

Deliberation on Animal Welfare Issues: Religion is the Panacea

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Abstract: *Nearly all religious traditions of the world depict about autonomous value of all living creatures including non-human beings and significantly placed them in religious sacred books, tract, symbols, myths, rituals, usages and custom. Religious traditions ordained mankind to show enormous compassion towards the plight of all living creatures. As the best creation of the universe human has moral and to some extent legal obligations towards non-human beings. These obligations encompass responsive, rational and amicable treatments. With a view to pursuing animal welfare it should be the prime objectives of mankind to ensure physical and psychological well-being of animals.*

Keywords: *Animal Rights, Animal welfare, Religion.*

Date of Submission: 06-12-2017

Date of acceptance: 21-12-2017

I. Introduction

All living creatures – human and non-human beings– are worthy of consideration and respect. Animals are living creatures with feelings. We must consider their lives as worthwhile and cherished. They too have a right to life, and protection from pain and suffering. Human beings are dependent on animals for various purposes. Particularly the majority of the world’s population is economically dependent on animals. The contribution of animals in our life is value worthy. We utilise animal for our existence including food (milk, flesh, eggs etc.), clothing (wool, leather), for warmth, for amusement (aquariums and zoos) and for cultivation, transportation, again there are many instances where we find them as our companion.

From the dawn of time, human exercised unfettered dominion over animal and killed them mercilessly for obtaining basic necessities of life. Likewise, with the passage of time, humans have contemplated their relationship with animals. Primeval societies as well as some contemporary communities worshipped some specified categories of animals. Still there are some situations where we find inverse relationship between human being and animals. At present there are a plenty of groups advocating animal rights and animal welfare. But we have no other option but to concede that animal right and welfare concept traced back to the time immemorial and originated in religious faith and beliefs. Animal right is a philosophy which advocates for some absolute rights of non-human animals just like as human being. Fundamentally there are no distinctions between human and non-human beings as both are living and sentient being. On the other hands animal welfare encompasses a concept that directs stewardship of animals to their best use and practicing more humane, sensible and responsive use of animals.

1.1 Methodology

This study is the combination of methods for interpreting the ethics and morality of proper treatment of animal as reflected in various religions. In this research the observation method is given priorities. Primary information is collected from religious books, tract and customs. Some of the information was extracted from secondary sources such as books, journals, magazines, newspapers, web sites etc.

1.2 Object

The research work begins with an overview of how the world’s religious traditions are responding to animal welfare issues. This work develops with a brief evaluation of theoretical concept of animal welfare in ancient society and their relevance to the study of animals in the history of religion.

II. History of Animal Rights and Animal Welfare

Traditional philosophy of most of the ancient communities had little respect for animals. Non-human beings were viewed as being incomparably inferior to humans. Philosophers of former eras seldom felt that humans should be required to care about animals at all, and that animals' happiness was certainly irrelevant in evaluating human decisions. A few instances of animal care rules were found in the Code of Hammurabi. In Indian sub-continent Emperor Asoka was the foremost who established for the first time an animal care hospital.

Human attitudes towards animals have been influenced by the philosopher of ancient Greece and Rome. Aristotle placed humans, in comparison with non-human animals, at the top of the natural world as the later lacked the sense of reasoning. From time immemorial animal were things to be possessed and used, whereas man was superior to everything else in nature¹. The philosopher and mathematician, Pythagoras, urged respect for animals, believing that human and nonhuman souls were reincarnated from human to animal, and vice versa. Jeremy Bentham disclosed a distinct philosophy towards animals by analysing the concept that animals have sufferings, therefore their happiness is indeed relevant. From 1800 onwards, there were strongest movement and arguments for imbuing animals with an enhanced moral value. In *Animal Liberation*, Peter Singer argues that humans have a moral obligation to animals because they feel happiness and pain. Towards the end of the 1970s, some moral philosophers applied the idea of rights to animals. They argued that animals, like humans, have certain absolute rights. Schweitzer, Rev. Dr. Albert said that by ethical conduct toward all creatures, we enter into a spiritual relationship with the universe.

III. Animal Rights and Animal Welfare Concept in Various Religions

It is well recognized that animals are conscious natural beings. Undoubtedly, all religions of the world have ascribed that human being should be sympathised, affectionate and merciful with all living creatures. Religious custom and faith is theology which ordained kindness to animals. Non-human animals are living creatures and sentient beings. They have meaningful presence in both spiritual and material world. There are more than 19 major world religions. But the most common are Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, and Judaism.

Hinduism believes that killing animals should not be permitted and it is important for personal purity. The believers of Hinduism make up the largest percentage of vegetarians in the world today. Another wing of strict vegetarians are the Jains who believe that animals, like humans, have souls and that each of these souls is considered of equal value and should be treated with respect and compassion.

Guru Nanak one of the propagator of Sikhism said that the highest religion is to rise to universal brotherhood; and to consider all creatures your equals. In case of decapitation they prefer sharp knife or sword which ultimate aims is to ensure animal welfare.

Buddhism treated human and non-human beings with equal footing and they acknowledge that humans are not more significant than other living beings. Judaism has promulgated *tsar baaleihayyim*, the biblically based prohibition against animal cruelty.ⁱⁱ According to a Coptic fragment; the Acts of Thomas; the History of John; and the writings of the Early Church Father Irenaeus; Jesus did not serve fish to the masses, but rather, he served only bread.ⁱⁱⁱ

Islam recognises some rights and welfare concept of animal which embraces both the physical and the mental wellbeing of animals. 'Muslim poets and philosophers wrote scores of tracts on the wisdom and mystical authority of animals, from Attar's the Conference of the Birds and Ibn Tufayl's *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* to the epic *Case of the Animals Versus Man* by a fraternity of Iraqi scholars. These were not idle musings, but teaching tools in the service of a higher moral commitment. As such, they are part of the civilisational memory of Muslims everywhere – ready to be evoked against opportunistic politicians, reckless corporations and negligent publics'.^{iv} The foregoing passages take an attempt to express a glimpse on right and welfare issues of animals but the upcoming points is going to depict the views of major world religious faiths on animal rights and welfare issues.

3.1. Hinduism

“One is dearest to God who has no enemies among the living beings, who is nonviolent to all creatures.”

Hinduism, the world's oldest living religion, recognised some traditions promoting ethical treatment of animals. Hinduism teaches respect for all creatures. Compassion towards all beings is a basic principle of Hindu practice. Animals are spiritually important for various reasons. Cows are revered and considered as particularly sacred and vegetarianism is the ideal. Cows, snakes and horses occupy an important place in Hinduism. In Hinduism animals are used as symbols or vehicles of Gods. Hindu traditions depict that human should not have unfettered power of using and consuming animals and plants. 'Ahimsa, an important belief in Hinduism, teaches kindness and non-violence towards all living things including animals. Devout Hindus believe in reincarnation, which means rebirth into a higher or lower existence, determined by how we live our lives; this is the law of karma. Hindus believe that animals, like humans, have souls.'^v

3.2. Buddhism

“One must not deliberately kill any living creature either by committing the act oneself, instructing others to kill, or approving of or participating in acts of killing. All beings tremble before danger; all fear death. When a man considers this, he does not kill or cause to kill.”

Buddhism is a belief and philosophy that developed as a religion, originated from the teachings of the Gautama Buddha.

One of the most fundamental and foremost philosophy of Buddhism is non-violence, popularly known as ahimsa—the prohibition against the bringing of harm and/or death to any living being. Buddhism affirms that killing of any living being is a sin. It firmly believes in friendliness toward all living creatures. In Buddhism the highest and universal ideal is to continually work for a permanent end to the suffering of all creatures, not just the human animal, but all animals, all living beings without exception.^{vi} Buddhism demonstrates the idea that human beings do not have any extra privileges and immunities above and beyond the non-human beings. The world is not a creation specifically for the benefit and pleasure of human beings.^{vii} Buddhism also believe in reincarnation and suggest that human being can take rebirth in the shape of a lower animal and vice versa.

3.3. Judeo-Christian Faith

“A righteous man regards the life of his animal, but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel.”

There are many verses of bible which flourished that God has supreme control and dominion over human and humans have the right to domain the non-human beings. The term dominion indicates stewardship, humanity to animals. There are some provisions in the bible recognising humane, responsive and kind attitudes towards animals. The idea means that, dominion over animals implies responsibility and obligation to them, rather than exploitation alone.^{viii} It is true that Judaism believes that human life has more value than animal life but human beings must avoid causing pain to any living creature and animals should be treated with compassion.

Judaism advocates for proper treatment of animals as they believe in the concept that animals have similar sensitivity like human beings. Jewish law affirms some justifiable use of animals such as for clothing or dietary consumption. The Jewish religious codes require that allowed animals are to be slaughtered by a specially trained Jewish male. Unnecessary cruelty to animals is strictly forbidden. Jewish law recognises that animal's share some of the same rights as humans enjoy. Cruelty to animals and Hunting for sport is forbidden by the express provisions of bible. They believe that animals must be treated with kindness.

3.4. Islam

“A good deed done to an animal is like a good deed done to a human being, while an act of cruelty to an animal is as bad as cruelty to a human being.”

Animal rights were recognized early by the Sharia (Islamic law). In the Qur'an, there are many verses and in the Hadith, there are many references advocating kindness to animals. The Quran describes that animals form communities, just as humans do. They have souls, communicate with Almighty and worship Him in their own way. The Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) often chastised his Companions who mistreated animals, and spoke to them about the need for mercy and kindness. It is a distinctive characteristic of the Sharia that all animals have rights. Islam imposes responsibility upon mankind for proper treatment of animal and interdict on human manipulation of animal life. The compassion and mercy of Islam not only encompasses humanity, but also extends to all creatures in the world.

Several sacred Islamic manuscripts state that animals have their own position in the creation hierarchy thereby they represent Almighty's might, wisdom and kindness and humans are responsible for proper treatment of animals. The mercy of Islam extends not only to human beings but also to all living creatures. Islam recognized that it is the duty of every Muslim to provide appropriate food, water, and shelter to their pets. Islam prohibits hunting of animal for sport and personal amusement. Islamic dietary law allows Muslims to eat meat. Slaughtering of animal is allowed for dietary consumption. But it must be done by following certain guideline so as to least pain and suffering of animals. Islam forbade to sharp the slaughtering instrument in front of the animal. Again, slaughtering of one animal in front of another is strictly prohibited. Physical and mental cruelty towards animal is forbidden in Islam. Mistreatment is regarded as a great sin. Islam does ascribe kindness to all creation both human and non-human beings for its followers.

IV. Concluding Remarks

Religious traditions obligate mankind to show humanity towards animal as they cannot speak for themselves. Non-human animals have their inherent intelligence, feelings and instincts. It is the foremost duty of all human beings to follow the ethics and philosophy based on respective religion which is both necessary for our spiritual and material wellbeing. Religious traditions are complex, diverse and there are many instances where absolute interpretation and analysis is often difficult. Over time it is important to follow the right way avoiding the incongruous by discerning appropriate interpretation of religious traditions. Exploiting animals on the basis of inappropriate interpretation of religious principles is a fundamental wrong. Non-human beings must be dealt with due care, equity and compassion.

In order to diminish the plight of animals sometimes it is argued that legal sanction is necessary. But what religious education and good moral culture may do, cannot be obtained by legislative attempts alone. Over

the ages it is evident that there are means and values in religions which can turn a man in reasonable being from perversion.

This research work describes the animal welfare concept from religious perspective. There are some who are not in the wing of theism, for them it would be symmetrised to provide the reference of science. As science reveals more facts about the "hidden" lives of animals, such as dolphins and whales suffer terribly in captivity, elephants mourn their dead, and wild parrots name their young. Science has taught us that chickens feel empathy, cows form maternal and social bonds, and rats - for no reward - will free each other from a trap.^{ix} Unrestricted human exploitation of animals as well as maltreatment of animals' results from lack of spiritual value in modern life. Animal cruelty represents a flawed humanity which is ultimately detrimental to the moral development of humans. By following the rules and principles of our respective religions, human being can recuperate from perverted path. If it happens it would be jubilation for the whole universe.

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Rowshan Jahan Farhana "Deliberation on Animal Welfare Issues: Religion is the Panacea." *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention(IJHSSI)*, vol. 06, no. 12, 2017, pp. 56-59.