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International animal rights day: A world that fosters human-animal coexistence

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"Animals were given the right to be on Earth long before we arrived"- Anthony Douglas Williams

The harmonic relationship between the human animal, non-human animal and the environment is crucial to ensure survival and sustenance. Though humans score highly in the aspects of complex thinking and abilities, there are also a lot of similarities that both share in terms of emotions, needs, habits, and behaviour. The fact that December 10 is celebrated as both International Human Rights Day and International Animal Rights Day is a reminder that all living beings deserve respectful and dignified lives.

Historically, Hindu scriptures have emphasized 'ahimsa' towards all that is living. Humankind's evolved, more complex abilities over other species do not entitle them to act superior but as the supreme protector. Culturally, in Indian ethos, animals have always held special significance in our day-to-day lives, and a sense of belongingness naturally prevailed. With growing urbanization and migrations, the animal care ecosystem is also getting affected.

Ensuring animals have rights is crucial. Today, we see animals being physically abused, neglected, monetized, over-bred, traded or killed purely for human benefit. Without the strict implementation of animal rights or animal laws, this will only increase in number.

The Indian Government has proactively taken steps to end all forms of discrimination and animal abuse to maintain the harmony of the ecosystem and protect the rights of creatures who cannot



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Husbandry, and Dairying is under deliberation and proposes sterner actions against offenders. While significant steps are being taken towards animal welfare through policy and legislative acts, there is still a lot left to be achieved.

The 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by United Nations also envisaged a development model "in which humanity lives in harmony with nature and in which wildlife and other living species are protected." It highlights the need for the conservation of species, biodiversity, and habitats. Policies supporting holistic coexistence can help us collectively achieve sustainable development while ensuring the survival of vulnerable species and the ecosystems they depend on.

The unprecedented pandemic caused by coronavirus has alerted the world on the importance of One Health, an approach that emphasizes the fact that the health of human beings is not a standalone concept, but rather an integrated trifold of Human, Animal and Environmental health. The Ministry of Science and Technology, Government of India introduced One Health Consortium in October 2021 to bring together various departments and health institutions that are currently fragmented and make them work in synergy to ensure Earth's holistic health.

To make a considerable difference in society, we all need to be more sensitive to animals and do our part. While human welfare is a cause that is central to a lot of socially responsible entities, animal welfare still needs attention from organizations globally. Creating best-in-class educational systems for veterinarians or animal welfare workers. Integrating animal care as part of the educational curriculum (in urban and rural India). Developing more structured shelter, healthcare, vaccination, and animal birth control (ABC) facilities for animals in need of care, and catering to the needs of stray animals would be a much-required disruptive step to create an equal world for all.

We must recognize animals as sentient beings, adopt ethical research practices that do not treat animals as 'testers' like in the case of cosmetic and fashion products and eschew circuses. The most important would be to teach our younger generation to treat animals with kindness and compassion.

While few individuals and organizations are coming forward to do good for animals, there is a need for awareness and a universal acceptance of co-existence. Small acts of kindness as nominal as encouraging the concept of community animals where an animal is jointly taken care of by the local community can bring in a difference. The animal that is born in a locality is fed, sheltered, immunized, sterilized (spay/neuter), and provided quality healthcare by a family as big as a community. In addition, it is the fundamental duty of every citizen to have concern towards all living creatures and improve their natural environment.

Life is dear to all living beings and animals too have the right to live and co-exist peacefully. Let's be compassionate and treat every living being with respect and care!

Written by Priya Agarwal Hebbar, Non-Executive Director, Vedanta Limited & Anchor, The Animal Care Organization (TACO)

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