

CONTESTING THE ‘ANIMAL-RIGHT’: THE LIBERATIONIST CHALLENGE IMPOSED BY DALIT VEGANS AND ANIMAL RIGHTS ADVOCATES

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ABSTRACT

The Animal-Right is what we can call the mob of Hindutva tainted individuals from the Right-wing, who go about injuring, terrorizing and even killing Dalits in the name of protecting the ‘holy cow’. But the Animal-Right is not only morally fallacious, but it is also logically fallacious, and does not further the cause of animal welfare, nor does it do anything to alleviate animal cruelty. In this regard, a new and astounding animal liberation and veganism front championed by the Left-wing does exactly what is needed in the true spirit of alleviation of animals and animal rights, and morally sound ways.

KEYWORDS: *Animal-Right, Animal-Left, Veganism, Hindutva, Animal Liberation, Dalit Activism*

Humans from varying political spectrums have aligned themselves with the cause of animal rights. Animal rights have had proponents from (far) right, as well as from the Left.ⁱⁱⁱ I have also come across Vegans on social media who wish to stay away from ‘human politics.’^{iv} The point is that Animal Rights movements are fraught with disagreements and conflicts, not just involving those who seek the welfare of animals and those who do not care for animal liberation, but between the many, many factions within the animal rights communities.^v

The curious case in India is that Animal Rights is entangled with the issue of caste oppression, and how. Food and diet cultures vary amongst different castes and serve as “dividing lines” (Ambedkar). Beef –the most forsaken meat of all is in the dietary domain of the Dalits.^{vi} Upper-caste Hindus condemn and oppress Dalits for consuming beef. Simply put, the ascribed sacredness of the cow is the driving force of the ‘Animal-Right’ in India.

There are similarities and parallels between the ‘cow-vigilantism’ practised by the Hindutva Right Wing in India, and the Nazi treatment of humans as less valuable than animals (Arluke and Sax 1). There are countless instances of caste-Hindus lynching Dalits to avenge a cow. But this caste-Hindus and their Hindutva sensibilities seem to have no issue with the gruesome torture and exploitation of cows for dairy products and eventually consigning these cows to slaughter. or when a particular sect of brahmins slaughter cows for rituals, or when upper castes such as Reddies (singular: Reddy/Reddi) and Gowdas (singular: Gowda) sacrifice hundreds of goats and poultry to their village deity or *Ooru Devatha* for the *Ooru Pandaga* or village festival.^{vii}

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Despite their hypocrisy, caste Hindus continue to incarcerate, torture and even kill Dalits in the name of the holy cow. For many Dalits, eating meat, particularly beef, has emerged as a symbol of resistance (Homegrown).

RECONCILING CAUSE

But how to ensure justice and liberation for all? Thus arose the question of reconciling the cause of the Dalit, with the cause of animals. And so, I spoke to one who had is vested in the causes of both Dalits and Animals – a Dalit Vegan. I had the opportunity to interview a Dalit Vegan called Ankur who goes by the Instagram handle *da.lit.vegan*. Ankur states that even though he is Dalit, he is one amongst Privileged Dalits: “Even having access to reservation is a privilege in itself; It was after I came to college through reservation and gain access to knowledge, did I gain access to anti-speciesist literature and animal rights theory.”

I then went on to ask whether Dalits are morally obligated to practice liberationism, considering the oppression they face from upper castes. He insists that their oppression does not absolve them of their moral duty to animals. He states, “That’s like saying women’s rights isn’t for those who don’t have an education. Killing, torturing and exploiting animals is morally repugnant. However, Dalit consciousness must come from within the community itself. Dalit activists must educate other Dalits about animal rights and liberation. It is the responsibility of the people at the top to help those at the bottom to transition. All this will take time, the transition will take time. It is systematic.”

I asked about whether he faced any backlash from the Dalit community for advocating veganism. To which he replied, “Yes, many times. I was called a ‘Savarna Chamcha’

and a 'brahminical Dalit'. But taking out the anger caused by oppression and atrocities on animals by committing atrocities against them isn't the way to go. This anger is severely misplaced and misdirected. It is a flawed and limited way of looking at the anti-caste as well as the anti-speciesist movement."

Ankur's views coincide with the narrative of the "Animal Left". Anthropologist Naisargi Dave (2021) from the University of Toronto says: "For the Animal Left it is impossible to act alongside animals without a rigorous assault on patriarchy, casteism, communalism, anthropocentrism. It is morally, logically bankrupt and politically bankrupt to try and divorce these issues. Animal Rights seeks the freedom, the right of animals to be free from violence, killing, torture. The animal left does not act for the sake of the welfare of animals alone. While Animal Rights suffers from a narrowness of focus. Lessons behind the Animal Left forms new social imaginaries...the Animal Left seeks to practice a vibrant capacious ethical politics."

CONCLUSION: THE HYPOCRISY OF THE OF THE ANIMAL RIGHT

The Hindutva Right Wing's cow vigilantism is morally bankrupt and hollow. Borrowing Smitha Rao's words, it is the "machinations of a fundamentalist metanarrative" (Rao 80). The quick, brutal, selective condemnation of animal slaughter does not do the work of animal justice, because justice movements require action towards systematic change. The brahmins and caste-Hindus were never really interested in animal liberation. What Animal-Right is interested in is the perpetuation of a cycle of condemnation, without actually putting in the effort to eliminate the suffering of animals. The cruel conniving hypocrisy of the right is in their *forcefully delegated* exploitation, torture, and killing of animals. It is in the interest of caste Hindus that Dalits continue to eat beef because that means that Dalits can continue to be labelled as impure, and can continue to be oppressed. With the liberation of animals, the upper castes will no longer have their biggest reason to commit atrocities against Dalits, and they seem to want to cling to all their reasons.

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