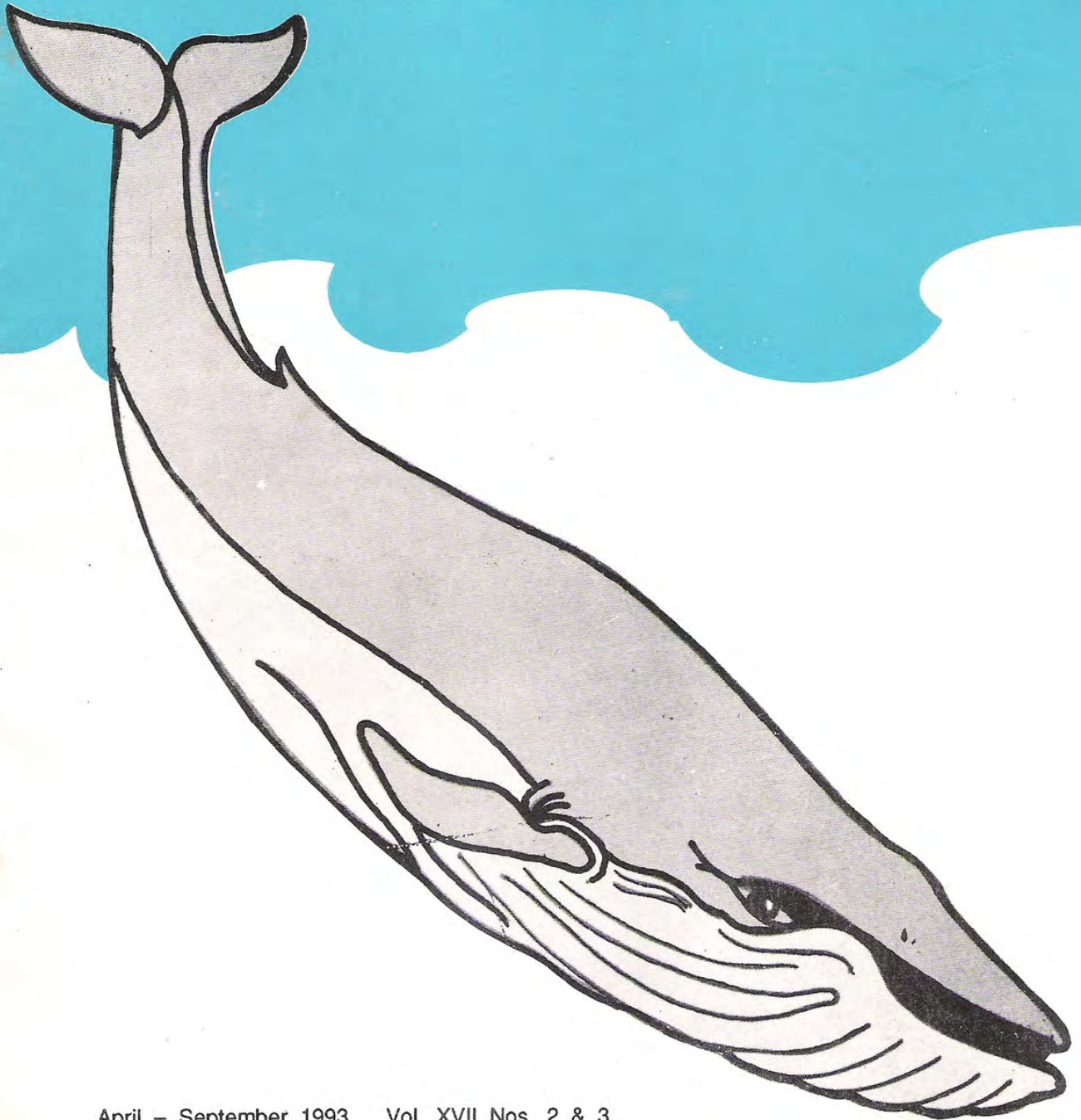


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The Evolution of the IWC

A report from the 1993 meeting.

David Bowles

Despite all the pessimistic forecasts and the fact that the 1993 International Whaling Commission (IWC) meeting was the first one on Japanese soil for 20 years, the results of the 45th meeting of International Whaling Commission will show that it was the most successful meeting since the ban on commercial whaling came into operation in 1986, and may prove to be a watershed meeting in IWC history.

Prior to the meeting, Japan and Norway had spent millions of dollars on public relations to convince the world and their own people that whaling should be restarted. Several Caribbean states were coerced by Japanese aid and turned up to vote with Japan in an attempt to swing the balance in the vital votes.

However the strategy backfired. A recent poll in Japan showed that the majority of young people in Japan are opposed to whaling restarting. Japan now has the world's largest growing whale-watching industry where Japanese people watch live whales instead of dead ones. Finally Japan and Norway were defeated on every major proposal at the meeting, and the IWC took a turn away from being a whaling organisation into a whale conservationist body.

An attempt to overturn the ban on commercial whaling was heavily defeated. The inclusion of the 66 species of dolphins and porpoises into the remit of the IWC was reaffirmed when four new resolutions were passed on these species. This is something that Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) has been working on for many years. An extensive report on this issue was published at the meeting, and

an EIA undercover investigation in Japan on dolphin killings was shown on television worldwide and at the meeting.

The IWC also accepted that environmental factors should be considered when discussing whether whaling should restart, a major step forward as it links in other factors such as pollution, over fishing and loss of habitat, and moves the IWC away from merely considering how many whales are to be killed.

Another important concept that the IWC accepted was on whalewatching. This introduces the concept that the IWC accepts that money can be made out of live whales instead of dead ones. It should also encourage countries to set up whale-watching operations, and convince people that whales should be left alive in the ocean rather than end up in a restaurant in Japan.

Other resolutions that were passed confirmed the new protectionist direction that the IWC was taking. An attempt by Japan to start coastal whaling was firmly rejected, and although Japan and Norway will continue their scientific whaling operations, both have been internationally condemned and there is a major campaign now in Europe and the USA against Norway. Finally it was agreed to discuss further a whaling sanctuary in the southern ocean.

This meeting was one of the most important since the ban on commercial whaling came into effect in 1986. If Japan and Norway had received acceptance for renewed whaling it would not have just effected whales but it would have been a clear step backwards for the conservation of all species. The fact that this was defeated was thus a major victory for environmentalists. The Japanese Commissioner at the end of the meeting complained that the IWC was becoming a whale protection organisation; the good thing is, he's right!

The author David Bowles is the International Chairman of the Beauty Without Cruelty Charity in London.

The Cobra Charmers' Festival

Amar Heblekar & Vasant Sawant

"Nagpanchami" is a major Hindu festival. On this day, people worship either pictures or idols of cobra in their houses. What Ganesh Chaturti is to Bombay, Nagpanchami is to Batis Shirala. In this obscure village of Maharashtra, live cobra is worshipped in practically every house. And for this festival alone, this sleepy village springs into the limelight.

Batis Shirala : The village of Batis Shirala lies fourteen kilometers westward by road from the Bangalore-Poona highway (NH 4), forty five kilometers from Kolhapur. Although it is termed as a village, Batis Shirala is a taluka of Sangli district of Maharashtra. It is well connected by a single-lane tar road from Peth Junction on the highway. However the road deteriorates the moment it reaches the S.T. (State Transport) bus-stand. This bus-stand is kept busy by the arrival and departure of buses at intervals of every one hour. There are various Government and Co-operative offices including an Industrial Technical Institute. According to a Government servant interviewed, the population of this village is approximately twelve thousand, and although new businesses have arisen, the major occupation of the villagers is agriculture. Ground nut, sugarcane and

maize are grown and dairy products like "peda" are made. The Warna Milk Project is at Peth.

Folklore : The village culminates at the temple of Goddess Ambabai beyond which stretch the vast open fields. It was for this temple, that the village was called "Sri Alay", meaning the abode of the Goddess. Shirala is the mis-pronounced name which it is now known by. It is also called Laxmi Shirala. The name Batis Shirala is due to the thirty two (Batis = 32) wards. A member of the Mahajan family interviewed by us told us the legend behind the unique



Nagpanchmi at Shirala

All features of the nagpanchmi are seen here. The large pot resting on jute sacks. Two men with bamboo standing on guard, one man swaying a small pot in front of the snake to divert the attention. This photograph was taken at the residence of a Mahajan.

- A.A. Heblekar

practice of worshipping live cobras. Saint Goraknath, of the "Navnath Sampradaya" (one of the nine saints beginning with the Lord Shiva), while wandering from village to village reached Shirala. He camped here for a few days. One morning, when he approached the house of a Mahajan family for "bhiksha" (alms), he was kept waiting at the doorsteps for some time. It was Nagpanchami and the ladies of the house ("sauh-a-shinis" or married women)

were engaged in worshipping clay idols of cobras. It is said that Gorakhnath then with his supernatural powers, transformed the clay cobras into live ones and are worshipped thus to this day. For a long time, only members of the Kotwal family caught the cobras from the field and brought them to the house of the Mahajan family for worshipping. It is believed that the practice has been followed for over a thousand years.

Catching the Cobra : We were made to believe by one particular gentleman in Goa who had been to Shirala, that catching a cobra for the people of Shirala was child's play. But when we visited this place last year, we witnessed quite the opposite. It was seen that only the experienced and confident men ever ventured to catch a cobra. This work starts about fifteen to twenty days before Nagpanchami. Cobras, as a rule, inhabit in holes already dug by other animals including abandoned ant-hills. Because of the rain, these get flooded and cobras, being cold blooded, come out in the sun just after the rains. The experienced men know from the marks at the mouth of the holes about the presence of cobras. They put long thin bamboo sticks into the holes. If the cobra is present within reach, the hissing can be heard by these experienced hunters. Thereafter, the anthill or the surroundings are dug with sticks, pick axes and spades. The cobra, invariably, tries to go deeper into the hole. When a part of the cobra is visible, the men stop digging with spades, and with the help of sticks, pull out the reptile. At times, the cobra gets injured by the pick axes. Because of this irritating disturbance, the cobra displays a lot of anger and is ready to strike anything within reach. A black pot is used to divert its attention by swaying it in front of the snake. After some time, it is pulled down with long sticks and guided into sacks. A number

of cobras are caught in this manner and later put in individual clay pots. Each pot is the size of a football and the mouth of the pot is covered with a smaller pot, the size of a large sweet lemon. A red or saffron cloth is used to cover the pot and a thick thread (locally called the "sutli" usually made of jute fibre) is tied at the neck of the larger pot. A very minute hole, the size of a pin head, is made on one side of the larger pot for ventilation. Small stones are kept in the pot (reason not known) and usually live frogs and mice are introduced into the pot for feeding. The procedure of catching a cobra was shown to us by Shri Shrikant Sontakke of the Guruwar Peth Tarun Nagaraj Mandal.

The Nagaraj Mandals : There are forty registered "Nagaraj Mandals" (literally meaning "Cobra Associations") in Shirala. The members of these mandals alone are permitted to catch cobras and ratsnakes. (Ratsnakes are caught for a totally different cause, as will be explained elsewhere). As per the procedure laid down by the Panchayat, the members have to register each and every cobra they catch so as to be eligible for the various awards to be given away. The length and thickness of each cobra are measured and noted down. These statistics are mentioned on the badges provided for each member who carries a cobra. Each Mandal manages to bag about ten to fifteen cobras. Over four hundred cobras had been registered that year as per Shri Shrikant Sontakke, a young member of Guruwar Peth Tarun Nagaraj Mandal, which had bagged sixteen cobras. The pots containing the snakes are kept in the house of the leader of each mandal, at a height. It has been made compulsory that each member carrying a snake is required to wear a badge. How inaccessible are these badges to be obtained can very well be known from the easy procedure by which we could get one. We were just handed one without even having to ask for it! Another compulsion put by the Panchayat is that each cobra should be released on green grass for

some time at least once a day. The names of some of the Nagaraj Mandals are Guruwar Peth (Thursday Market) Nagaraj Mandal, Mayur Mitra (Friends of Peacock), Kamrahi (Co-travellers!), Hindu Ekta (Hindu Unity), Friends Circle, etc. There are also some individually sponsored mandals like Young Nikame Brothers, Anantrao Naik, Vasantryao Naik etc.

The ritual : On Nagpanchmi day, all the men carry the cobras to the Ambabai temple at 6 a.m. The goddess is worshipped by the ladies and thereafter the cobras are released on grass and offered the "aarti" (small lamps). This takes place on the field near the temple and we can see a number of cobras being worshipped by small groups. After the ceremony, the cobras are again introduced into the pots. The cobra caught by the Kotwal family is then taken to the house of the Mahajans while the rest of them are taken from house to house of the rest of the villagers for worship. The ladies of the respective houses go to the temple and bestow "halad-kumkum" (turmeric and red coloured powders) to the Goddess and also worship the caves near the temple by putting "lhayo" (baked rice) and then return to their houses to worship the cobra brought to their doorstep by the members of the mandals. "Pancharats" (lamps) are lit in these houses. The members of the mandal stand on guard with long thin bamboo sticks when the pot is opened. The cobra puts out its head with its hood open, indicating its irritation and anger, but the people take it for its blessings. One of the members diverts its attention with the help of a small black pot while the ladies of the house worship it from a distance, usually from behind the cobra. They throw the baked rice, halad and kumkum from about a metre's distance, which falls all over the hood of the cobra including its eyes. The cobra hisses all the time, in anger. This

procedure continues till noon. We must remember that cobras, like all snakes, do not have any eyelids. The eye is covered by a thin transparent membrane and hence its eyes are open even when a snake is asleep. The extent of damage the fine powder of halad-kumkum does to the eye can only be imagined.

The Procession : The major attraction of Shirala for which people crowd is the procession of live cobras in gaudily decorated chariots. These chariots are either trailers of tractors or bullock carts. A lot of pain is taken to decorate each chariot and each chariot is led by a dancing mob playing loud music. The procession is led by the chariot of the Mahajan family. The chariot is mainly constructed of wooden planks and is decorated with multi-coloured ribbons and flowers. The place where the cobra is kept is usually covered with a jute bag over which the cobra is let out. Three men carrying long thin bamboo sticks are posted behind the cobra, while a man in front sways the black pot in front of it. This procession files through a very narrow road towards the temple. The houses on the street open flush on the road and as such, because of the crowd, the procession seems hardly to move at all. People are cramped on the doorsteps, on the roofs, terraces, parapet walls, almost any conceivable space available. In front of each tractor or bullock driven chariot is a band playing loud music into loud-speakers. We spotted quite a number of ten-drum-sets and electronic synthesizers. The music played is invariably catchy Hindi film music and young men dance to it. We spotted in many cases professional nautch girls and prostitutes (as we were told by a member) dancing suggestively and laughing hysterically. On every float, "gulal" (the pink powder usually popular in Holi festival) is kept, and the devotees throw a pinchful at the cobra and apply the finger to his/her own forehead. The procession disperses once it reaches the Ambabai temple in the evening.

The Prizes : There are three prizes for this procession and are not awarded essentially on the length of the cobra alone, as is generally believed. It is awarded exclusively for the stamina of the cobra to rise on its tail and its thickness. And the third prize is for the best band played. The first two prizes are decided before the procession while the third is awarded after. Last year, the first prize for the cobra was awarded to Kurlegalli Nagaraj Mandal and the second to Shiv-Shakti Nagaraj Mandal. The cobra is released only two or three days after the Nagpanchami and it is claimed that each cobra is released at exactly the same spot as it was caught.

The Fair : Like at all religious festivals, in Shirala too, pretty stalls come up. There are many sweets and toy shops. The novelties are large guavas and "pedas" (sweets). There are two giant wheels, two merry-go-rounds, and a captive animals exhibition. This exhibition is managed by three men who claimed to have come from Sholapur. They had, in captivity, in very tiny cages, the following animals: Two palm

civets, two rhesus monkeys, three baby crocodiles, a python, a jackal, a baby wolf, a pheasant, a cock, a goat and a porcupine. These animals are cramped in individual cages. Their condition is to be seen to be believed. These poor creatures can hardly move at all, and by chance if any of them is facing away from the crowd, there is the helpful man who pokes it with an iron rod with a sharp hook at its end so that people can get to see their money's worth. There is a board at the entrance claiming "Entertainment for just one rupee". When we questioned the owner regarding the condition of the animals, he claimed that he fed the creatures thrice a day and were aired at least once a day. And nowadays because of inflation, he hardly profited at all! When asked whether he had taken any permission from any officials to set the stall, he said he only approached the police, who did not take any objection to his setting the stall.

Management : We interviewed a Police Inspector on duty at Shirala, and as per him over one lakh people have visited Shirala just on Nagpanchami day (i.e. 14th August 1991) alone. The fair gathers about three to four days before. On verifying the vehicle parking coupons issued by the police it was seen that more than three thousand four-wheeler and an equal number of two-wheelers had arrived. These vehicles are parked in an area stretching upto two kilometers outside the village. The traffic management had been efficient. Special State transport buses had been arranged at intervals of five minutes. The Police officials on duty consist of one Deputy Superintendent of Police, two Police Inspectors, twenty Police



*Live Animal Exhibition
A monkey and a cock*

– A.A. Heblekar

Sub-Inspectors, 160 Police Constables and forty lady Constables. As per the Inspector, the number of visitors are increasing beyond their expectations and hence are alert to maintain law & order on the roads, mainly because the roads are narrow and over-crowded. The police are equipped with five walkie-talkies and five wireless sets on vehicles (jeeps).

The Forest Department and its role :

The cobras, which have enjoyed the liberty and freedom in the wild, when suddenly enclosed in unnatural surroundings are bound to be angry. And especially so because cobras, as a rule, have very short tempers. So every time they are exposed from the pots, they strike at the small black earthen pots swaying before them, As such they are bound to get hurt on the mouth. Further, they are taken from house to house in the pots for worship and in order to get them to expose their hoods, they need to be irritated and this can easily be achieved by poking bamboo sticks at them. They are made to maintain this position for as many as seven long hours at a time. So the amount of torture these cobras have to bear can very well be imagined. But due to religious sentiments, the people of Shirala are permitted to catch the cobras under certain restrictions by the forest authorities. As per one of the officers, although it is quite troublesome for the cobras, the people do not kill the cobra(?). Their method of catching the cobra is "scientific", hence unobjectionable. The villagers claim to offer treatment to injured snakes, but we could not find any practical proof in this matter. The officer also said that this contact of the villagers with the snakes brought good faith of the people towards all reptiles and the general attitude of men to kill any reptile the moment it is spotted is non-existent here. A squad of one Range Forest Officer (RFO), five Round Foresters (RF), 15 Forest Guards (FG) and 25 Watchmen

from the Sangli Territorial range are deputed to supervise and bring to book any persons ill-treating the snakes. The RFO provides a badge to each person who carries a rat snake. They claim that they release snakes carried by unauthorised persons. When we drew attention to a particular snake, lying exhausted in a pool of water, its owner claimed that it will be alright after drinking water. However, we examined minutely the mouth of the snake and found that it was injured due to mishandling. We somehow persuaded the authorities to release the snake after treatment.

The Health Centre : There is a special medical squad on duty, ironically for people alone, who are readily available in case of snake bite or other emergencies. A squad of a physician, an anaesthetist, a surgeon and other staff were present when we visited the centre at noon. The vaccine for snakebite is available in the centre throughout the year. Although the medical officer claimed that there were eight cases of snakebite and all of them were treated successfully, one of the village elders informed us that there were eight fatalities due to snake bite in the last four years. They also told us that they took special care and precautions which might arise due to the presence of more than a lakh of people. There is always the chance that the snake gets injured while being caught. Although the villagers claim that they can treat the injured cobra, we did not see even a single person handling a cobra. There is a veterinary centre, but it was closed, and said to attend to cattle only.

There is a general belief that the people of Shirala play with cobra and are immune to cobra bite. But this is not true. As mentioned earlier, we did not see even a single person handling a cobra. They always kept a respectful distance from the reptile while worshipping. The only snake they actually play with, is the rat snake, which looks like a cobra to a layman because of the colour.

Photo Business : Along with the cobra, a large number of ratsnakes are caught by the villagers. Last year alone there were more than fifteen hundred ratsnakes caught; and these are solely for business. We counted 145 temporary photo studios in Shirala crowded with people to take photographs with ratsnakes dangling from the neck. Each photo studio had about twenty ratsnakes (ratsnakes are locally known as "Dhaman"). Many young men were wandering in the fair with ratsnakes around their necks, inviting customers to be photographed. They charge Rs.20/- each for a snake and they claim to send the photograph by post within five days. None of the studios boast cobras.

The condition of the ratsnakes was pathetic. Ratsnakes are non-poisonous, gentle snakes, and are very quick in movement. The moment any captured snake is kept on the ground, it always tries to slide away. But unfortunately when we tested a few of them, not a single one showed these reflexes, mainly because they were exhausted beyond repair. Ratsnakes are cold blooded and cannot tolerate the temperature of human beings for a long time. But this constant dangling on the neck of men for over twelve hours must be really trying for them and one can very well imagine the condition of their skin from constant handling and mishandling. We saw a young boy swirling a rat snake wildly in the air; this was one pathetic scene that even elders seemed to approve. If we are to compare the difficulties these people took to catch a cobra and then maintain it by spending a lot of money without any profit, and the business these people get from ratsnakes, it can be seen that people would prefer to catch ratsnakes more than anything else for monetary benefit in the coming years. And as said earlier, because of the state the ratsnakes

are in, who have to be quick to catch its prey, they are as good as dead. Under what condition will the ratsnake be, can very well be imagined because, remember ratsnakes never feed in captivity.

Cobra Cruelty : We saw that while worshipping the cobra, the ladies throw "haldi-kumkum" from a distance on the forehead of the cobra which usually scatters all over its hood. As such, some of it falls on its eyes. Cobras, like all reptiles, do not have any eyelids but only a thin transparent membrane over its eye. Also, during the procession, where "gulaal" is thrown at them by enthusiastic devotees and the constant poking of bamboo sticks to maintain its hood for at least five hours, is torturous. The constant swaying of the small earthen pot and the repeated attacks on it damages its mouth making it difficult for feeding.

It is popularly believed that cobras hold grudge against people who hurt them and eventually trace out its victim by smell or sound alone and kill them. But on seeing the treatment these people of Shirala give to the snakes makes one feel that if the belief were true, the entire population of Shirala would have by now been wiped out. It is a question of torture to over 400 cobras and lives of over 1500 ratsnakes every year.

Big seizures of snakeskins

BWC is proud that one of the organisation's long time member, Mr. H. K. Sharan, who at present is the Chief of Customs at the Delhi airport was responsible for detecting and seizing two lots of snakeskins being taken out as customer baggage. The first one consisted of 2747 snakeskins valued at Rs. 11 lacs and the second 4620 snakeskins valued at Rs. 20 lacs. Last May also a similar seizure was made by him of 1800 snakeskins valued at about Rs. 10 lacs.

Talsur's safety and lack of side effects proved

Professor G.P. Talwar of the National Institute of Immunology (NII) has informed us that two expert Professors of the Tamil Nadu Veterinary and Animal Sciences University, Madras, have undertaken authoritative trials on Talsur and their report shows clearly the complete safety and lack of side effects of this, once in a life time injection. As per their findings : "Talsur can be used safely for sterilisation and castration of animals, without any adverse reaction".

These trials had to be undertaken in view of a complaint from the Blue Cross of Madras on some side effects that occurred in **one** dog in their study. Unfortunately it was given wide publicity. On examination it turned out that the vial of Talsur used for this particular dog was outdated by 2 years. This was a single case of a side effect noted in a dog, even through the organisation in earlier time period had reported to NII safe and successful sterilisation of 150 dogs with Talsur.

Talsur has received the New Drug Authorisation and has been licensed to a public sector company, M/s Karnataka Antibiotics & Pharmaceuticals Ltd. for manufacture and marketing. It has been used in many parts of the country for castration or sterilisation of bulls, dogs, wild pigs, wild Neel gai, etc.

BWC would like to further encourage its use for the sterilisation of male dogs so as to lessen the so-called stray dogs population. A single injection successfully sterilises an animal for life.

*Members often ask how they can actively help the cause. Apart from filling in the Volunteer's Form and waiting to be locally contacted, if and when possible, a person can without much effort contribute towards making the **BWC** movement a bigger success. A few simple suggestions (no compulsion) are given below.*

I resolve to:

Buy only those cosmetics and toiletries included in the **BWC's** "List of Honour" booklet.

Stop eating animals.

Write an animal rights oriented letter-to-the-editor once a month.

Advertise the **BWC** message by putting up posters and stickers at appropriate places.

Never visit Zoos and Circuses and stop others from doing so.

Cut out and send possible items of interest which appear in publications to the **BWC** office for necessary information and action.

Volunteer donating time and talents to help promote the cause.

Enrol at least one new Member for **BWC** before the end of the month.

Send/collect a Donation (however small) for **BWC**.

Stop wearing silk, using leather and other animal origin products as outlined in the "List of Honour".

Circulate "Compassionate Friend" magazine issues among friends and others.

YOU can make the difference for the animals by supporting the movement. Remember:

**Beauty Without Cruelty
is a way of life
which causes no creature
of land, sea, or air,
terror, torture or death.**

Answers to some frequently asked Questions

How to send BWC Membership Subscription?

New subscriptions should be sent along with the filled up Membership Form in the name of BEAUTY WITHOUT CRUELTY by Demand Draft payable at Poona, Cash personally handed over to the India Branch or Centre offices, by MO, or Cheque with commission charges added.

In the case of Annual Subscription renewal or conversion from Ordinary to Life Membership, it is requested that the Membership Number be quoted.

Members wish to receive either "Satvanukampa" or "Karuna Mitra" instead of "Compassionate Friend":

The Gujarati and Hindi versions of our Magazines were discontinued some time ago due to not being able to cope with the work involved. All members now receive "Compassionate Friend" in English.

Request for Jojoba Seeds:

Letters requesting BWC to send Jojoba Seeds are received off and on. Due to germination problems BWC stopped giving out these seeds and decided to only supply Jojoba Saplings.

What to do with particular animals products I no longer wish to use?

Destroy them. If you put them back into circulation by selling them, indirectly you are encouraging their use. Even if you give them to some one to use or decide to finish using them yourself it amounts to the same thing. Once you've made up your mind to do that you do not want to use particular animal products, it is best that not only do you yourself immediately stop using them,

but you do not even indirectly encourage others to use them.

Is a particular cosmetic/medicine/food vegetarian?

If cosmetic or toilet preparation: look in the latest BWC "List of Honour" booklet.

If medicine: read the ingredients and write to the company. The majority of allopathy medicines are tested by means of experiments on animals.

If food: usually the ingredients stated on the package gives a clear indication. If not, then write to the manufacturer as per the printed name and address.

Is there a list of foreign cosmetics which are free of animal substances?

BWC does not have a single list covering different countries. Moreover, such lists of acceptable products are available only from a couple of countries where animal rights groups have been able to undertake the necessary research. If you are travelling abroad, let us know which country you are visiting and if we have a list of products pertaining to it, we'll gladly send it to you.

Do remember that products marked "herbal" or "natural" or "pure" are not necessarily free of animal substances. It is also possible that they may have been tested by means of experiments on innocent animals and so can not classify as cruelty-free.

No response is forthcoming from the Animal Welfare Board of India in spite of several letters:

BWC can do NOTHING about this. It is the way the AWBI's staff function or rather (sadly) does not function.

BWC Office in Bombay

Donors can rest assured that each and every contribution for purchase of our office will be utilised for this purpose. Meanwhile, as we have been unable to find suitable premises, a round sum of Rs. 11 lacs has been invested in HDFC Trust Bonds

Tiruvalluvar on abstaining from Flesh and Non-killing

K S Satagopan

Tiruvalluvar was a great Tamil poet and moralist who undoubtedly ranks amongst the best of great men of India and whose work KURAL is considered to be one of the literary and ethical masterpieces of the world.

Nothing is known with certainty about the date of the KURAL and the life of the poet. Researches by various scholars lead to different periods lying between the 2nd and the 6th Century A.D. He is said to have been a weaver by profession. The greatest virtues to his mind were simple kindness, truthfulness, sincerity and harmlessness to all life. Tradition tells us that when he died his body was according to his express desire exposed in the open air outside the town to be eaten by scavenger birds.

The KURAL consists of 133 chapters of 10 couplets each, in the 'Kural metre' from which it gets its name. These couplets are models of terseness and vividness. These 1330 couplets are divided into three parts dealing respectively with Virtue, Wealth and Love — the first three of the four 'objects of life' with which Indian thinkers dealt with, the fourth being Salvation or Moksha. Tiruvalluvar was mainly concerned with practical things and he may have believed that a virtuous life cannot but lead to 'salvation'. The whole work is unsectarian in nature. It is evident from his work that the poet believed that ethical norms or standards like 'respect for all life' are independent of all circumstances.

It is under part I "VIRTUE" that we find the chapters on 'Abstaining from Flesh' and 'Non-Killing'. The poet's strong conviction

is borne by his couplets themselves. But the fact that he chose to write a separate chapter on abstaining from flesh when he could have as well treated the topic under Non-Killing is very instructive. Given below are authorised translations of these couplets. The brief explanatory notes that follow some of them within parentheses are based on authorised Tamil commentaries.

Chapter 26 ABSTAINING FROM FLESH

1. How can he be possessed of kindness, who to increase his own flesh, eats the flesh of other creatures. (As flesh-eating involves killing, it is opposed to kindness and so will not be indulged in by the man who has that grace.)
2. As those possess no property who do not take care of it, so those possess no kindness who feed on flesh. (A man loses his property by not taking care of it. Similarly, a man loses the benefit of kindness - the vital spiritual element in him - by feeding on flesh.)
3. Like the (murderous) mind of him who carries a weapon (in his hand), the mind of him who feasts with pleasure on the body of another (creature), has no regard for goodness. (The mind of a flesh-eater is like the mind of a man whose only motive is to kill with the weapons that he carries.)
4. If it be asked what is kindness and what its opposite, the answer would be preservation (non-killing) and destruction (killing) of life; and therefore it is not right to feed on the flesh (obtained by taking away life).
5. Not to eat flesh contributes to the continuance of life; therefore if a man eats flesh, hell will not open its mouth (to let him escape out, after he has once fallen in). (This and the next couplet refute the argument of those who maintain that

the sinner is he who kills and not the one who eats).

6. If the world does not destroy life for the purpose of eating, then no one would sell flesh for the sake of money.
7. If men should come to know that flesh is nothing but the unclean ulcer of a body, let them abstain from eating it. (This is to stress that flesh eating is degrading from the hygiene point of view also.)
8. The wise, who have freed themselves from mental delusion, will not eat the flesh which has been severed from an animal. (One who is within his senses will not eat flesh which has been obtained by severing the head of an animal.)
9. Not to kill and eat (the flesh of) an animal, is better than the pouring forth of ghee etc., in a thousand sacrifices. (It should be remembered that not all sacrifices - religious rites for production of good - involve killing of animals. See 33.8.)
10. All creatures will join their hands together, and worship him who has never taken away life, nor eaten flesh. (It is made clear that 'Abstaining from Flesh' cannot itself be a virtue apart from 'Non-Killing' or vice versa. A recent commentator says that the poet may have had in his mind the Buddhists who allowed a man to eat flesh provided he did not kill.)

CHAPTER 33 NON-KILLING

1. Never to destroy life is the sum of all virtuous conduct. The destruction of life leads to every evil.

2. The chief of all (the virtues) which authors have been summed up, is the partaking of food that has been shared with others, and the preservation of the manifold life of other creatures.

(The word 'others' in the phrase 'that has been shared with others' should be taken to mean 'other living beings'.)

3. Not to destroy life is an incomparably (great) good; next to it in goodness ranks freedom from falsehood.
4. Good path is that which considers how it may avoid killing any creature. (Good path refers to the good path for attaining Mukthi.)
5. Of all those who, fearing the permanence of earthly births, have abandoned desire, he is the chief who, fearing (the guilt of) murder, considers how he may avoid the destruction of life.
6. Yama, the destroyer of life, will not attack the life of him, who acts under the determination of never destroying life.
7. Let no one do that which should destroy the life of another, although he should by doing so, lose his own life. (One should avoid killing even when one is attacked to be killed.)
8. The advantage which might flow from destroying life in sacrifice, is dishonorable to the wise (who renounced the world) even although it should be said to be productive of a great good.
9. Men who destroy life are base men, in the estimation of those who know the nature of such meanness.
10. (The wise) will say that men of diseased bodies, who live in degradation and in poverty, are those who separated the life from the body of animals (in a former birth).

International Boycotts

Ray-Ban

News from London states that Ray-Ban sunglasses are about to face the glare of animal rights activists in a move aimed at putting pressure on Bausch & Lomb, the manufacturers who are involved in the 100 million dollar-a-year turnover monkey trade. The campaign has been taken up by the British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection.

Mitsubishi

In America, the Rainforest Action Network has embarked on an effective campaign calling for a boycott of Mitsubishi products worldwide because the production, sale and use of these goods can help cause the senseless death of millions of acres of rainforests across the globe at the hands of Mitsubishi. They say "When you buy from Mitsubishi or any of their nearly 160 companies, you support their unethical and often illegal practices. You support the blatant destruction of thousands of plant, insect and animal species - in fact, entire ecological systems. And you support the persecution and exile of hundreds of native communities."

American Express Card

Hundreds of people who were disgusted to see pages of fur featured yet again in the American Express' mail order catalog, have joined the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals' (PeTA) campaign to convince the company to stop peddling furs. More and more persons are cutting up their American Express credit cards in half and sending them along with protest letters.

L'Oreal and Lancome

There hasn't been a public execution in Paris in many years. But executions

resumed in the city of Light last summer when PeTA members beheaded a giant "rabbit" at the Place des Innocents, symbolizing L'Oreal's continued killing of animals in cosmetic tests. The executioner, a vulgar woman dripping in cosmetics, lowered the blade in front of hundreds of Parisians, tourists and reporters, who were horrified to learn of L'Oreal's cruel methods, as were the thousands who saw the protest on European television and in international papers.

PeTA has since called for a boycott which requests that people return L'Oreal or Lancome products lying around the house back to the company with a letter asking for a refund and explaining that the purchaser does not want to support cruelty.

Gillette, Johnson & Johnson, Bristol-Myers Squibb and Procter & Gamble

The joint call by the New England Anti-Vivisection Society (NEAVS) and PeTA for boycotting Gillette products continues. Leaflets with pictures of bunny rabbits being tested upon are being distributed.

Last year, PeTA went to the boardrooms of Gillette, Johnson & Johnson, Bristol-Myers Squibb and Procter & Gamble with shareholder resolutions demanding an end to outdated blinding and poisoning tests on animals. Millions of shares were voted for the animals and all in attendance at the companies' annual meeting heard the gruesome details of animal tests.

1994 Winter Olympics

The Animal Welfare Institute of Washington, DC, is one of the organisations which has appealed to people: "Don't buy anything that comes from Norway, and boycott the 1994 Winter Olympics until Norway stops killing whales for profit."

Norway's intransigent insistence on defying International Whaling Commission decisions is bringing increased pressure on Norwegian business as well as Government. Boycotts announced could cost many times the 59 million kroner expected from whaling.

Do YOU know what's wrong with McDonald's?

A Signature Campaign has been started by many organisations requesting the Government of India to seriously re-consider and withdraw the permission given to McDonald's for setting up fast-food outlets in collaboration with the Venkateshwara Group. Activists on 6 continents are boycotting McDonald's due to various reasons which are relevant to India:

Religion and Animal Rights: McDonald's buy more beef in America than any one else. Therefore the entry of this multinational into India is gravely objectionable on religious grounds. It does not matter that they plan to serve chicken burgers in India. The fact remains that they are responsible for the death of 5,00,000 cows a year to supply meat in their American outlets, leave alone the additional slaughter of millions of cruelly factory bred cattle, sheep, pigs, chickens, etc in other countries.

Environment: McDonald's use of this imported beef has a direct impact on tropical deforestation in South and Central American Rainforests which are destroyed for their beef production and also their paper packaging. In some countries they use environmentally damaging plastic foam packing. Do we Indians want to support this wanton destruction of rainforests which serve as the "Lungs of the World" and are home to half the world's estimated 10 million species?

Health: The American Medical Association has linked conclusively the crippling and premature death of nearly 1.5 million persons each year by heart failure, stroke, cancer etc due to excessive consumption of animal foods. This makes McDonald's particularly responsible. Do we want our people to suffer the same way by their cultural invasion in India that will spoil the culinary tastes of our Indian youth?

Human Exploitation: McDonald's exploitation goes beyond animals to also cover human exploitation. Their prices per meal are considered high. They have declared that they expect their international operating income to grow 20% annually in profits in the next 5 years. They have bought millions of acres of land from small farmers in the Third World depriving them of their only means of subsistence. The people are replaced by cattle and the process of manufacturing hamburgers begins. McDonald's are renown for being strongly anti-union. 75% of their workforce is under 21 with over 60% leaving in less than one year. They also discriminate against black franchisers, not allowing them to operate in white areas. Are such concepts acceptable to us Indians?

Economics: It has been proved that it is cheaper and better (quantity-wise and quality-wise) for grains, pulses etc to be consumed by humans directly rather than the produce of the land to be first fed to animals specially bred and killed for their meat which is eaten by humans. A special study of feed to flesh conversion would once more prove the point that there would be enough food to feed the entire nation and more if precious wheat, soya etc. were not fed to poultry and other animals "grown" to be killed only in order to produce second hand food in the form of flesh.

Indian Heritage and Tradition: No amount of foreign investment would be worth the exploitation involved which would benefit no one except McDonald's and the Venkateshwara people. It is the duty of each and every Indian, particularly those at the helm of affairs to use their good offices to stop the entry of McDonald's into India. It would be in the interest of us Indians who value our heritage and traditions.

What YOU can do Now (Time is running out)

Join the Signature Campaign

Give wide publicity to these facts.

Forms for signatures and hand bills of this page are also available with BWC, Post Box 18, Poona 411001.