

Veganism Is Spiritual



Editorial by SONAL SRIVASTAVA



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Why is it important today for us to turn vegan?

- Man has a tendency to further his self-interest. The self he

defines, usually, quite narrowly, in relation to his body then all the other bodies become material benefits to be exploited. When he defines himself in terms of gender, then, the other gender becomes a means to further his own gratification. Similarly, he can define himself in terms of an immediate family, community — whenever there is division, a party on the other side is conveniently created and exploited.

There is the Homo sapiens species and there are other species as well. Man's egoistic worldview is that all these other species exist just for the sake of man; hence we exploit them in all possible ways. This is the very antithesis of spirituality, which is about broadening of ego boundaries. The dissolution of the narrow ego resonates with veganism. I do not see how it is possible to be spiritual and not be vegan. There is biodiversity loss and extinction of species happening today; millions of interconnected micro ecosystems are threatened all because of man's flawed self-concept. So these two are interrelated — man's quest for liberation from his ego, narrow self-concept, and his compassion towards the larger world. The larger world includes all flora and fauna.

Does veganism fit in with our culture, where we are brought up on a milk diet? In fact, the first solid meal offered to an infant is kheer, rice pudding.

- Cultural and social practices are time dependent. So when we talk of the Hindu community's affinity with milk and milk products, it's a socio-cultural thing and it doesn't have anything to do with the essence of religion. Since India was an agricultural economy, the role of the cow and oxen was always important. From there came this association with the entire cow family. Earlier, all of that was in limits and it was mostly a cultural practice. Cultures must change in response to the realities of time, but the essence of religion cannot change; cultures have to adjust as per the prevailing conditions.

What is the essence of religion?

- Man lives by his ego and the narrower the ego boundary, the greater his suffering. This is the simple essence of all religions. The more you live by your petty self-concept, the more you will suffer; therefore, all religions truly are about liberation from ego.

There are stories associated with Krishna's love for butter....

- The essence of Krishna does not lie in his fondness for dairy products; his essence is in the Bhagwad Gita, and there is not a single verse in the Gita that speaks highly of milk or recommends milk consumption. What is the essence of Krishna? Is it that he would consume milk, ghee and butter or that he explained what it means to live, to work, and to fight through the battle of life?



in the religious domain that are absolutely time-dependent and they must not be conflated with eternal principles. What one eats depends on his time and age, his social conditions.

Nutritionists say that dairy products are rich in calcium and protein; so they are important for children and women of a certain age.

■ The weight of nutrients obtained per rupee spent is either comparable to and many a times, even lower than the weight of nutrients that one can obtain from purely vegan products. It is a myth that veganism can only be afforded by the resourceful. If you want to live a compassionate vegan lifestyle, it is not only inexpensive; it may turn out to be economically more feasible than an animal-based diet. Today, you have top athletes in tennis, cricket and several other sports, even in physically demanding disciplines like bodybuilding, who are vegan.

The vegan movement is still in its infancy and it is pitted against the powerful forces of animal farming, agriculture and the meat industry.

Doesn't ayurveda recommend dairy products?

■ Ayurveda is a system of medicine; it will talk of stuff that is medicinal. It's based on things that can be locally sourced, but its primary concern is to heal. It's a defined medical system of treatment, so you cannot fault it for that. What they may be saying is that in a special condition, this is what would work. It's not something that can be institutionalised. This has to be an individual call. Someone may say fine, my life is quite important and if to sustain my life, a few animals are to be slaughtered then it's fine. When we talk of milk and curd, the relation between the milk products industry and the meat industry is forgotten. A religious Hindu would say, 'But I consume only milk and curd; I do not eat meat' and then he would absolve himself of any guilt of animal slaughter. What they forget is that India is one of the biggest beef exporters of the world. Why don't we clearly see that the same cow or buffalo that is used to extract milk today is slaughtered tomorrow? As an economic asset, why won't you want to draw and extract value from it, right till the last rupee? You draw value from the cow, through its milk and the process of having her deliver milk is highly cruel and it involves forced insemination and other kinds of cruelties, which are not visible to the final consumer of milk, so he gladly consumes it. Once that correlation becomes clear to people, then, it would be easier for them to take decisions.

But some people take this whole thing to a very violent level including lynching and killing those suspected of cow smuggling.

■ Being lynched by obsessive milk users is the cruel irony. One who is drinking a kilogramme of milk daily, is assigning himself the moral authority to actually, physically assault someone who is just taking away the animal for slaughter and sometimes on mere suspicion! This is not only illegal, it is also immoral and definitely not spiritual. Just leave the animal alone, let the animal be. Ultimately there is so much that boils down to economics. ■



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