

Animal 'Rights' and Wrongs, who defines them?

News:

Animals were subjected to a string of brutal attacks at a farm that sells goats' milk to Tesco, Sainsbury's, Waitrose and other supermarkets, footage from hidden cameras has revealed. Goats were seen on video being punched, kicked, hit with a pole and slammed onto their backs at a plant that supplies St Helen's Farm, in East Yorkshire. (Source: The Independent 27/07/2020)

Comment:

Video footage of horrendous animal suffering has emerged from the rights organisation Surge, which shows the barbaric treatment of goats at a Yorkshire farm, the main suppliers of St Helen's Dairy, the leading goat milk company in the UK.

The Animal Welfare Act 2006 states animals, including farm animals, must be protected from pain, injury, suffering and disease, however the hour long video footage shows dozens of goats being kicked and punched, hit with a metal pole, held by the throat with their tails twisted, left lame and struggling to stand and walk, and crying in pain as they were held by their necks. The video also showed the goats slammed onto their backs on a conveyor belt before their hooves were roughly trimmed.

Society has come to view animals merely as expendable resources, a source of revenue rather than creatures with a right to life, purpose and a value of their own; and as a self-professed nation of animal lovers some will write off this cruelty as an anomaly. However the behaviour of the employees is indicative of a broader ideological mindset entrenched within the wider society under Capitalism - which is to derive the maximum financial benefit at every opportunity, even if it means overlooking tenets of morality and ethics just because moral and structural accountability is subjective.

The last few decades have seen this mindset of impunity metastasize within Western, secular nations despite the high claims of human rights and social welfare. Decades of police brutality and Western military interventions revealed staggering new heights of abuse and torture. Proving beyond doubt that the values of freedom and benefit become warped in the absence of accountable institutional structures - and that a sense of social and personal morality rooted in a God centric world view is wholly necessary for the functioning of a civil and just society.

In Islam an individual cannot separate his social responsibility from his personal accountability, or even from the divine Shariah laws which anchor his behaviour within Islam's state structures in any given scenario.

Islam's tradition is exemplified by an occasion when on route to Badr, a Quraysh war scout was apprehended, and when some of the Muslims tried to beat him so he would reveal strategic information, the Prophet peace be upon him hastened to finish his prayer and apprehended them with the words, «إِذَا صَدَقَّاكُمْ صُرِّيْتُمُوهُمَا، وَإِذَا كَذَبَّاكُمْ تَرَكْتُمُوهُمَا!» **“you beat him when he is honest with you, and you leave him be when he lies to you!”** Imam Malik (ra) later clarified the Islamic position with this evidence when asked, “can a captive be tortured if it is hoped that he can reveal the enemy's points of vulnerability?”, to which he said, “we have never heard of this (in our tradition).”

Such is the mercy and humane treatment that prisoners of war are entitled to in Islam, that when physical revenge could have been taken against Suhail Ibn Amr for his obnoxious preaching against Muhammed peace and blessings be upon him, he (pbuh) said, «لَا أَمَلُ بِهِ فَيَمْتَلُ اللَّهُ بِي» **“I will not mutilate him, lest Allah mutilate me - even if I were a Prophet”**. Thus highlighting through these statements that no authority, not even a prophet would escape accountability for torturing those under their care.

Likewise the Islamic tradition is rife with examples of benevolence towards animals. The prophet himself exacted this by cutting around his own garment, rather than disturbing a cat that was sleeping on it. Also he forbade the practices of cutting tails, manes, keeping saddles on animals unnecessarily, the branding of animals on soft spots, and from being overburdened.

The Messenger (peace be upon him) would, say «اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ فِي هَذِهِ الْبَهَائِمِ الْمُعْجَمَةِ» **“Fear God in your treatment of animals.”** [Abu Dawud]. Also he (saw) said, «مَا مِنْ إِنْسَانٍ يَقْتُلُ عُصْفُورًا فَمَا فَوْقَهَا بِغَيْرِ حَقِّهَا، إِلَّا سَأَلَهُ اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ عَنْهَا» **“There is no man who kills a sparrow or anything beyond that, without its deserving it, but God will ask him about it”**. [Ahmad and an-Nasai]. Jabir reported that there happened to pass before Allah's Apostle (saw) an ass the face of which had been cauterised, whereupon he said: «لَعَنَ اللَّهُ الَّذِي وَسَمَهُ» **“Allah has cursed one who has cauterised it (on the face).”** [Muslim]. Also he (saw) said, «لَعَنَ اللَّهُ مَنْ مَتَّلَ بِالْحَيَوَانِ» **“May God curse anyone who maims animals.”** [Hadith Bukhari]

However the most obvious evidence of *ihsaan* or excellence towards animals is demonstrated by the Shari ruling on the method of slaughter. Its conditions protect the emotional state of the animal by not even allowing it to feel fear, by encountering any carcasses or the sight and sound of the slaughter of other animals - nor should the creature even see the knife. The slaughter itself must be done very swiftly and with a deep incision to the jugular vein and carotid artery so that death is instantaneous, without pain and suffering. Notwithstanding this, animals are to be kept in hygienic and spacious conditions, nothing like the factory farms of today... and given that consuming meat from any other manner of slaughter is impermissible, indicates the mandatory aspect of this practice and the merciful Shariah laws.

On the authority of Abu Ya'la Shahddad Ibn Aus, the Messenger of Allah (saw) said, «إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَتَبَ الْإِحْسَانَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ، فَإِذَا قَتَلْتُمْ فَأَحْسِنُوا الْقِتْلَةَ، وَإِذَا ذَبَحْتُمْ فَأَحْسِنُوا الذَّبْحَ، وَلْيُجِدَّ أَدْنُكُمْ شَفْرَتَهُ، وَلْيُرَخَّ» **“Verily Allah has prescribed proficiency in all things. Thus, if you kill, kill well, and if you slaughter, slaughter well. Let each one of you sharpen his blade and let him spare suffering to the animal he slaughters.”** [Muslim]. As narrated by Ibn Umar, the Prophet (saw) cursed the one who did Muthla to an animal, i.e. cut its limbs or some other part of its body while it is still alive. [Bukhari]

So as we approach Eid ul Adha and the days of sacrifice in remembrance of Ibrahim (as) and his test of obedience to Allah (swt), we can raise and counter the issue of animal rights within the Islamic framework and easily showcase the ideological supremacy of Islam.

**Written for the Central Media Office of Hizb ut Tahrir by
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