

Animals: Mythology And Worship

Pushpendra¹, Dr. Rahul Tripathi²

¹(Research Scholar)

²(Professor Amity University, Rajasthan)

Abstract:

Ancient Indians had recognized the animals right to co-exist with man and therefore they were loved, nurtured and even worshipped. In order to impress upon the commoners about their importance, the animals were given the status of gods and goddesses. Mostly in the ancient Indian literature, animals are depicted as 'vahanas' or vehicles of the gods. Airavata; vahana of lord Indra is one of the very popular examples of it. Airavata means "the one who knits or binds the clouds". The Upanishads contain detailed descriptions about horses and cattle. The Garudapurana contains life-histories of fishes and turtles. Although there are no special books which dedicated to a special animal (besides Matsya Purana, the name looks like that it is about fishes but it is about the stories of lord Vishnu), Nagamahdimya, Nandipurdo, Mayiratrahimya and Pashu-puriltia are some good accounts about them.

Keywords: Zoolatry, Vahana, Upanishad, Garud, Matsya, Kamdhenu, Totemism.

Introduction

The term zoolatry or Animal worship is basically the depiction of religious activities in which animals are involved by the peoples. These practices not only shows that animals are and were worshipped but they were also sacrificed sometimes. This practice of worshipping animals is very old in Indian subcontinent. From the excavations done in Harappa and other sites so many evidences are found which shows that nature (tree and plants) and animals were worshipped by Harappan people. Our sacred texts such as Vedas and Upanishads highlights the connections of few animals with our deities so they are venerated by peoples. The ancient practice of animal

worship is not only popular in Indian culture but also in Greek and other cultures as well. Holy animals are venerated or worshipped in some religions because they embody divine forces or represent incarnations of divine entities, like gods, such as Nandi, Vasuki, Kamdhenu etc. Animals can also be venerated as a symbol of a deity, the deity can be anthropomorphized and given a humanoid form, or the deity may transform between animal and human form.

Tradition of Zoolatry

The evidences of animal worship, although goes back to prehistoric period, it was practised by the hunting-gathering societies. The excavations done in Harappan sites provides various evidences of it. It might be possible that the practice of zoolatry begins from animism or totemism.

Animism is a belief of connection with the nature where the components of nature such as trees or animals possess a divine or spiritual essence while Totemism is basically a system of belief in which humans are said to have a mystical relationship with a spirit-being, such as an animal or plant.

In Indian mythology the animals are worshipped in various forms; as deities, the monkey god (Lord Hanuman), the elephant god (Lord Ganesh), the snake goddess (Devi Mansa); as avatars, the fish avatar (Lord Vishnu), the boar avatar (Lord Vishnu): as vahana's, the bull vahana (Nandi), the eagle form (Garud) etc.

Animal Worship: Bond Between Humans and Animals

The bond between animals and humans was not always so similar to the relationship humans have with each other. According to the archaeology the animal-human bond was developed around 10,000 years ago when for the first time they started domestication of animals. In the early stages only, few were domesticated and rest were killed while hunting as they believe they are harmful for them. Dog is considered as the first domesticated animal by the historians. Slowly they believe that these animals can serve them while farming, hunting, travelling even they can use them for their protection. This bond can be seen as a working relationship. This bond of humans and animals can be clearly seen the family of lord shiva where the vahana of shiva is nandi(a bull) and he is having a snake on his neck, vahana of goddess Parvati is lion, god ganesha's vahana is a mouse and god kartikeya is having mayur(peacock) as his vahana. These all animals are enemies

of each other and always ready to kill each other while in the picture of shiva family, we can see them sitting with each other peacefully.

Animal Worship: Symbol of Respect

The sacred regard for animal is the biggest element of respect for the animals. For example eating cow in Hinduism is prohibited because it is sacred and considered as a Mother figure. Worshipping animals has often developed in ancient cultures from observations of specific animal behaviours and traits bringing admiration. It might be possible that this worship and respect is somehow related to the importance of particular animals that what kind of duties they can perform for humans and what kind of product we can get from them. Like, not every animal got respect all the time, some animals are not considered good even some activities done by them are considered as inauspicious. For example, cow is the highly respected animal in Hindu mythology because all the products provided by her are useful to humans.

Human beings and animals always shared a special relationship with each other. Animals are the medium of emotional and social support for humans. People who desire and love and affection from their family and friends can be satisfied from their pets that they share close bond with. This is one of the modern factors which is responsible for the respect towards the animals.

Festivals of Worshipping Animals

Not only in Indian culture but most of the other cultures from all around the world celebrates various festivals in which they worship animals, such as Naag Panchami, Mattu Pongal, Kukur Tihar and Monkey Buffet Festival etc.

Naag Panchami is one of the auspicious ceremonies that are celebrated annually during the month of Shravan on the 5th day. Snakes (Naag) observed by Hindus, Jains and Buddhists.

Mattu Pongal is related to the worship of Cows. This is the third day of Pongal (biggest harvest festival in Tamil Nādu). On this day cows are adorned with kum kum and their horns are painted.

Kukur Tihar is a five-day Hindu festival held in Nepal in autumn season. In this people give their thanks to the other species. Crows, worshipped on the first day, Dogs are worshipped on

the second day, Cows are worshipped on the third day and Ox are worshipped on the fourth day.

Conclusion

Besides all these things where we talk about the respect and worship of animals, so many times we have heard about the cases in which animals are harmed by humans, daily thousands of animals are killed for food and for their skins and other items. Thousands of animals are killed in laboratories for medical experiments. The case of pregnant elephant who died because he was given fire cracker fruit by the local people in Kerala. These are horrific incidents which shows that one side, we worship these animals as gods but

Animals played an important role not in humans lives but in our ecosystem as well. Therefore, it is our duty as humans to protect animals for a better future.

References

- 1.K. Nanditha, Sacred Animals of India, May 2014.
- 2.Colona Angelo, Religious and Cultural Construction of Animal Worship in Egypt from the Early Dynastic to the New Kingdom, 2021.
- 3.Jones J.Y., Worship Not the Creature Animal Rights and The Bible, July 2019.
4. Agarwal V.K., Animal Behaviour, 2009.
- 5.<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6952866>
- 6.<https://www.mentafloss.com/article/558101/fall-festivals-around-world-celebrates-animals>
- 7.<https://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/book/browse?ty=pe=lscsubc&key=Animal%20worship&c=x>