

Editorial

This edition of the *Bhatter College Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies* is dedicated to the broad multidisciplinary field of Animal Studies. The Animal Question was selected as a focal point of academic enquiry and discussion because of the demands of our time. We believe strongly that animals, not just as opposite beings—in relation to whom our identity is to be defined, but as our fellow beings on this planet deserve more—more rights and respect solely on the basis of their evolutionary status. Founded mainly on the principles of the Enlightenment and liberalism, our educational system follows mainly utilitarian principles. The syllabi, particularly at the school levels inculcate utilitarian attitudes to animals, and thus it is deprived of higher idealistic attitudes and it does not leave any room for alternative viewpoints. On the contrary, under the guise of scientificism it encourages a sense of non-responsibility for the individual, and the responsibility becomes a kind of invisible idea ascribed to the vague entity of the collective society, authority, institution etc. Our educational system should seriously reconsider the ways animals are presented, represented and familiarized and speciesism is institutionalized.

In the new century, we need to search for alternatives which should not be singular but rather pluralistic in nature and holistic in approach. In this age of explosion of research, various topics in networked environment of always-available, cannot we think differently and orient our knowledge and faculties to initiate and encourage discussion on animals? If accepted theoretically, the inevitable question that would pop up is: what should be the status of animals in the discussion, which remains completely a one-way dialogue with its panoptic vision unchanged? One simple answer based on common sense is: animals can be viewed as our fellow creatures on this planet on their own rights. This will, however, lead to the much disputed topic: whether animals can have rights at all since rights demands—for instance, the philosopher Roger Scruton argued, duties. This view has been effectively refuted by a number of theorists in the 20th century, particularly by Peter Singer whose formulation that animals have interests, particularly an interest in not suffering, dismisses all other counter-arguments. This point of commonness among all the animal beings and the human beings becomes a fundamental principle challenging all the arguments—many based on the empiricist evidences, found in ‘nature’, and questions all our ‘needs’ and ‘pleasures’ that initiates torture and suffering of animals from the ancient slaughter-house approved by Descartes to our modern circus and ‘scientific’ zoo.

In ultimate analysis, dominance, violence and cruelty—which we have received as evolutionary gifts, cannot be justified by pseudo-science and sophistry. Let us not talk of responsibility or duties as precondition for animal rights, rather let us talk of our own responsibility in not violating the rights of the mute and voiceless. True human superiority is not to be found in speciesism, but to be justified only after we learn to respect their rights and actively participate in upholding the rights—an act which can be called truly divine by the standard of any religion.

--Pabitra Kumar Mishra, PhD

Editor-in-Chief