

Might there not be more food for the landless poor, and fodder for the starving cows of India if a ban on poultry as well as beef and dairy product exports were set in place? I have witnessed the slaughter of buffalo, goats, and sheep in Delhi. On one occasion I was with a chief government veterinarian, who, on seeing a hobbled and helpless buffalo being stabbed repeatedly in the throat, shook his head in disbelief and told me, 'That's not Halal' (approved Moslem ritual slaughter). I wondered if the Gulf state of Moslem consumers would be concerned.

If India could lead the world by putting a certification of 'ahimsa' on all its meat, eggs, dairy and leather products, it would be a major step for humanity. India's reputedly second most lucrative agricultural export commodity is leather, much coming from cows. It is unfortunate that no such leather could be labelled 'ahimsa leather' with guaranteed veracity for the many Jain, Hindu, Buddhist, and other consumers who walk in footwear made of leather. The toxic chemicals that most of India's tanneries continue to discharge into rivers and watersheds cause serious ecological and human health problems.

A letter dated June 20, 1994, addressed to me from the Secretary of the Akhil Bharat Krishi-Goseva Sangh Society of Bombay, which claims to be engaged in the preservation and protection of the "cattle wealth' of India, states:

Our efforts towards preservation of cattle wealth at the political level are not meeting with the desired success in our country in view of the thick skinned bureaucracy and politicians who are hell bent on destroying the cattle wealth of our nation at the behest of the meat lobby, which finds enormous wealth in this activity as also at the behest of FAO, an organ of United Nations which dictates policies in third world countries, aiming at total destruction of the cattle resources of third world countries.

²⁵see: M. W. Fox, *Eating with Conscience: The Bioethics of Food*. (Troutdale, OR: NewSage Press, 1997)

However there is a silver lining to this otherwise discouraging scenario and that silver lining is in the form of our judiciary. Some time back a case instituted in a court in New Delhi involving shifting of a slaughterhouse from one area of Delhi City to another area, the Learned Judge who delivered a judgement in this case has made an excellent analysis of the whole issue and established the legal rights of animals as well as the need for conserving animals for conservation of environment. He has established that the human race, the environment and the animals are interrelated and extinction of animals will spell doom for environment and mankind.

Contrary to this Learned Judge's views on environmental conservation, an almost insoluble problem has been created by the ecological damage caused by overgrazing of cattle, buffalo, sheep, and goats and their diseases and hunger, problems compounded by a lack of fodder and vital grazing land that has been taken over to grow feed and fodder for intensive modernized dairies, buffalo calf meat production and egg and poultry factories, and for cash-crops. The root of the problem is ideological, and the ideological conflicts between the reasonable and the less reasonable must be resolved. India's 'cattle wealth' is first and foremost a family and community matter. The above Delhi judgement is based more on historical tradition than on reality. The expansion of the domestic animal and human populations in India will spell doom if they are not controlled. Certainly at one time, cattle and other domestic animals generally helped play a positive role in environmental conservation, recycling manure, urine and crop-leftovers and in enhancing biocultural diversity. But under the pressures of the global monoculture of industrialism, all vestiges of humane, organic and sustainable agricultural practices, wisdom and spirituality, may be obliterated forever.

As a veterinarian, I find it particularly distressing to see Indian government veterinarians, with few exceptions, being assigned to the poultry, dairy and meat and slaughter agro-industry sectors, rather than being more involved in the kinds of rural animal health and welfare issues that IPAN is addressing and also in related sustainable agriculture and aquaculture initiatives and wildlife disease control and conservation programs. These are so important in terms of economic security, national democracy and spiritual tradition. The monopolistic capitalization of India's 'cattle wealth' by developing export markets that are not based on humane, sustainable

and socially just methods of animal and plant production, is unwise and bioethically unacceptable.²⁶

It is significant that in the US, the Roman Catholic Church has spoken out against industrial agriculture and the expansion of livestock factory farms, a position endorsed by the Sierra Club, one of America's largest conservation organizations. India's cattle wealth cannot be determined by the number of animals alone, but by their diverse social, economic, ecological and religious contributions to traditional Hindu, Jain, and Moslem communities. These rural and para-urban communities are under transformation today, and though the final outcome will probably mean fewer cows for fewer families, animals should not be the exploited victims of 'modernization' or be neglected during times of social and economic transformation. This is particularly true for a country like India that from the outside is seen by the rest of the world as a nation uniquely dedicated and constitutionally mandated to respect the welfare of animals and the spirituality of compassion.

Cattle Ways of Seeing

Like most animals, cattle are seen and valued in essentially four different ways. First, they are valued symbolically in accordance with a culture's particular religious traditions, mythology and history. For example, India's cow is a symbol of the divine mother-provider to millions of Indians. Second, cattle are valued objectively, and materially or economically for the various services and produce they provide. A milk cow's great economic value most likely helped her gain sacred symbolic status. But as the economic climate has changed in recent times, so has her symbolic status in the eyes of many. Third, cows and their offspring are valued subjectively and emotionally, as a source of social status, security, and companionship. Fourth, they are valued spiritually, as a manifestation of divine creation, as sentient souls embodied in bovine form with inherent value, interest, and sanctity, to be recognized and respected by society.

It is from their spiritual significance to us that our ethical sensibility, our respect for the sanctity and rights of animals is derived. Likewise, from

²⁶Ibid.

their material significance we come to value their utility. From their subjective, emotional significance we come to empathize with animals and in the process learn about their feelings, what gives them pleasure, and what causes them distress and suffering.

Without the spiritual and emotional perspectives, the objective, material perspective becomes exploitative. Where empathy and ethical constraint are lacking, inhumane treatment and suffering are likely consequences. The symbolic value of the animal may or may not promote compassion and humane treatment. In the absence of emotional and spiritual significance, cruelty may be condoned, like the widespread prohibition against euthanizing cattle in India when they are incurably ill, injured and suffering. That the symbolic value of the cow should take precedence, in this instance, over the emotional and spiritual dimensions of the human-cow bond, is indeed a travesty of the ethics of compassion and ahimsa. Likewise, when the material utility of the cow takes precedence over all else, as on the Western factory farm, she comes to be treated as a milk and calf producing biomachine. Her welfare is of no significance so long as the costs of improving her condition are not reflected in increased profits from greater efficiencies and productivity.

As Deryk Lodrick shows, anthropologists are not unanimous in their acceptance of the many reasons why cows are sacred in India. The present status of the cow in India, who by many people is given the same respect and consideration as a revered member of the family²⁷, is the result of many complex factors -- the 'cow complex'. This includes ancient totemic fertility cults and Goddess-worship²⁸; the influence of more recent religious traditions and doctrines (Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism share the doctrine of ahimsa) as well as social order (caste food taboos), and also ecological and economic considerations.

The complexity of the human-animal bond is evident in these four very different ways in which cattle are seen and treated. What is called for is a unified sensibility that integrates the symbolic, material, emotional, and spiritual components of the human-animal relationship into a mutually

²⁷A devout Hindu will proclaim 'Gai hamari mata hai'-- the cow is our mother!

²⁸For further details on the complexities -- religious, social, historical, and ecological -- of dietary choices in India, see F. J. Simoons, *Eat Not This Flesh* (University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1961. Also, Buffie Johnson, *Lady of the Beasts* (Harper & Row, San Francisco, 1988).

enhancing symbiosis. The human side of the relationship is more balanced and equitable when the rights, interests, and welfare of animals are given equal and fair consideration. The ethical inconsistencies in the religious and secular communities' attitudes toward and treatment of animals is more evident in India than in other countries precisely because India is the birthplace of the highest spiritual principles pertaining to animal welfare and yet they are not always put into practice.

No human community can be sustainable for long or enjoy peace and prosperity if there is no reverential respect for animals and nature. The major challenge facing the ever multiplying human populace is food security, clean water and adequate shelter, fuel and sanitation. With the present escalating rates of population growth, resource consumption, and environmental destruction, the Earth cannot sustain our species.

As the history of India is interwoven with the cow, so is the future of both. From my perspective after several tours of duty working in animal protection in India, the future does not look good. This is not simply because of poverty, population pressures and environmental destruction. I see a lack of vision that is more than a conflict between traditional and Western values and imperatives as between national sovereignty and becoming a player, or victim, in the new world order of a 'free' global market economy. This impaired vision is in part attributable to the confusion and anarchy of widespread corruption, but more especially, I believe, to a lack of ethics and compassion. The same may be said of most other countries to varying degrees, but in no country do animals suffer more, especially cows, because they are sacred. In essence, the body and the spirit of India are divided and they must be brought together and healed, otherwise both will perish. By the same analogy, the cow as a symbol is treated with reverence, but real animals are too often treated with cruel indifference. Their sufferings, often a result of human ignorance, are accepted fatalistically -- a consequence of karma, and inaction results. This can be due to a lack of available veterinary care; lack of enforcement of animal protection laws; sheer poverty and desensitization to others' suffering; and the belief that condones non-activity, namely, that it is wrong to interfere with another's fate. We need to heal the divisions between the sacred and the secular and between belief and practice, so that ahimsa does not mean nonactivity or nonintervention, but leads to active compassion toward all beings, human and nonhuman.

Caring for animals and caring for people, for the poor and the hungry, go hand in hand as part of the humane agenda of any democratic society. While this article focuses particularly on India's cattle, the plight of these creatures mirrors the plight of the poor. According to one recent study on the issue of world hunger:

Many of the countries in which hunger is rampant export more agricultural goods than they import. For example, India ranks near the top among Third World agricultural exporters. In 1995, while at least 200 million Indians went hungry, India exported US\$625 million worth of wheat and flour and US\$1.3 billion worth of rice, the two staples of the Indian diet. In addition, the American Association for the Advancement of Science found in a 1997 study that 78% of all malnourished children under five in the developing world live in countries with food surpluses.²⁹

There are no miracle remedies for hunger and poverty from advances in technology, science, or medicine. The miracle will come not via genetic engineering of animals and plants but through the transformation of humanity into a compassionate, empathic, and responsible life form. A mutually enhancing symbiosis with the Earth community of plants and animals, both wild and domesticated, is our only viable future. Our hope lies in our capacity to reconnect empathically with all living beings and to use compassion as our compass.

Biography

Dr. Michael W. Fox joined The Humane Society of the United States (The HSUS) in Washington, DC in 1976 and has produced numerous publications and developed several technical research programs that apply scientific methods to the investigation of the many uses of animals, notably laboratory, companion, and farm animals. In addition, he is on the Board of Directors for the Center of Respect of Life and Environment, an affiliate of The HSUS. Dr. Fox has authored over 40 books and for the last 25 years has written a nationwide syndicated newspaper

²⁹Frances Moore Lappe, Joseph Collins and Peter Rosset with Luis Esparza, *World Hunger: Twelve Myths*, Second Edition (1998).

column, 'Ask Your Animal Doctor', enjoying a weekly readership estimated at 12 million. He is also a consulting veterinarian and bioethicist, and gives lectures, seminars and presentations both in the US and abroad on a variety of topics related to animal welfare, behaviour, conservation and bioethics.

