

The damp, cold and grey days of December herald the mass slaughter of countless millions of animals for food or furs in the affluent Western World. At this time we celebrate Christmas. A time of peace on Earth, and good will to mankind (but not apparently for the rest of God's creation which we selfishly plunder).

This time of feasting originates from the ancient Roman festival of Saturnalia and yet in memory of the birth of the Christ who brought a teaching of love. We celebrate Christmas with such cruelty.

There are those who hold the view that Jesus himself may have been a vegetarian, coming from an Essene family. Surely he would not have condoned the terrible cruelty to animals by the growing use of factory farm methods and the horrors of the slaughterhouse.

I have been a strict vegetarian for 35 years, and on the death of my Stepfather, Lord Dowding, in 1970 I gave up my aerospace career to join my Mother in her dedication to animal welfare.

I am grateful to Shri Nitin Mehta, President of the Young Indian Vegetarians in England, for inviting me to make myself known to you and to share with you some aspects of my work in India. In this connection I must thank Shri Prabuddha N. Chatterjee for his help to me and to his dedication to animal welfare through the "All Lovers of Animals Society", which was run by the late Dorothy Matthews. Also my thanks to Asoke and Shunta Mukerjee for their great friendship to me and my wife while in Calcutta.

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How delicate is our relationship with nature ?

The importance of a harmonious relationship between man and nature has always been an important aspect of the Indian culture. Yet this is now threatened by the intrusion of Western material values - the values that I speak of are the very ones which have been proved to be untenable and are being discarded in the West.

Consider the matters of wildlife and pest control. The scene is idyllic. A humid Indian summer evening with the sun sinking behind the billowing monsoon clouds; the beating wings of a family of giant fruit bats foraging in the mango trees; the insect whine of attacking mosquitoes, and the air filled with the wooing chorus of the Indian bull frog. How I long to be back amongst my friends in a country I have come to love so dearly.

Even as I write, there is tragic news from India. Thousands of people and animals died near Bhopal in agony from an escape of toxic methyl isocyanate gas, used in the manufacture of insecticides.

The increasing dependence on dangerous insecticides in India is directly linked to the needless and cruel mass slaughter of millions of bull frogs to provide a food delicacy for the North American and European market. The range of delicacies for the gourmet is proliferating - lobster, crab, pate de foie gras, and now frogs' legs.

Commercial interests supplying the supermarkets and fast food trade are cashing in by making these one-time rare delicacies available to all.

Alas for India - a beautiful country whose heart beats in thousands of small villages. Its farming communities, their livelihood, the rural ecology and economy are threatened by a small number of influential business

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entrepreneurs with big fish processing and freezing plants. They are cashing in on the live cutting of millions of frogs each year which pass through their plants on the outskirts of cities such as Madras, Bombay, Hyderabad and Calcutta. Over the past 25 years the trade has grown at an alarming rate. In 1959, India exported about 93,5 tonnes (equivalent to at least 5.8 million frogs). By 1973, this had risen to 2,698 tonnes, and to 3,570 tonnes in 1978 (which is the equivalent of 10,700 tonnes live frogs). Ecologically, these frogs would have eaten over 10,000 tonnes of crop pests PER DAY during the monsoon season, had they been left alive in the rice paddies and coconut gardens to fulfill their natural task.

There are about two hundred species of frog in the world. Of the sixteen species in India and Bangladesh four species of frog are used, mainly the larger *Rana tigrina* and *R. hexadactyla*.

In 1973 the USA temporarily banned the import of frogs legs from India, Indonesia and Japan, due to problems with bacteria such as salmonella. Solutions of water and chlorine or 10% common salt are used to wash the frogs to help reduce this problem. India exported 1,935 tonnes to the United States in 1982.

In an attempt to dispel allegations of cruelty in India a National Award was given to a researcher who came up with the idea that a 10 minute immersion in 10% sodium chloride immobilised the frogs and it was assumed to anaesthetise them. This however has been scientifically disproved, and, to the contrary, such a process is highly irritant and damaging to the skin of amphibians.

Peasant farmers now have had to try and compensate for the loss of this natural pest control by using pesticides, such as DDT, DNOC and other highly toxic chemicals, many of which are imported from Europe, where their use is restricted or banned.

Britain, the world's third largest exporter of pesticides derived more than half its income from export sales in 1983. The EEC accounts for two-thirds of the world's pesticides exports.

This growing dependence on insecticides by India and Bangladesh is being increased by the seasonal mass slaughter of hundreds of millions of bull frogs each year to provide this food delicacy, causing a growing health threat to peasants - especially children. The Head Surgeon of the Skin Clinic in Bangladesh's capital Dacca is concerned that 20% of the population suffer from skin diseases caused by contact with pesticides. "If the toxic chemicals are not reduced, we shall have to face enormous problems".

According to Oxfam, 375,000 people in the Third World are poisoned - 10,000 fatally - by pesticides each year. These figures do not include chronic or long-term damage, such as cancers and birth defects.

India spends 13 million pounds (rupees 200 crores) a year on the insecticide imports, more than double the amount it earns from the frogs legs trade. Across the border in Bangladesh, now the largest exporter of frogs legs, the bill for pest control has escalated to 17.5 million dollars.

For every 35 paisas (54 pence) earned in foreign exchange this has prevented the natural destruction of 1 kg. of agricultural pests. The surest means of exterminating an animal is to put a price on it. But there are other considerations, if only man would seek to understand the wonderful relationships in nature. Frogs control parasites which harm freshwater fish. These fish live in village ponds and keep the water clean during the dry season when water is so vital. Frogs also provide a major food source for snakes, such as the cobra and also birds of prey. The use of toxic insecticides such as DDT have caused many birds to disappear and the loss of frog spawning grounds, as well as poisoning fish. The result is that without an abundance of snakes and other predators the rodent population has increased, and in the Indian sub-continent they outnumber people by ten to one.

In Bangladesh, for instance, 1.2 million tonnes of grain are eaten or spoiled by rats every year - exactly the amount that is imported to feed its starving people. India has allocated one and a half million dollars for rat-extermination programmes.

In November 1977, my Mother Lady Dowding, as President of the National Anti-vivisection Society was invited by Smt. Rukmini Devi Arundale, Chairman of the Indian Government's Animal Welfare Board, to address their Third National Conference in New Delhi. There she had discussions with Prime Minister Desai, a fellow vegetarian, who agreed to Lady Dowding's request to ban India's export of monkeys, painted finches and frogs' legs. Despite the announcement that the trade in frogs' legs would be stopped, only the ban on the export of monkeys for experiments has been implemented, which incidentally is still enforced.

During 1977-79, whilst again in India on a wide range of animal welfare and conservation issues, I had discussions concerning the trade in frogs' legs with the Prime Minister. However, the short-term commercial pressures were so strong that no action could be enforced to save India's ecology and resulting hardship to its people from this cruel trade. In April 1983, the Animal Welfare Board declined to publish my reports on trade in frogs' legs and commented " it is not desirable for us to publish an article on such sensitive subjects".

India has so devastated its own wild frog population that Bangladesh has taken over as the largest exporter of frogs' legs, exporting some 1,300 tonnes - 42% of total exports - to the largest importer the USA. The Netherlands took 39% of Bangladesh's total exports.

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The Dutch are the second largest importers of frogs' legs, taking 1,048 tonnes in 1982, 303 tonnes from India. China who used to supply both an internal and external demand, has banned the sale of frogs after their importance in controlling rice pests was revealed.

Britain's imports increased to 109.6 tonnes of frogs' legs in 1983. In May 1984, the BBC showed some of my film of the cruelty involved in the frogs' legs trade. The showing of this film launched a national and international campaign to ban the import of frogs' legs.

The success of the campaign so far is that a major American-owned food chain and two importers, as well as many retail outlets, have stopped selling frogs' legs in the UK.

Questions have been raised for me in Parliament and a resolution has been tabled in the European Parliament calling for a ban on the import of frogs' legs into European Community (EEC). I have asked my friend the Deputy High Commissioner to express our concern over the cruel trade in frogs' legs.

In England we are circulating petitions opposing the cruel and destructive trade in frogs' legs. Already, and in only a few weeks, we have 35,000 signatures. A presentation and protest will be made to the Government in 1985.

On the occasion of the Gandhi Birthday celebration I had the privilege of meeting the new High Commissioner for India, Shri Prakash Mehotre, and his charming wife - what a wonderful example of statesmanship they set. They are vegetarians and very talented singers. They shared my concern and I hope they will also express the growing anxiety over India's continued involvement in this cruel trade. Regrettably, their stay in England is only very short.

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The embarrassed Indian High Commission has issued a barrage of statements citing improved hygiene, control in catching and exports, immersing frogs in salt water! and research into improved slaughter methods to justify this cruel and disastrous trade. Whether they are killed humanely or not, the ecological damage remains, and as already stated, India has to spend more than twice the foreign exchange earned from the frogs' legs trade, on the import of highly dangerous insecticides to replace these useful insect eaters.

Why does the Government of India allow this wanton slaughter to continue to provide a mere food delicacy for the affluent West and to the detriment of its own people and country? Have those in power forgotten the teaching of Ahimsa and the retribution of Karma?

Each one of us bears a personal responsibility. It is our world and the way we act as individuals will collectively shape its future. It is for you to protest to the Government and write to the press about the cruelty of the frog trade, the increase in factory farming methods, the trade in furs, reptile skins, and live animals, and to resist the pressures of the multinational drug and chemical companies.

"Evil will triumph so long as good men do nothing".

As Mahatma Gandhi pointed out, protest must be non-violent, for if we protest against violence with violent actions we fight against ourselves.

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We can contribute to violence, famine and war, or we can work for peace. If we choose the latter, the fundamental basis is a harmonious relationship with the whole Natural World. If we get that wrong it will all be wrong. It starts with personal responsibility....

"All life is one, and all its manifestations with which we have contact are climbing the ladder of evolution. The animals are our younger brothers and sisters, also on the ladder but a few rungs lower down than we are. It is an important part of our responsibilities to help them in their ascent, and not to retard their development by cruel exploitation of their helplessness.

What I am now saying, if people would realise it, is of very great practical importance, because failure to recognise our responsibilities towards the animal kingdom is the cause of many of the calamities which now beset the nations of the world. Nearly all of us have a deep-rooted wish for peace - peace on earth; but we shall never attain true peace - the peace of love, and not the uneasy equilibrium of fear - until we recognise the place of animals in the scheme of things and treat them accordingly."

These words were spoken by my Stepfather, Lord Dowding, on 18th July 1957 as he concluded one of the 27 speeches on animal welfare he gave in the House of Lords.

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Editor's Note: David Whiting was requested to give a short background of his and his family's work on animal welfare and animal conservation and to write an article to be presented at the Jain Conference which took place in Delhi in February 1985. Since the writing of this article the import of frogs legs into the U.K. has dropped from 109,599 kgs in 1983 to 80,669 kgs last year. At the 5th Conference of CITES which was held in Buenos Aires last month, it was decided to list Rana tigrina and Rana hexadactyla on Appendix II. The Gov. of Bangladesh has imposed a temporary ban on the trade in frogs legs for ecological reasons, but the Indian Government has not followed this lead.