

# Animal Justice and Moral Mendacity\*

by

Purushottama Bilimoria

## Introduction

There is always the risk of romanticization when it comes to tackling the topic of animals, in classical discourses to contemporary practices. There are numerous issues to consider where animals are depicted and represented, or misrepresented. These may pertain to human sacrifice of animals, symbolic imagery in high-order astral practices, mythic and hybrid iconography in ancient mythologies, art and religions. We might next mention the depiction of animals as the denizens of monstrous evil, as threatening part of 'brutish nature', living out the law of the jungle, and hence requiring to be subdued under the law of the survival of the fittest. Huge dinosaurs, mammoths and other 'monsters' (think of "Jaw", "Armageddon", "Avatar", etc) are reconstructed (often digitally) or virtually resurrected from fossils and archeological excavations, with a certain degree of imaginative extrapolation, albeit without theoretical sophistication, which end up being projected on large cinemascope screens.

Then there is the utilitarian deployment of animals in agro-culture, farming – the importance of the poultry, bovine, sea-and-water creatures, and a variety of other animal species ("delicacies") in dietary praxis and food consumption (meat industry, factory farming); but also in game hunting; the circus and the zoo, domestic pet culture; animal guide (for the challenged human); veterinarian vivisection; animal exhibitions (at annual shows and sale-yards, as once the practice with slaves in this country); not to mention bestiality and

---

\* A version of this paper appeared in the e-journal : *Berkeley Journal for Religion and Theology*, vol 1 no 1, 2015: 56-79.

animals pornography, and other unrecorded implicates of animals in the human life-world.

Animals have become indispensable in scientific explorations also: consider how animals provided clues for the supposed missing links in the evolutionary chain of being, with the pioneering works of Lamarck and Darwin (prelapsarian animals were reconfigured, even invented, to fill in certain lacunae in neo-Darwinian theories); Dawkins and Dennett clinch take evolution of organism (by various chance factors) as the side-show in the primordial soup of the Big Bang: i.e. with equal probability no animals – including human animals – need have arisen when the gases cooled down and moist cellular formations emerged spontaneously. Many discoveries in biology begin with or are hypothesized from observations of animal behavior and vivisections; testing of tissue-cells, and extended to pharmaceutical and drugs that are then dispensed to ailing humans. The refinement of these products involve genetic-manipulations and animal experimentation in biomedical laboratories and in psycholinguistic research units. Then there are implants of monitoring devices in animal bodies to track and measure their flight or swimming paths and behavior in natural and artificial environments. Last but not least, animals are sent out to the stratosphere space or deployed in astronomical travels (e.g. chimps and dogs in unmanned rockets), and so forth. These mark the more recent inclusion of animals in the human theoretical and far-reaching geographical epistemologies.

It is somewhat disarming to realize the extent to which the ontology of the non-human animal species is inexorably and pervasively linked with the human imaginary and *lebenswelt*. What would the human world have been without animals? Perhaps as human beings have done away with the gods in the modern world and replaced them with cell phones, we may be on the brink of doing away with vegetation with a disturbingly similar fate awaiting the animal kingdom also. (On an aside, in the big cities of China, such as Beijing

or Shanghai, where almost everyone walks around with a cell phone, it is astonishing not to see animals in comparable numbers; while there was no death of cured animal flesh, even live options in the fish tank, as you enter restaurants and diners for breakfast. Although a few citizens have begun to adopt miniscule puppies as pets.) Hunger has been shown to be less of an imperative - as it might have been during the hunter-gatherer era, and then too not of the same devastating magnitude – than the desire to satisfy the appetite and taste-buds. There are other ways of dealing with the issue of hunger and nourishment needs of the human race.

Consider also the quantum of violence visited upon the biospheres and animal species. Suppose there was a way of recording the pain, belching, shock, horror, confusion, stroke and brain-fissure from the "peaceful quick sniper or blade" enacted over animal across the globe, from discreet slaughterhouses to road-side butchers, might the Hindu gods be awakened from their sublime slumber recognizing that '*ṛta* (Rītā)', the timeless order, divined by Dharma and the impersonal law of karma have been horribly disturbed. But the gods are loath to intervene in human affairs, unless called upon, and that might require certain kind of 'blood sacrifice', which would beg the question and possibly defeat the purpose of the end-goal.

Philosopher-scholars concerned with engaging in ethical reflections and debating theories of justice at large have found in find in this field of discourse a fertile ground for mining conceptual resources and mapping certain blind-spots and lacunae prevalent in the human moral menagerie. The analogy here is to the sudden ripples felt in the hitherto paternally constructed moral systems – ethics, justice, law, penal codes, 'rights of man', toleration, inclusiveness, etc – when it was discovered that slaves, women, people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds, indeed even minorities and 'aliens' (foreigners), may have inalienable right to liberty, equality, basic capabilities, justice and fairness, along with certain positive rights that building and that entail duties on the part of the state or the

dominant majoritarian group that would enable the flourishing of the members of the alienated or segregated groups. Moral antinomies lurk beneath many a good intention that may not be immediately detected, especially when one principle can lead to two contrary, if not clashing, derivative outcomes. And there are likely to be antinomies in respect of human disposition towards animals, their welfare, treatment or neglect in moral considerations across all traditions, for one cannot assume *a priori* that this area of possible moral concern toward non-human 'individuals' or species was all already sorted out and even fine-tuned before we or the current generation(s) came on the scene. That there really is a no moral problem outstanding here and hence there are no antinomies to boot. But philosophers within the animal rights and animal liberation groups have been at pains to unearth a number of glaring antinomies and have pointed to a serious and significant moral problem facing human beings' relation to animals in all the spheres and spaces where animals are involved or implicated. Of course, staunch rationalists may see no real problems with this lack or they may deny that there are any such antinomies because animals in their view do not share the same moral subjective status (as moral agents, moral patients, individuals with equal inherent values, interests and rights, or jural entities in legal terms, such as corporate); and these despite the talk of 'natural duties', duty of justice (Rawls), non-cruelty/humane treatment, conservation of species or sustainability in the face of ecological degradation, environmental responsibility, and so on. But what does this all say about the reach and desired completeness, much less absoluteness, righteousness, of humanly conceived morality or be it moralism? Can non-humans be accorded moral significance or, more technically, moral considerability, and if so to what degree? There are numerous debates on the intricacies of each of these tropes in the spaces symbolically occupied between humans and animals in our modern times (philosophy, cultural studies, feminism, and pop, media and film cultures ). Where do the religions – and their theologies or respective theodicies - under consideration stand on these issues and challenges?

I wish to take up a few of these sentiments and put them to test in respect of the claims to moral high-grounds in Indian thought-

traditions vis-à-vis mostly Western or biblical traditions especially in North America, turning the focus in this instance – on a par with issues of caste, gender, minority status, albeit still within the human community ambience – to the question of animals, and to ask : how sophisticated and in-depth is the appreciation of the issues and questions that are currently being debated in contemporary circles? What degree of awareness could we say has been present in the traditions – not just in some perfunctory, platitudinal, belief-based descriptions or prescriptions, but in actual explanatory and morally sensitized senses? I ask these questions because today’s animal rights/liberation movements are based largely on moral-philosophical considerations with secular and legal sensitivities rather than on religious or religion-informed philosophies; in fact, someone like Peter Singer chastises religion (and he means largely Western/Abrahamic traditions), for their animosity towards animals; even though the early roots of animal welfare –e.g. RSPCA/SPCA, anti-cruelty codes, and first vegetarian movements – were all either Christian or Jewish based (e.g. Lewis Gompertz; Henry Salt and his Vegetarian Society of London, that re-inspired Gandhi’s vegetarianism; or the Seventh-Day Adventists who started Sanatarium foods worldwide<sup>1</sup>). But there have movement within Christian and Jewish theologies, and grass-roots movements in the West and Israel, as well as in India, to revive, re-interpret orthodox texts, and furnish fresh theo-philosophical grounds for the same arguments and ends that secular animal rights advocates have been striving towards.<sup>2</sup> Morality can have many homes; it is not the exclusive proclivity of secular, not unoften utilitarian, philosophers or a handle-full of peace-loving leftist activists. That is my argument.

My aim is first to present the respective representations of and attitude toward animals in as broad a compass as possible: Hindu,

---

<sup>1</sup> Robert Tappan, “Feeding the Children of Abraham”, *Scholarly Works of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals* (PETA), p. 2 (pdf accessed). Lewis Gompertz was the British founder of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in 1824.

<sup>2</sup> More recent formations take up names such as 'Animal Theology' as the Oxford-based theoretical-cum-activist group does, with its own journal by that name. See Linzey, 1995.

Buddhist, Jain, Jewish and Christian, Gandhi and of the modern secular West.

My concern will not be with details, but rather how Indian and Abrahamic thought position themselves on the challenges of theodicy and on animal utilization, in the light of current philosophical and scientific speculations on the supposed sentience of animals. That is to say, how the traditions look upon the life-status of animals and justify, or rationalize, the many topographies of evil in respect of the animal-kingdom. These topographies include suffering, harm, unnecessary or untimely death, nakedly at the hands of nature (climatic, environmental, inter/intra-species tussles, uncontrollable diseases, etc) but also, and increasingly in greater proportion, in the hands of (hu)mankind. A framing question I will be addressing is the extent to which orthopraxies have informed ethical views in these traditions, and vice versa. For example, we need to ask at what point and with what degree of compunction or complicity does Judaic thought move from the explicit vegetarianism of the Genesis 1:29 to homologizing women and animals (*bestes puantes*), and considering flesh as food?

On the Brāhmaṇic-Hindu side, would animal sacrifice in the erstwhile *yajñās* of Vedism have ever sparked off moral conscience vis-à-vis *hiṃsā* (injury/violence), had it not been for Jain and Buddhist disquiet against the grain of *hiṃsā* (and become activist-advocates for *aḥiṃsa*: a simple act of adding the negative *nañ-* prefix, in the form of 'a-'; a moral term that likely did not exist in Brāhmanism before the rupture)? Thereafter Hindu texts rise to the occasion and increasingly become staunch advocates themselves of animal care, welfare, proper husbandry, treatment and hospitality – in proportion to the inclusion of animal imagery in religious symbolism and deification. To ignore such penal ordinances (e.g. in *Arthaśāstra*, *Dharmasūtras*, *Nibandhas*, several *Purāṇas*, *Mahābhārata*), would be to risk punitive measures and expiation of the demerit (*prāyaścitta*), here and hereafter. Is modern Hinduism even as it becomes more secular (cf. Hindu Code Bills), McDonalized and globalized, after the Gandhian interlude, far

behind in abrogating the moral inclusiveness of animals in a reformed Hindu ethos? Or will the evangelism and self-righteousness of Hindutva along with modern-day Jainism with their near-absolute embracing, indeed ‘revivification’, of vegetarianism and anti-cow-slaughter movement likely to alienate secular Indian animalists, by underscoring more the religious qua orthodox rather than the moral qua ethical grounds? Still, India boasts the largest number of *faith-based* vegetarians, followed by Israel (not North America mind you, despite its South Asian population and New Ageist movements; nor is there much of it in Europe-UK, South Americas, rest of Asia, Middle-East or the Oceania-Pacific regions).

## **PART A**

### **Rites over rights: Western origins of sanctified flesh consumption**

First I will present some standard, let us say, ‘official’ , theological views and then moral hermeneutical critiques in terms of their relevance and ethical reach toward contemporary challenges and changes in the animal habitat or treatment brought about by technological and consumer-based developments, and other ‘innovative’ methods.

The Torah, Genesis 1.26, states: Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

Genesis: 1.29 suggests that people were initially vegetarians living on seed-bearing plants that God gave them. It wasn’t until after the Flood (Gen 9.3) that flesh of animals was permitted for food, and after the exodus from Egypt animal sacrifice also (Jeremiah 7:22-23). But this appeared to have been short-lived and was never intended to be an absolute prescription.

Of course, the Christian Bible did not interpret 1.26 in the light of 1.29, and took ‘dominionship’ rather literally. So evolved the idea of man’s prelapsarian stewardship over the rest of nature: God had created nature that it may serve Man. The Jewish tradition, by contrast, has been more circumspect. The key principle or moral intuition that seems to have been the guiding force is the prohibition of inflicting suffering – *tza’ar ba’alei chayim* in Hebrew – on living creatures. There seems to be some recognition in rabbinical rulings of the physical, psychological and emotional suffering of animals, and hence the innumerable prohibitions against the over-use, recklessness towards and abuse of animals, whether in farming practices, extracting labor from animals, or in human dietary preferences and practices. Religious laws derived from this basic moral intuition have reinforced the duty humans have towards non-human animals; however, in practice and especially religious and secular rites, there have been certain ambivalences and inconsistencies that modern scholars have been at some pain to point out.

While, hunting and games that involve death of animals are prohibited as these serve no religious purpose; animals can be slaughtered for food but only by sanctioned specialists who offer certain prayers in the process, and see to it that blood is fully drained from the flesh, etc. This rule, along with blessings offered at the table, ritualizes the consumption of flesh. Naturally deceased animals cannot for that reason be used for food, but their by-products, especially the skin and horns may be taken for other purposes. Animal products are used in religious rituals: skin and leather for the scrolls, mezuzah and the tefillin, the shofar blown at Rosh Hashanah, and Kosher-meat is permitted on Shabbat and Pesach (what we call the Passover feast), and in daily meals as well. These Jewish dietary laws are given in the Torah, and the basic ones are<sup>3</sup>:

Certain animals may not be eaten at all. Only animals that are ruminant (chew its cud) and have split hooves may be eaten.

---

<sup>3</sup> Giora Shimoni, “What are Jewish Dietary Laws?” About.com Guide.  
<http://kosherfood.about.com/od/kosherbasics/f/jewishdietlaws.htm>



Of the animals that may be eaten, the birds and mammals must be slaughtered in accordance with Jewish law.

All blood must be drained from the meat or broiled out of it before it is eaten.

Meat (the flesh of birds and mammals) cannot be eaten with dairy.

But what exactly is the significance of kosher and kushrat and their implications for moral thinking on animals? Do animals have any rights beyond being part of human rites? Should we talk of animal *rites*, rather than animal *rights* (the pun is intended to underscore an ambiguity in classical thinking?) Thus, is there something ambiguous in allowing the beasts of burden to rest on the Sabbath? And yet, apart from enforced rest and strictures on creative work, there seems to be concern for animals underscored in the prohibition against animals laboring on the day of rest (Genesis 8:1) Is a fully-fledged vegetarianism ever entailed in the beneficence shown to animals (Exodus 21:28)? Do we get close to minimal rights of animals in the Hebrew codes? Has contemporary (orthodox and liberal) Judaism countenanced the arguments of one of their own Israeli-Jewish animal liberationists and liberal Rabbis, declaring that the consumption of meat is now halachically unacceptable, and they blame Judaism for sanctioning slaughter of animals for food that through Christianity and Islam also has become a mainstay of Western culture? Although most do not dismiss Judaism for that moral fault, but rather work to build a new moral metaphysics and set of practices to honor more rigorously the originary moral intuitions.

Notwithstanding the noble proscriptions and duties moral agents have toward animals are purely for safeguarding humane impulses, rather than any rights that animals might be said to have as animals per se. Cheeseburgers are not kosher. But this speaks little of the animal as such.<sup>4</sup> Likewise, the ambiguity surrounding the beasts of burden to rest on the Sabbath. But the strict adherence here underscores more a religions based requirement than a moral

---

<sup>4</sup> ibid

understanding as such. Elsewhere though feeding the animals before humans and allowing animals to have a right in the fruits of their labor, seems to be ‘based on a recognition of an inter-species moral relationship’, i.e, entitlement ensuing from investment of labor (ibid). The subjective qualities of animals possessing desires, feelings and needs are given due accord. This is more clearly marked in the prohibition against taking a bird’s egg from the nest while the mother is present. Either this is in recognition of the mother’s ownership, hence right, over her own egg, or it may be in recognition of the same kind of attachment that humans have to their off-spring: and it would be brutal in both instances to sever that connection. But the beneficence shown in these rules are constrained in two other areas, I shall explain.

When an animal kills or mauls any human person, according to Maimonides, that animal is tried in a court of 23 judges and sentenced to death, destroyed (and its flesh not be eaten), and the owner may be charged with homicide as well. It is strange though moral agency is imputed on the animal when an animal kills out of its own volition, or some instinctual tendency. This renders the animal a jural entity, which no modern law accords to it (though the animal, such as the American pitbull terrier that mauled a child in Australia was instantly destroyed; and a goat was arrested in India for committing serial offences). It is curious however that when animals are horded away to the slaughterhouses, notwithstanding the supervision of rabbis present that proper religious process is followed, animals however are not given the right to defend themselves against being killed by humans, for their own dietary drives! “Oh Lord, thou preservest man and beast (Psalm 36.7), but not when mauled in slaughterhouse 3". It would seem more cruel to accord moral agency and a fake-right to self-defense in a mocking court, where an impending capital punishment is a foregone conclusion, then to foreclose the same right when the killing is in the reverse direction; this is not a bilateral arrangement, nor balanced in the inter-species inclusion of animals in the human community.

## **When Kosher isn't anymore *kosher* – in the feed-lot enclosure for example.**

Modern challenges and practices of procuring meat has radically transformed since the industrial revolution and much more so with the corporatization of the hitherto village-based animal farming practices. Critics in the secular-rational-utilitarian are all too aware that the meat industry is a heinously macabre enemy of the animal rather than its friend, for the industry treats animals as an almost inanimate objects to be slaughtered and delivered to the dining table of their consumers who are for most part blind-folded from the process and deceptions involved in the manufacture of the meat products and by-products. So if today's meat comes from the same abusive **factory farms** as all other meat, notwithstanding and rabbinical or halal supervision and /or intervention to see to it that prescriptive rules are followed, there are no standards to ensure that the slaughter is any less cruel or is humanely carried out (e.g. not killed before being stunned). In some instances, it has been shown to be much worse, according to animal industry sleuths, such PETA.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, while Abrahamic teachings that via Protestant, Catholic, Jewish and Islamic teachings, form the bedrock of the modern industrialized world, emphasize the grave importance of protecting human health, the consumption of animal products is responsible for numerous diseases including heart disease. And just when over 1 billion-plus people across the world do not have enough food to sustain themselves, our carnivorous diets are at least ten times as wasteful of food resources as a vegetarian one.

We can speak of the number of animals killed and how many end up in well-intending dining and festive-celebratory tables (e.g. 280 million of one species of bird are rounded up for ceremonial slaughter each year on a

---

<sup>5</sup> PETA website: <http://animalrights.about.com/od/animalrights101/tp;>  
<http://www.animalliberationfront.com/Practical/FactoryFarm/USDANumbers.htm>

day euphemistically called 'Thanksgiving Day'). Animals slaughtered in the US amounted to nearly 10.2 billion land animals and 52 billion sea animals in 2010 (rise by a few million each year). (So, a total of about 63 billion animals per annum). This USDA figure does not include another 875 million animals that died lingering deaths from disease, injury, starvation, suffocation, maceration, Clintons'-style incarceration, or other atrocities of animal farming and transport; nor those in the wilderness killed by hunters, game-shooters, in pounds, animal experimentations, laboratory research and genetic engineering, nor wildlife displaced by animal agriculture and human habitat developments, construction of dams, new housing zones, roads, water-ways etc, nor wildlife directly killed by farmers with the use of pesticides, traps, Monsanto's terminator seeds and other methods. Since the U.S. is a net exporter of both live animals and processed meat, the number of animals actually consumed in the U.S. was less than the number killed. Add to these, land and sea-animals (including whales) exported live or in slaughtered form in and from other countries across the globe, increasingly China, India, Australia, New Zealand, Pacific Islands, Russia, Latin American and African countries. Thus for example, India became the world's largest source of buffalo meat in 2012, ahead of Brazil. Buffalo meat is cheaper than beef. The Indian government has invested heavily in abattoirs. Recently released Ministry of Food Processing data showed that India exported 1.89 million tons of beef in 2012-2013, which is a 50 percent increase over five years ago. India's buffalo meat exports have nearly tripled since 2009, rising to 1.65 million tons in 2012, according to USDA figures.<sup>6</sup>

There is also concern among ecologists and environmentalists on the huge impact the massive meat industry has on natural resources, drainage on the land, water usage, pollution (from the methane gas that cattle produce and the waste from the slaughterhouses), and other unmitigated consequences of the carnivorous fealty (which Michael Pollan and others have begun to bring to public consciousness). Animals have become just another

---

<sup>6</sup> For more information see "Annual Report" in "Reports & Downloads," Ministry of Food Processing Industries, Government of India, accessed July 2, 2015, <http://www.mofpi.nic.in/>; For updated USDA statistics on exports, see "Livestock and Poultry: World Markets and Trade," United States Department of Agriculture, Foreign Agricultural Service, last modified April 2015, accessed July 2, 2015, [http://apps.fas.usda.gov/psdonline/circulars/livestock\\_poultry.PDF](http://apps.fas.usda.gov/psdonline/circulars/livestock_poultry.PDF)

fodder to the excesses of human desires and exploitative life-style.

The question arises: why do we not grant the same legal protection to animals while they are on the farm as we do in the case of domestic pets in the home, who may even be afforded full funeral rites as well upon their death? What has happened to the principle of empathy and universalization or universalizability that the Enlightened fathers, notably Kant, put forward? But of course they had not conceived of a *sui generis* animal ethic at all. Preference negative utilitarianism that argues for the reduction of animal pain does not use the language of universal rights and equal moral universalizability for animals; it speaks of duty of care and respect and regards for the interests and desires of animals, on a par with human sentient beings, as one has towards one's under-aged children and over-aged parents (possibly now in hospices care).

## **PART B**

### **The Indian Animal: *Animals and Ecology in the Pre-Vedic age***

It is generally believed that the Indus valley people (as far back as 10,000 BCE) domesticated several herbivorous wild animals. They trained those animals for use in agriculture, travel and hunting. Their settlements were on river banks, amidst dense jungles and forests and hence they maintained a close relationship with the natural environment. They superimposed a supernatural force on every aspect of nature and worshipped these. Trees and animals were objects of adoration and they treated them as the manifestations of an higher order (*ṛta*).

Hence it is that the cow who occupies a pride of place in several hymns of the *R̥gVeda*. The cow, its variegated species, and their habitat are described in the texts in glamorous details. The sages considered the cow as the personification of motherhood, fertility and liberty. The cow was compared to the goddesses such as *Pr̥ṣṇi*, *Āditi* and *Ushās*. Rain was regarded as nothing other than the milk pouring

from the udder of a cow. It is therefore not surprising that in the early Vedic period, the cow was killed for sacrifice as the main offering (*havis*), because it was seen to have such a resemblance; and this earthly ‘good’ might well be sufficient to please the gods who would, for their part of the bargain, return rain and calves a plenty.<sup>7</sup> The cow, like the horse, was also given in sacrifices as ‘gift’ (*dakṣinā*). The cow, owing to her apparent intelligence, patience and acquiescence was adjudged as among the best sacrificial animal (*yājñīya pasu*). As Laurie Patton noted:

... as many Vedic hymns and later ritual texts ... indicate, sacrifice of an animal into the fire was part of the ecological balance in the ancient Vedic world; the killing and distribution of the animal was part of a larger understanding of human harmony with natural forces.<sup>8</sup>

The R̥gvedic people then regarded animals as an integral part of their agrarian and pastoral culture. The deification of animals, apart from the sacrificial theology, probably also indicated a gesture towards animistic beliefs among the indigenous and non-Aryan groups in the region. So it wasn’t that there was total, unconditional prohibition of the consumption of animal flesh, whether from the sacrificial offerings or from other sources.<sup>9</sup> Male calves and bulls were regularly eaten in ancient India. Any cattle that naturally died could be eaten, its meat dried and sold.

The lesson to be gleaned here is that how, historically speaking, the killing of animals and their distribution otherwise was part of a larger hermeneutic of the harmony of the human life-world with the natural forces; what it might mean to re-disperse the natural world in

---

<sup>7</sup> RV I.16.114.10; RV.X.169.3/II.7.5 X.91.14

<sup>8</sup> Laurie Patton, ‘Nature Romanticism and Sacrifice in R̥gvedic Interpretations’, in *Hinduism and Ecology*, (eds. Chris Chapple and Mary Evelyn Tucker) CSWR, Harvard, 2000, p 43.

<sup>9</sup> For an argument that the ‘holy cow’ was neither sacredly regarded nor prohibited for consumption as part of the regular diet of the early Hindus, from R̥gVedic times (barring a few lines underwriting the prohibition in the Arthaveda), see the controversial account by D N Jha, *The Myth of the Holy Cow*. (New Delhi: Matrix Books, 2001).

the process of rejuvenation; what it might mean to hasten the processes of life and death; and how the tropes of harmony with nature *and* sacrifice could well converge in short, a kind of redistributive justice in the context of the natural environment.<sup>10</sup>

### **Ecology in the *Purāṇas***

Apart from registering the unity of all sentient (*chetana*) and non-sentient (*achetana*) beings, the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* informs us that gods, men, animals, reptiles and birds are but the various forms of the creator Brahmā since these have emerged from his limbs. Mention is also made of the need to safeguard the interests and needs for times yet to be: *bhaviśya*. It is interesting that such a future-regarding comparison is made long back in the *Purāṇa*. And so the argument by the best inference goes a fair way toward supporting an ecological perspectivism that is not confined contingently to the interests and needs of the current generation, but factors in the predictable depletion of resources exacerbated by the excesses (i.e. exponential) growth of the population burdensomely on Mother Earth, which more than likely will prove detrimental, if not catastrophic, to the needs and interests of the future generations (*bhaviśyaloka*), to which they have equal entitlement. This is not only mark of good ecology but decent moral philosophy.

### ***Purāṇic* reasoning on animal health-care**

Early Indians took great care in keeping the animal environment clean. *Garuda Purāṇa* prescribes the following medicinal herbs for keeping the elephants healthy: myrobalans (*Terminalia chebula*), *haritaki* (*Chewbulix myrobalan*) and *brahati*. Pastes of several medicinal herbs are recommended for curing several ailments of elephants. Aśoka, the Buddhist Emperor, much later likewise built hospices and veterinarian units for ailing animals.

---

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

In the *Arthaśāstras*, heinous and gratuitous acts against animals are punishable –in respect to their neglect, over-use, abuse, stealing, letting run amock, even negligence by veterinarians, etc in the interest also of maintaining eco-balance. Nevertheless, the meat of female cows no longer able to give milk was permitted for consumption.

### **Animals and the concept of non-violence (*ahimsā*)**

The common ethos emerging through the reflections of *Purāṇas*, *Arthaśāstras*, and the epics appears to be this: It is part of the *dharma* of the *rājaniti* that the king and his ministries maximize protection and maintenance of all beings and species that belongs to the earth (*bhūma*). Still, any cattle that naturally died could be eaten and its skin and flesh dried and sold.

The treatises on ethics and religion (*Dharmaśāstras* and *Smṛtis*), the two epics (*Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*), and ancient lores (*Purāṇa*) emphasized the fourfold values of life which could be practiced in two ways, i.e., an active life in this world (*pravṛtti*) and renunciation of the world (*nivṛtti*).<sup>11</sup> The virtues of the second tradition perhaps led to the development of non-injury (*ahimsā*) in dharmic traditions. A more compassionate leaning paved the way for a more successful development of non-violent sacrifices in which pulses, cereals, ghee were substituted for animals in the sacrificial fire.<sup>12</sup> The *Mahābhārata* declared non-injury as the highest duty to be performed by an individual.<sup>13</sup> The *Bhagavadgītā* provides quasi-philosophical grounding for the values extolled in the *Mahābhārata* and is more decisive in its ethical pronouncements. It is for this reason that the *Gītā* (for short) has had a profound impact on modern Hindu-Indian thought and is drawn upon obliquely in Western ethical and ecological deliberations as well.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> For discussion see works of Greg Bailey and T S Rukmani, 'Literary Foundations for an Ecological Aesthetic: *Dharma*, *Ayurveda*, the Arts, and *Abhijñānaśakuntalam*, in *Hinduism and Ecology*, q.v., pp. 101-126.

<sup>12</sup> *MBh Śāntiparvan*. P. CCLV. 24 ff; CCLVII. 4ff. CCLXI. 19; CCLXIV.17: The

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, Śāntiparvan CCXXXVII 17 ff.; CCLXIV . 19 ff.: *Anu Parvan* CXVI. 72: CXVII 37-39.

<sup>14</sup> Gandhi, 1962; Naess, 1989, p. 194; Jacobsen, 1996, pp. 231-233 ; Gerald J. Larson, 'Conceptual Resources in South Asia for 'Environmental Ethics,' in *Nature in Asian Traditions of Thought: Essays in Environmental Philosophy*,



Several commentators, including *Śaṅkara*, have observed that the feeling of pain is universalized so as to derive a principle of empathy and non-injury. *Śaṅkara* characteristically commented that one who sees that what is painful and pleasant to himself is painful and pleasant to all creatures, will cause no living beings pain, and that he who is non-injurious is the foremost of yogins.<sup>15</sup> Self-realization in the *Gītā* takes due cognizance of the moral principle of *lokasaṃgraha*, the well-being of all sentient beings. The world of living things is brought together in a process governed by moral cause-effect relationships and it makes it imperative for each being within it to respect the autonomy, the interests and destiny of the other, and ultimately to find a way out of the cyclic implications of this process.<sup>16</sup>

Let me now move to certain contemporary narratives. I will begin with Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi was acutely aware that the demands generated by the need to feed and sustain human life compounded with the growing industrialization of India, if not of the world at large, far outstripped the finite resources of nature. This might appear naïve and commonplace with the onset of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but such pronouncements were rare as they were heretical at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Gandhi was also adamant about the need for a rigorous ethic of non-injury in the human treatment of animals.<sup>17</sup> More passionately on active environmental renewal projects, Gandhi wrote in 1926 that for India the next step should not be destructive agriculture but the planting of plenty of fruit trees and other vegetation as these provide nourishment, stability in the soil, and attracts rainfall as well as provide fodder for the insect and animal world. He was even worried about silk and wool extractions, and therefore proposed their replacement exclusively with *khādi* (mix of cotton and linen). The implications of such simple ecological wisdom have only just begun to dawn on a tech-fested agriculture production economics.

---

J. Baird Callicott and Roger T. Ames (eds.), Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1989, pp. 267–277.

<sup>15</sup> *Śaṅkara*, 1976, pp.198-9; Bilimoria & Hutchings, 1988, pp. 36.

<sup>16</sup> P. Bilimoria, *op cit*, pp. 17-18

<sup>17</sup> Gandhi, *My Socialism*, Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1959, pp: 34-35.

Gandhi also regarded vegetarianism as a moral cause, even once stating that he would prefer death to consuming some beef-tea or mutton, even under medical advice. He saw the life of a lamb as no less precious than that of a human being. In his little known treatise, *The Moral Basis of Vegetarianism*, he asserted, ‘The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated.’ To Gandhi, vegetarianism was not just a religious principle, but an moral obsession that he spent much time and effort on.

We see some of Gandhi’s thinking reflected in modern-day animal liberation/rights thinking, e.g. in Peter Singer’s argument that the morality of actions should not be determined exclusively in terms of human interests, rather that since animals indisputably have the ability to feel pain and pleasure (i.e. they have sentience), it would be wrong to intentionally cause suffering in animals. This general doctrine of sentientism is meant to be a corrective to the prelapsarian spectre of speciesism. One would have to be a ‘species-ist’ to believe that animals are not as deserving of freedom from suffering and subordination brought about by human interests, as is a race of people who are subjugated by another race without justification. Of course, by the same token, one cannot be over-romantic according to this view, about the special ‘rights’, and so on, on the part of the ‘animal species’, for this would be tantamount to ‘reverse species-ism’ (analogous to ‘reverse orientalism’). Rather, a non-anthropocentric and non-species-ist moral perspective is derivable from at least negative utilitarianism and underscores human responsibility to nature rather seriously, principally by including animals in the ‘expanding’ moral community of individuals and by not allowing human interests to subordinate the well-being of animals without justification. On this view, vegetarianism is said also to be morally compelling, for it is only out of selfish human interest, for food and feeling well, that one would have an animal killed and consumed, with relish. One might as well eat one's (or another's) pet(s).<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> See Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation*, 2nd edition. London: Jonathan Cape, 1990.

A contemporary Gandhian ethical argument for discontinuing the slaughter and consumption of the cow (ox, bull, buffalo, or cattle) has been taken up by Maneka Gandhi (wife of the late Rajeev Gandhi, and daughter-in-law of Indira Gandhi). Her strident animal rights campaign works through petitioning parliament and the legislature as well as voluntary animal rescue hospices; and one of her major targets has been the slaughterhouses, abattoirs, along the Yamuna River, and tanneries along the Ganga, which have been the major source of pollution of the waters in recent decades.

It can be surmised from the above discussions that just as Brāhmanic thought was compelled by the forceful moral concept of non-injury championed by Buddhist and Jain protagonists, and moved it to a more universalistic and pragmatic stratagem, modern-day Asian philosophies (from South , to S-E and East Asia) as well, may have yet to learn some more from these traditions and cultures – given their amoral animal praxis , both sacrificial and human consumption (except for pockets of Buddhist and Daoist monastic practices). The concept of *ahimsā* helped change the ancient outlook of a nomadically-driven people and brought about a rejection of the violence involved and perpetrated in Vedic sacrifices. It further helped develop the aligned aspects of non-injury in virtues, fledgling to begin with, such as the Hindu and libertarian ideals of toleration, forgiveness, and equanimity. Thus animals, trees and fauna, for their part as participating subjects, could be said to have played a significant role, directly or indirectly, in the development of Indian morality and the practice of preservation of the environment around them. At some point in history Indians could consider it a moral accomplishment to live in harmonious association with fauna and flora without disturbing the eco-components of nature. Whether in real-life practice and in their polity they achieved this or not remains in some doubt and a subject of much bitter complaint,<sup>19</sup> an ethics is

---

<sup>19</sup> Alison M Jaggar, 'Is Globalization Good for Women?' in *Comparative Literature*, Special Issue on Globalization and the Humanities, edited by David Leiwei Li, Fall, **53**, (4), pp. 298-314; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason, A History of the Vanishing Present*. Camb, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999. Jennifer Crawford, *The Attentive Heart*, Aldershot: Ashgate, Publishing, 2005.

not always measured by its success (consider the problems with utilitarianism, perhaps the most ‘successful’ Western ethics closer to our times) but by its conceptual coherence and broadness of vision.

The sentient and the non-sentient creatures and things of nature became increasingly, in the philosophical and devotional (including tantric or wildly esoteric) orientated schools in particular, a part of microcosm that is seen to be integral to the macrocosm. The forest universities imparted teaching amidst sylvan surroundings. The denizens of forests and jungles drew minimal food from nature for their survival, thus allowing the periodical growth of forests. People who committed crime on animals were severely dealt with by stringent laws. They propounded the philosophy of unitary consciousness in all the creatures of the world and cautioned against the indiscriminate killing of these creatures resulting in his own down fall. This holistic approach grew slowly but appreciably, such that in our times there can be a Gandhi, an Albert Schweitzer (also influenced by Jaina ethics), Arne Naess, The Dalai Lama, Vandana Shiva, Arundhati Roy, Medha Patkar, Sunderlal Bahuguna, a staunch Gandhian, Maneka Gandhi among others, who are able to command or claim a voice in the global movement towards environmentalism and sustainability without compromising to the globalization of industrial capital interest that remains more impersonally blind to the epistemic and real violence of their instrumental rationalism, with a single-minded pursuit of money economy, than the Vedic *rishis* and fishermen of yore, who used animals to appease the gods or provide nourishment to an immediate community.

## **Conclusion**

At the end of the day, or the modern era, what we can learn from the wrongs and rights of the tradition (ancient, through medieval to modern day) is this: We should like to think that human beings are

intelligent enough to be able to come to terms with the fact that they have certain basic duties to other species in the common eco-sphere (such as not to harm, not to disturb, not to forego trust, be willing to make restitution, be compassionate); these duties may ensue either in recognition of the rights of others *or* in respect for the interests and values of others (more in the Levinasian sense than that acceded by analytical or classical utilitarian ethics). While a morally stronger case can be made by basing the argument on interests and values than on the moral rights of animals, there is no reason why animal ethics need to favour one over the other. It would seem to me that a case for the *respect* of animals (of the kind that Paul Taylor has made as part of his case for respecting *nature*<sup>20</sup>) among the faces of the other through which indeed we are, can only be strengthened by finding a mean between rights and interests. There are ample resources for this bridging in all religions, not least on a par in the South Asian traditions.

---

### Additional References

Purushottama Bilimoria, Joseph Prabhu and Renuka Sharma (eds.) *Indian Ethics, Classical Traditions and Contemporary Challenges*. Vol. 1. - Aldershot : Ashgate, 2007; New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008.

\_\_\_\_\_ and P AE Hutchings, 'On disregard for fruits - Kant and the Gītā'. In: P Bilimoria & P Fenner (eds.) *Religions and Comparative Thought* (Delhi: Satguru Publications, 1988): 353-368.

Rabbi Dr. J. David Bleich, "Judaism and Animal Experimentation." In: Tom Regan (ed.) *Animal Sacrifices: Religious Perspectives on the Use of Animals in Science* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986).

Epstein, Ron, 'Religious Thoughts about Animals' (compilation), <http://userwww.sfsu.edu/~rone/Religion/religionanimals.html>

Lawrence Finsen and Susan Finsen, *The Animal Rights Movement in America: From Compassion to Respect* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1994).

---

<sup>20</sup> Paul Taylor, *Respect for Nature, A Theory of Environmental Ethics*, New Jersey: University of Princeton Press, 1986.; Richard Sorabji, *Animal Minds and Human Morals: the Origins of the Western Debate*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1993.

Temple Grandin, "Humanitarian Aspects of Shechitah in the United States," *Judaism and Animal Rights*, 97-98.

*Hinduism and Ecology* (Chris Chapple and Mary Evelyn Tucker eds.) Center for the Study of World Religions, Harvard University, Cambridge, 2000.

Roberta Kalechofsky, "Preface." In: Roberta Kalechofsky (ed.) *Judaism and Animal Rights: Classical and Contemporary Responses* (Marblehead: Micah Publications, 1992)

Andrew Linzey, *Animal Theology* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995).

Jim Mason and Peter Singer, *Animal Factories* (New York: Harmony Books, 1990)

Mary Midgley, *Animals and Why They Matter*. Rpt. Atlanta: University of Georgia Press, 1998.

Tom Regan, *The Struggle for Animal Rights* (Clarks Summit: International Society for Animal Rights, Inc., 1987) 153.

Richard H. Schwartz, *Judaism and Vegetarianism* (Marblehead: Micah Publications, 1988).

Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation* (New York: Avon Books, 1990) chapter five "Man's dominion..." and Singer, "Animals and the Value of Life," *Matters of Life and Death*, ed. Tom Regan (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1993) 287-292.

Richard Sorabji, *Animal Minds and Human Morals: the Origins of the Western Debate*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1993.