



Animal Protection in Pakistan

Haroon Akram Gill, born in Gujranwala-Pakistan, is a social scientist with a degree in Mass Communication. He is currently working with a federal government think tank as head of Public Relations. He is an activist who raises his voice for issues concerned with nature and its protection. His focus areas are climate change, environment, biodiversity, wildlife, and animal protection. He also addresses social and cultural concerns related to nature, youth, media and public relations.

Love and care for animals is among the basics of Islam. Muslims are pioneers in establishing animal welfare systems and it is evident from Islamic history that animal welfare has always been an exalted value. Shelters reserved for the needs of animals existed in Cairo a thousand years ago. Islam ranks humans as custodians of life on earth, appointed by God, and considers it a crime to harm any of God's creations. The sentence of all animals has been declared in the Quran. However, in the case of Pakistan, a country that had been established in the name of Islam as a first Islamic state in recent times, application of such a belief regarding animal protection is not visible as much as one might expect. Where there is a lack of human rights there is no chance of organized animal welfare, so is the case of Pakistan.

There are so many regions of Pakistan, like Sindh, South Punjab, Northern areas, Baluchistan, and Cholistan, where once biodiversity was very rich but today thousands and millions of animals and birds fall victim to uncontrolled hunting and other elements i.e. climate change, extremist activities, side effects of the "War on Terrorism" and insufficient steps taken by the government to save the Biodiversity and to protect the animals, mainly lack of legislation in this regard.

Pakistan as a Winter Sanctuary for Migratory Birds

With a series of waterways and wetlands running from north to the Indus Delta, Pakistan is termed a wintering sanctuary for various migratory birds. Indus flyway zone of Pakistan is one of seven fly zones of migratory birds all over the world. Around 7,000,000 – 12,000,000 guest birds arrive in Pakistan flying over Karakorum, Suleiman Ranges and Hindukush along the Indus River every year from Europe, Central Asian states and India. These migratory birds, which include swans, ducks, flamingos, waders, falcons, cranes and geese start reaching Pakistan in early September till February and start flying back to Europe and Central Asia by March. They spend the winters in different wetlands and deserts of Pakistan,

which are scattered almost throughout the country, from the high Himalayas to coastal mangroves and mud flats in the Indus delta.

There is rising concern in Pakistan by wildlife experts at the decreasing number of migratory birds in the country. Wildlife experts are of the belief that a decline of almost 80% has been witnessed in the population of migratory birds in the Punjab province in recent years. The reasons are hunting, poaching, environmental pollution, vanishing of forests, and massive construction activities. For example, various areas of the country are home to the jeopardized and rapidly going astray "Houbara Bustard". The hunting of this endangered species was banned by the British Government in 1912 in the Subcontinent, and then later by the Government of Pakistan in 1972. For the last few decades, it has been witnessed that the ban is for locals only and foreign luminaries are issued hunting permits for the "Houbara Bustards". The dilemma of this situation becomes even worse when the honorable guests exceed their allowed limits, reportedly 100 times in some cases. According to the Third Schedule of the Baluchistan Wildlife Act (1974), "All Bustards" from the family Otididae are listed as "Protected Animals; i.e. Animals which shall not be hunted, killed or captured." To provide legal cover, the provincial governments often use the provisions of a leniency clause within the Baluchistan Wildlife Act to "de-list" these protected species for the period of hunting by foreign dignitaries.

The Manchar Lake in Sindh (One of the five provinces of Pakistan) was one of the largest freshwater lakes of the subcontinent and once home to millions of waterfowls and numerous fish species. However, increasing salinity and other pollutants and ruthless hunting have brought a sharp decline in the number of visitor birds and water life over the years. Moreover, every winter the lake and its surrounding areas become a slaughter house for migratory birds. A large number of birds is killed and their meat is sold at local markets on daily basis. The provincial wildlife department seems to have



no control over poaching. By doing this, we are not only losing bird population but also violating the international law as Pakistan has signed numerous conventions for the protection of birds, such as the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species and the Ramsar Convention.

The Role of Legislation

There are not only problems concerning the protection of migratory birds, a short history of the legislation for animal protection in Pakistan will provide a broader view on the issue.

When we talk of the animal protection laws in Pakistan, all the legislation we have in this regard was done by the British during their rule on the Subcontinent. The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act was passed in 1890. This was due to the efforts of the "Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals" (SPCA), modeled after the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in the UK, which had been established in Karachi in 1878 by a group of animal lovers.

The law was executed in the whole of «British India» (which parted as Pakistan and India in 1947). The Act concerns domestic animals that are working animals. After the partition, India revised the law and enacted a new Act, namely the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1960.

In Pakistan, the 1890 Act unfortunately remains the same and only few amendments have been made yet, after even 67 years of independence from the British rule. Section 3 of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act imposes only one month imprisonment or 50 Pakistani Rupee fine for a first offense of cruelty to animals. A subsequent offense which is committed within three years of the first one has been declared punishable with three months' imprisonment or 100 Rupees fine. Additionally, section 429 of the Pakistan Penal Code 1860 makes it a criminal offense to kill, maim, or render useless any animal, punishable with five years imprisonment, or with fine, or with both. There is a dire need to update the law although some amendments were made at different times, such as in 2001, when Local Government Ordinance prohibited bear dog fight (which used to be a popular sport in rural areas) because it is cruel to animals.

What is remarkable is that all provinces of Pakistan have their own Wildlife Protection ordinances, such

as the Sindh Wildlife Protection Ordinance 1972, the Punjab Wildlife (Protection, Preservation, Conservation and Management) Act 1974, the Balochistan Wildlife Protection Act, 1974 and the North-West Frontier Province Wild Life (Protection, Preservation, Conservation and Management) Act, 1975. These acts apparently apply to wild animals. The Local Government Ordinance 2001 concerns stray animals (e.g. feral and stray cats and dogs) but this legislation is concerned with protecting the public from the stray animals not the other way around. Although Item 9 section 2(c) forces that animal shelters should be built, the legislation has never been enforced in this way. All the above mentioned acts cater for animal rights and ask for animal protection but implementation in the desired way is not evident anywhere. The organizations and institutions related to implementation are not working properly. On the other hand we should have a look on the bottom up activities provided by welfare societies.

Animal Welfare Societies in Pakistan

Karachi is the largest city of Pakistan, with a population over 20 million human beings and a large number of animals and birds. An animal shelter with a capacity of 150 animals was functional in Karachi till the late eighties during the last century. It was being run by the SPCA (Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) under the supervision of Lady Constantine, a Swiss resident of Karachi with very limited funds and resources. After the death of the Lady in the early nineties this century-old tradition of service to animals in the city vanished. The shelter land was taken away by the government and the special animal court at the Sindh High Court wound up. The only shelter witnessed in Sindh after that is the one on the Karachi-Hyderabad Highway working under the "Edhi Foundation" - named after Abdul Sattar Edhi (born 1928), the icon of social services in Pakistan. It has proven home to cats, dogs, donkeys, crows and kites.

The more than a century old "Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals" (SPCA) is still active in Lahore. Their office and a shelter owned by the society are housed in the only University of Veterinary and Animal Sciences. Moreover, government institutions and organizations dedicated to Animal protection and welfare are not working up to the desired mark. In such absence of institutionalized support, the efforts of some indi-



viduals and organizations that are working towards the betterment of animals, is nothing short of heroic.

In 2004 the City Government of Karachi ordered to kill the stray dogs by using different means, as the increasing number of such dogs was threatening to harm the life of citizens. In response The "Pakistan Animal Welfare Society" (PAWS), was founded against such cruel acts of poisoning and shooting of stray dogs. It has had a modest start and is run entirely by volunteers.

The Brooke Hospital for Animals started working in Pakistan in 1991. They have their centers in 12 districts. The work of this organization has been estimated to support the livelihood of approximately 1.5 million people in 250 poor communities in Pakistan.

The "Bio Research Center" (BRC) Pakistan in collaboration with "World Society for the Protection of Animals" (WSPCA) has managed to end the brutal act of bear baiting with their dedicated work for cause. BRC did a great job in 2007 by preaching against bear baiting in almost 1000 mosques. The campaign resulted in rapid decrease in bear baiting since that time. BRC established a bear sanctuary in Kund to house rescued bears. Unfortunately, that was flooded in 2010 and all the resident bears died except two.

Outlook

Keeping in view the situation, WWF Pakistan suggests reducing incidences of illegal and excessive hunting by local and foreign hunters and proposes controlled hunting of the species to be undertaken within the framework of species conservation and benefit to local communities. WWF Pakistan advocates undertaking population surveys on standard formats and protocols and wants it to be conducted in selected sites all over the country, on an annual basis.

In case of the Houbara Bustard, WWF is of the view that the government should continue the good practice of not allowing any hunting in the Houbara breeding areas, such as the Nag Valley, which should be declared as Houbara Bustard Wildlife Sanctuary. In addition, no hunting should be allowed in other protected areas, especially National Parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries.

WWF Pakistan recommends that the Foreign Office (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) should coordinate with the senior representatives of the "Federal Climate Change Division" and provincial wildlife departments for sharing relevant information before the allocation of hun-

ting areas to foreign dignitaries and provinces must contribute with population data before any hunting allocation is made. This is important so that all the related stakeholders are on board and understand their roles and responsibilities.

WWF also suggests development of District/Regional Conservation Action Plans, conservation awareness campaigns, training and capacity building of government staff and exchange visits, strengthening the customs authorities to be alert of any illegal wildlife trafficking on a sustainable basis.

Some other steps can also be taken in this regard as convincing the concerned authorities to implement and enforce the existing laws and directives relating to alleviating the suffering of animals. Furthermore, people should be educated and advised to visit the zoos, and highlight the plight of animals in order to get the living conditions of these animals improved.

Awareness about animal rights should be raised in the general public as a long term solution and children must be educated about these rights by including the subject in the syllabus at all levels. The law enforcement officials should be made aware about animal rights, and should be trained to prevent animals from being poached, and from being captured.

Shelters for the stray animals do not cost much and can be established at low costs. The local governments should take the initiative in this regard, and at least provide land, if nothing else, to the interested parties.

By adopting these measures we would not only be able to do a virtue but we would also be able to tell the developed world that animals are being given rights and can be protected with even lesser facilities and resources. Above all it would raise our image as a nation who is a flag bearer of Islam which claims to give the rights and love to every creature of God.

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