

# Challenges to Animal Protection

Dr. Vandana Shiva

**A**nimal protection is definitely very low in the popular agenda in India. This is ironic, given that we are the civilisation from which the diverse philosophies of Ahimsa and non-violence took birth. It cannot also be argued that compassion for animals is a thing of the past since the animal rights movement is the strongest and best organised social movement in the industrialised countries at present. In this period of globalisation we seem to be experts at shedding the best of our traditions, and adopting the worst traditions of the west. We seem to have shed our past based on compassion, and selectively adopted the culture of cruelty while rejecting the culture of compassion from the modern western industrialised societies. Our challenge today is to build a future based on compassion from this present based on cruelty.

I see four fold challenge to animal protection. The first is the threat to animal diversity. The second is the problem to cruelty to animals. The third is the issue of sustainability as linked to animal protection. The fourth is the new threat of animal patenting.

## 1. The extinction of Animal Diversity:

Major movements exist to create awareness on the extinction of wild animals. Yet most of our domesticated animal breeds are on the verge of extinction, and no one has shed a tear or made a noise.

### Gir :

The Gir cattle have been bred and maintained by the Gir "maldharis" the indigenous cattle breeding community of the Gir region. 'Mal' means wealth and 'dhari' means holder of wealth. Indigenous breeds are clearly the primary wealth for pastoralists like the 'Gir Rabari'.

The Gir region is also home to the famous Gir Lion. The maldharis and their cattle have lived with the lion over centuries. The maldharis accept the fact that

each year they will lose some of their cattle to the lion. They never kill the lion because they worship the Goddess and the lion is her 'vahan' or vehicle. In spite of centuries of coexistence, the maldharis are being identified as the primary threat to the Gir lion by international conservation bodies like IUCN and international financial agencies like the World Bank. The World Bank's ecodevelopment project in the Gir sanctuary involves resettling of maldharis who are cattle experts, not cultivators and they are unable to survive through cash crop cultivation and are pushed into destitution. With their displacement, the Gir cattle and centuries, of biodiversity expertise is threatened with extinction.

### Ongole:

The Ongole is a world famous breed from Andhra Pradesh which is threatened with extinction in its own centre of origin. Government policy documents refer to distinctive breeds like the Ongole as 'non descript' breeds. A publication says "The low producing native breeds are mixed with exotic cattle breeds such as jersey, holstein fresian, etc. through artificial insemination". There are 2,838 A.I. centres in Andhra Pradesh alone. The Government document goes on to state. "In order to augment the cross breeding programmes, a systematic elimination of native scrub bulls is essential. Unfortunately the department personnels have to face stiff resistance from the farmers in this aspect in view of the local market and other considerations. During 1992-93, 9.95 lakh scrub bulls were castrated"

The Government animal husbandry programmes are therefore programmes for the elimination of India's cattle diversity including the Ongole cattle.

### Vechur :

The Vechur cattle, an almost extinct variety of Indian indigenous breed, is the smallest cattle variety in the world. Endemic to the moist landscape of Kerala,

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the uniqueness of this rare variety is its high fat content in milk. It needs very little feed and one kilogram of fodder for the day is enough for this short and stumpy draught cattle. At present, its local population is not more than 100 despite the conservation efforts by the Kerala Agricultural University. The Roslin Institute of the Edinburgh University of the UK, the creator of Dolly, the Sheep, has surreptitiously obtained the embryos of this rare Indian breed to facilitate their patentable transgenic research. The Pharmaceuticals Proteins Ltd., a branch of the Roslin Institute, has got patent on cows, sheep and other mammalian bioreactors (including human) for using animals as pharmaceutical factories to reduce chemicals in mammary glands. Now as reported, loaded with a patent on Vechur and with command over shifting genes technology called "Biotechnology", they can turn our little Vechur into walking factories in their fields and earn billions of dollars through butter production by churning the high content of fat in its milk.

### 2. Cruelty, Old and New:

Violence against animals is increasing. Animals in India have always been our work partners. But with increasing poverty, with people not able to look after their children and having to send them to work, animals too are getting exploited. In Addition, we are seeing the rapid introduction of factory farming. There is also the looming threat of genetic engineering with animals being used as pharmaceutical factories.

### 3. The Centrality of Animals to Sustainability:

The primary cause for the rapid erosion of livestock numbers is due to India's trade liberalisation policies. Under the prevailing climate of economic liberalisation, many Government initiatives and legislation such as the New Livestock Policy, have been implemented with the target of increasing meat exports. The livestock policy paper is disrespectful to

the Indian culture of reverence for farm animals. These cultural beliefs are going down in western countries themselves, India's livestock policy is trying to convert predominantly vegetarian society into a beef eating culture. In the U.S. beef consumption per capita has declined from 88.9 pounds in 1976 to 63.9 pounds in 1990. Cultural attitudes have been the most significant reason for maintaining vegetarian diets for the large majority in India. The livestock policy would like to undermine these conservation policies to promote a meat culture.

As stated in Section 2.10 on Meat Production, "The beef production in India is purely an adjunct to milk and draught power production. The animals slaughtered are the old and the infirm and the sterile and are in all cases malnourished. There is no organized marketing and no grading system and beef prices are at a level which makes feeding uneconomic. There is no instance of feedlots or even individual animals being raised for meat. Religious sentiments (Particularly in the Northern and Western parts of India) against cattle slaughter seem to spill over also on buffaloes and prevent the utilization of a large number of surplus male calves".

The policy then recommends Government interventions to stimulate meat production even though this will totally undermine the basis of sustainable agriculture (Section 3.10)

The Ministry of Agriculture has given 100% grants and tax incentives to encourage the setting up slaughter houses. According to a 1996 Union Ministry of Environment report, atleast 32,000 illegal slaughter houses have established themselves in the last five years, compared to only 3600 licensed abattoirs legally established. The Government affirms that this is simply an estimate, which in reality is bound to be much greater.

Total quantity of meat exports has risen more than twenty fold from 6196 tonnes in 1975 to 137,334 tonnes in 1995. (FAO 1996).

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It can be observed that beef and veal, buffalo meat, and total meat exports have all increased by factors of 2.15, 1.93, and 1.91 respectively from 1990 to 1995. Between 1991 and 1996, cattle, buffalo and livestock populations have only increased by factors of 1.01, 1.01 and 1.02 respectively. India is exporting more meat than is being replenished within the country.

Another significant factor contributing to the decline of cattle is the shortage of fodder. The fodder crisis has three roots, one lies in agriculture policies based on Green Revolution techniques which undermined the sources of fodder from agricultural crops. High yielding varieties were bred for grain, leading to a decline in fodder. The second source lies in aid programs such as "Social Forestry" and "Farm Forestry" projects which promoted the planting of monocultures of non-fodder species such as eucalyptus, thus aggravating the shortage of fodder. Finally, the enclosure of the commons has also led to a scarcity of grazing lands and pastures.

With regards to cattle, the disappearance of the hardy indigenous, well adapted breeds, serves only to cripple the livelihoods of the rural communities that depend upon them. The use of cross-breeds adversely affects small farmers as these cross-breeds can only provide high milk outputs at higher levels of nutrition, unlike the indigenous breeds which have high energy conversion and use scarce fodder and feed resources efficiently.

The promotion of increased meat production for export is leading to the erosion of our genetic livestock diversity and depletion of our cattle wealth. Large populations of indigenous livestock species are disappearing due to the increased slaughter rate for export. Furthermore, the emphasis on commercial dairy with the eventual aim to export, is threatening the existence of India's indigenous breeds due to the cross breeding with exotic species.

### **Impact of Meat Exports on Animal Diversity and the Rural Economy:**

In the last decade there has been a significant decline of livestock in India, particularly the indigenous breeds known for their hardiness, milk production and draught power. The decline in livestock is primarily due to illegal slaughtering of cattle and buffalo for meat export.

FAO in 1996 confirmed that "the diversity of domestic animal breeds is dwindling rapidly. Each variety that is lost takes with it irreplaceable genetics traits-traits that may hold the key to resisting disease or to productivity and survival under adverse conditions." For example, some of the declining indigenous breeds today are Punganur, Red Kandhari, Vechur, Bhangnari, Dhenani, Lohani, Rojhan, Bengal, Chittagong Red, Napalees Hill, Kachah, Siri, Tarai, Lulu and Sinhala. The dramatic decline in livestock population in India has reached rare proportions. If measures to arrest this trend are not taken now, most of us will witness the extinction of livestock within our life time, and with it the foundation of sustainable agriculture will disappear.

### **Undermining of Rio:**

The policies of meat export promoted under a trade liberalisation and the diminishing numbers of livestock unequivocally portray a complete lack of commitment made in Agenda 21 to sustainable utilisation and management of animal genetic resources.

The role of animals in tropical farming systems is not fully appreciated, since animal husbandry models come from industrialised countries where livestock are separate from crop production and are maintained for animal energy and draught power or for organic inputs to maintain soil fertility have been displaced.

Recognising the erosion of animal genetic resources, Agenda 21 states the need for conservation and utilisation of animal genetic resources for agriculture. Chapter 6, para 76 of Agenda 21 states;

"Some local animal breeds have unique

# **PAZHAKULAM SOCIAL SERVICE SOCIETY - PASSS**

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attributes for adaptation, disease resistance and specific uses which in addition to their socio-cultural value should be preserved. These local breeds are threatened by extinction as a result of the introduction of exotic breeds and of changes in livestock production systems."

Rebuilding animal and crop diversity is an important policy aspect of sustainable agriculture.

Chapter 14.65 of Agenda 21 calls for conservation and sustainable utilisation of the existing diversity of animal breeds for future requirements. But since India's ratification of GATT, and the implementation of World Bank recipes of structural adjustment, India's new economic political climate has hastened the rate of depletion of our animal wealth and the extinction of our animal diversity.

### **The Compulsion of Non-Sustainability:**

A serious consequence of the declining animal wealth is the undermining of the foundation of sustainable agriculture and the destruction of the rural economy and rural livelihoods. This will adversely affect the landless, the dalits and women. Women provide nearly 90% of all labour for livestock management. Of 70 millions households which depend on livestock for their livelihoods, two thirds are small and marginal farmers and landless labourers. Cattle exports are leading to the escalating costs of purchasing livestock, which are adversely impacting on the small farmer community. Reduced amounts of dung for manure, cooking and fuelling biogas plants further reinforce the trend towards unsustainable agricultural systems and rural economies. Consequently, farmers become increasingly dependent on imported non-renewable fossil fuels for fertilizers and energy.

While the export of cattle is justified on the basis of earning foreign exchange,

the destruction and a drain of foreign exchange through increased imports of fertilisers, fossil fuel, tractors and trucks to replace the energy and fertility that cattle give freely to the rural economy.

### **4. Patents on life :**

New property rights regimes are redefining animals as intellectual property. Animal protection movements need to engage in the issue of animal patenting, in order to determine the public morality or older public that Article 27.2 of TRIPS/WTO can be used to exclude patenting of animals.

### **The Need for Both People's Movements and Government Actions:**

Rejuvenating a culture of compassion is basically a civic responsibility. However, animal protection cannot merely be a people's movement -- it also needs the Government to perform its duty as stated in Art 51 - A(g) of the Constitution.

While promoting lifestyles and consumption patterns has to be a people's movement, the Government has a duty to join people in protecting animals. The Government cannot legislate vegetarianism, but it can definitely respond to people's call to stop animal and meat exports. The Government cannot force people to be compassionate, but the Government is needed to put a philosophy of compassion into practice by reflecting the public morality and excluding patents on animals in any amendment to patent laws. Government cannot choose lifestyles for people, but it can definitely make sound and sustainable agriculture and livestock policy so that factory farming systems based on cruelty to animals are not introduced in India.

The people need to become more active in animal protection. But this does not mean that the Government should move out.

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