

CRUELTY TO ANIMALS AND VIOLATION OF COMPASSION FOR LIVING CREATURES—A CRIME

'The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated'—Gandhiji. Article 51A of the Constitution reads:

It shall be the duty of every citizen of India—

- (a) to value and preserve the rich heritage of our composite culture;
- (b) to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers and wild life, and to have compassion for living creatures;
- (c) to develop the scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform;

It has been wisely said that 'God sleeps in the mineral, awakens in the vegetable, walks in the animal and thinks in man.' (Kathryn Breese). The gentleness of our jurisprudence forbids grievous ill-treatment of beasts, domestic or dangerous.

Is not the cow holy and the bull too? Why, half-lion, half-human is Narasimha an avatar of Vishnu! Birds too, Garuda, Peacock are holy! Do we not have a rat temple with tens of thousands of mice frolicking (Subramanya) fearlessly (in Rajasthan)? Don't we have devotees of serpents and monkeys Hanuman and walk piously round holy trees and bamboo clusters chanting mantras? A culture of reverence for arboreal and animal creation is ecological wisdom as ancient inheritance and compassion for fellow-beings of lesser evolutionary status. Darwin taught us:

We must, however, acknowledge, as it seems to me, that man with all his noble qualities.....still bears in his bodily frame the indelible stamp of his lowly origin. (Charles Darwin)

Are not our glorious tuskers, so majestic, so magnificent, so divine, so stately?—Yet they are so pachydermically, so satanically, so malignantly terrorized that sensitive hearts revolt, Constitutional values rebel and our sublime culture suffers shock. Do the pious devotees of Vinayaka, the Elephant God, realize that hundreds worship

this grand divinity as the offspring of Shiva and Parvathi although the natural habitat of elephants is the forest and their fond food is jungly bamboos, edible roots and palm leaves? To behold them in their wild environs is a wonder, a rare thrill, an exciting spectacle of superb beauty and a celestial scenario of colossal grandeur with ivory tusks and big, black, bulging bellies. Harmless herds of elephants when slowly moving in lovely locomotion are and stately gregariousness, when confronted in lonely isolation, a violent fury rabidly destructive, ready to crush and kill without 'Gajendra' qualms. Our national parks are homes of these huge holy beasts and form the animal wealth and precious living treasure of Creation. And yet, man's barbarity to beast and inhumanity to God is visited on this sanctimoniously worshipped Gajendra! Wild elephants are vegetarian and peaceful unless provoked. But Man, still unable to outlive his arboreal ancestry, cruelly traps the noble beasts for his entertainment and hard, harsh labour. His worship is deception, to gain material good and his deification of the elephant is savagery and picturesque golden glory when we see the pachydermic marvel in temple festivals and timber business work places where they are tortured to carry heavy hard wood. What dizzy delight in witnessing great Ganapathis wearing caparison, elaborate and making them stand-still for hours unmoved by tremendous crowds and noisy drums, subjecting these unhappy creatures to festival discipline and humans on their back—these unnatural exercises are cruelty.

Aesthetically speaking, watching these superb elephantine splendors presenting themselves in graceful groups with large ears waving vibrantly as if in response to the rhythmic drumbeats, is a sight for the Gods to see. As the spectacular team of elephant holding aloft its high head the divine idol with decorative Netti Pattom or face finery like golden glory gleaming celestially in the gleaming sun Solomon in all his glory is not arrogant like, one of these. Every majestic festival in Kerala summer is a feast for the eye and ecstasy for the heart unbeaten by any religious grandeur anywhere on earth. Intoxicating, indeed, is this sovereign evening for God and Man! How patient, silent and absolutely obedient and royally descended from heaven and emerging with grave dignity are these twenties and thirties, even sixties and seventies of remarkable well-groomed, shining tuskers, with enchanting ivory, quietly responding to their mahouts prods even when mammoth crowds in rapturously revelry

enjoy these supreme stately beasts marching safely in disciplined drill, with huge torches and Pancha Vadyam with blowing couches and dazzling drums reams, in front! But behind this heavenly pleasure is the sadistic torture of God's noble creation nurtured in green forests but caught trapped, trained, tamed and these huge wild animals chained in their big legs, losing their natural freedom of jungle saunter and suffering stand-still situation for listless spells in the name of Gods, but really for the crazy joy of man! What a tragedy, comedy, cruelty and savagery! Is it not vicious pleasure, vulgar violation of human compassion towards living creatures and man's terrorism inflicted on animal's humiliating helplessness? I have been in jail in 1948 and a few fellow-prisoners were chained when taken out and still feel the hurt! Some Menaka Gandhi whose heart bleeds for Ganapathi, the incarnation of godly elephants, must speak for Vinayaka. True devotion to the deity Ganapathi demands and commands a liberation, an arrest of this satanic, unholy process. Did we not once revel in circus animals, roaring brave lions in forests, captured and tortured in cages, caned and trained traumatically, to behave meekly like cowardly creatures? Today, thanks to Menaka, the law has banned this barbarity; and yet circus shows are fantastic attractions without lions crouching to order and obey like lambs! The lion in man is dead and like dogs he licks imperial feet! Humanity is truly great when humility courageously spurns the suppressive social order and compassionately embraces fraternity!

The finest hour of human harmony arrives when man in nature is in fellowship with every other creature thereby making cosmic unity and expression of divinity. Let us, therefore, promote more opportunities for our younger generation, the flowering nation, to hold a handsome relationship with beasts and birds, walk high peaks, deep canyons and rare caves. The Raj Bhavans in Madras and Hyderabad have excellent mini-national parks. What a delight to visit! Kaziranga and its rhinos the Gir forests with its lions, the flocks of doves, parrots and pheasants in Rajasthan are a paradise which no Indian should miss. Alas, what has happened to Man? Bernard Shaw, with truthful cynicism, observed: Darwin taught us not that all men were monkeys once, but that some monkeys have no tails now. How sad that the forests with their happy inheritants are vanishing and the rest of the earth is infested with wild animals huddled in high-rise five-star cities, called civilized world, frightfully armed with freebooters and

technological terrorism. A great revolution in the evolutionary process is the desideratum if the human future deserves its tryst with destiny.

The appetite of humans for violent pleasure, sadistic sights, flesh foods by harsh butchery and vulgarity by witnessing Killer bleeding that bull-fight, shooting wild beasts, eating frogs legs and meat of tender calves make our five-star hotels bedlam promoters. Let us campaign for a humane culture!

He prayeth best who loveth best,
All things great and small,
Because the dear God who made us all,
He made and loveth us all.

Nay more. Listen to William Blake. He speaks for all time, all creation.

A dog starv'd at his master's gate
Predicts the ruin of the State,
A horse misus'd upon the road
Calls to Heaven for human blood.
Each outcry of the hunted hare
A fibre from the brain does tear,
A skylark wounded in the wing,
A cherubim does cease to sing.

May 31, 2008

V.R. KRISHNA IYER