

Animal rights in Islam

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Abstract

Several years has elapsed since the societal recognition of the issue that not only people should enjoy several rights but also all parts of nature should have relevant rights. New legislation enacted in many countries and regions of the world during the 1980s requires that laboratory animal use be reduced, refined and replaced wherever possible, for ethical and scientific reasons, in line with the 3Rs concept put forward by W.M.S. Russell and R.L. Burch. The scientists worldwide begin to recognize the importance of 3Rs in the biomedical education as a social concern for laboratory animal's welfare rises. However, the Quran, the holy book of Islam, as well as Hadiths contain the obligatory ways to keep and treat animals since more than 1400 years ago.

According to Islamic principles, humanity is not allowed to do everything to the living things and must only take their lives if necessary. Furthermore, there are Islamic restrictions on manipulating animals, such as limited hours of work. Hunting of young birds for pleasure is forbidden by Islam. From the Islamic viewpoint, animals represent Allah's might and wisdom, and humanity must pay attention to their health and living conditions. Several Islamic manuscripts state that animals have their own position in the creation hierarchy and humans are responsible for the facilities and animals at their disposal, including animals' health and feed. Islam determines the living costs of animals and orders humanity to respect and not to abuse them. This paper reviews historically animals' rights in Islam.

Keywords: animal, right, islam, Quran, Hadith

Introduction

Laboratory animal procedures have made significant contributions to biomedical research in the past, as well as to the safety and efficacy evaluation of chemicals and products of various kinds. Some such use of vertebrate animals will continue for the foreseeable future, in the interests of human beings and other animals. Nowadays, the widespread and expensive use of animal models in medical research is quite common. It is certainly true that a few modern scientific methods could have been used for humanity if it were not possible to perform preliminary tests on animals. From a historical viewpoint, invaluable pieces of research undertaken by such scientists like Pasteur show the importance of using animals in medical research. The first prerequisite for manipulating laboratory animals is to observe the rules of breeding and keeping them and to treat

them correctly, and this is scientifically and ethically necessary to do research.

In the world today, researchers are ethically and legally obliged, according to adopted rules and regulations, to be accountable for the rights of animals under observation, governing animals' living environment, nutrition, and hygiene so as to keep their peace.

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Reduction alternatives as methods for obtaining comparable levels of information from the use of fewer animals in scientific procedures, or for

obtaining more information from the same number of animals.

Refinement alternatives as methods which alleviate or minimize potential pain, suffering and distress, and which enhance animal well-being.

Replacement alternatives as methods which permit a given purpose to be achieved without conducting experiments or other scientific procedures on animal (Smyth, 1978).

Researchers are prohibited from using methods which are considered painful or disturbing in laboratory tests on animals, and numerous committees such as UAWC (University Animal Welfare Committees), LEACC (Life and Environmental Animal Care Committee) supervise research on animals at different universities of the world. The Islamic faith has comprehensive instructions and laws governing animal rights and these detailed laws that are imposed more than 1400 years ago are unprecedented precise.

Materials and methods

This review article studies animal rights and the legitimate boundaries of human manipulation of animals according to the Islamic laws (Naeinei, 2000). A literature review of the published articles in national and international websites and journals conducted. Duplicate citations were excluded. Authors also searched Quran (holy book of muslims) and related Hadiths.

Results

A. Animal evolution and resurrection

Many Quranic verses emphasize animal resurrection, such as "When animals are resurrected" (81:5). Moreover, Allah says, "Certainly, there is no living thing on earth or on the wing unless it belongs to its own group the same way that you humans belong to your own race; We have not ignored anything in the book [of creation] and eventually all [the living things] will be resurrected and return to their Lord" (6:38). This Quranic verse's interpretation states that animals are natural signs of God's might and live in their own specific societies according to the divine rule inspired by God. Like human beings, animals have their own individual and social beliefs on the basis of which they always act to survive and save themselves from extinction (Pourmohammadi, 2002). Building societies which is an observed commonality among all animals is not simply because of instinctive and deterministic aspects of life such as nutrition, growth, and reproduction, but has another goal outside material life, i.e. preparing for the afterlife. Allah says, "We have not created the earth and sky and whatever among them for fun, but because of justice [wisdom and necessity]; however most of them are not aware of it" (44:38-39). The

two Quranic verses clarify the point that all parts of the universe have their own positions and nothing is created in vain.

B. Animals as divine signs and lessons for humanity

Allah says, "There are [manifest] signs [of truth] in the creation of [humanity and numerous types of] animals scattered [on the earth] for those who believe [in Allah]" (45:4). From an Islamic point of view, not only animals but also the entire God's creations are signs of His might and wisdom. For instance, Allah says, "Do they see how [useful] a camel is created?" (88:17). Several Quranic verses invite humans to learn lessons from animals, birds, ants, and honeybees. A believer in God learns from studying animals as divine signs and in addition to opening up new horizons of knowledge and science, he/she deepens his/her faith (Pourmohammadi, 2002).

C. The boundaries of human manipulation in animal life

A question of ethical importance is how much humanity is allowed to make use of animals. According to Islam, human manipulation of animal life is not unrestricted and humans are only allowed to take animals' lives if necessary. Hence medical experiments requiring preliminary tests on animals must be devised in a way that the number of possibly killed animals is minimized. The Islamic rule stipulates restrictions on manipulating animals, among which are as follows (Feridooni, 2000):

1. Restrictions on collecting honey. According to Islam, the amount of honey left in a honeycomb should be enough to feed honeybees and in winter it is praiseworthy to leave more honey than enough to feed the bees of a honeycomb.

2. Restrictions on riding and carrying loads. Quoted from holy prophet of Islam "Muhammad" (PBUH) that there is no beast of burden that does not pray to God every morning so that Lord may bestow it an owner who would give it enough forage and water and would not overload it. Also, Abu Harirah quoted from the prophet of Islam, "Ride animals as much as it is necessary for your needs and do not use animals as your sedan chairs." Ali Ibn Abu Talib (PBUH) instructs his agents "do not ride an animal as much as it can no longer bear your load, and be fair to animals ...If an animal is exhausted, it must take some rest..." (Shahidi 1996).

3. Prohibition on verbally abusing and beating of animals. Numerous Hadiths forbid insulting and beating animals particularly in their faces. Moreover, Islam prohibits from slaughtering animals in front of one another.

4. Instructions on hunting. Islam has detailed instructions on hunting. For instance, hunting of wild

animals and birds should be avoided at night as much as possible (probably because Allah has made nights a time of rest and peace for all living things). Hunting devices are also recommended being of sharp iron so as to minimize the pain. From an Islamic viewpoint, hunting as a hobby without necessity is forbidden and deemed a great sin, and anyone who goes on a journey to hunt for fun has committed a sin.

5. Prohibition on separating baby birds or animals from their mother. Hunting baby birds before they have left the nest is forbidden in Islam, and it is recommended that younglings should not be separated from their mother.

6. Prohibition on sports violating animal rights. Although Islam encourages sports such as horse and camel racing, it forbids sports which violate animal rights. Prior to Islam, some people run their camels as long as only one camel survived. This act was strictly forbidden by Islam. Some others made animals like dogs and roosters fight one another, and this was also prohibited by the rule of Islam.

Conclusion

Humans are responsible for whatever they have at their disposal, including animals whose rights must be respected. 'Ali Ibn Abu Talib (PBUH) says, "Be obedient to Allah regarding His subjects and the lands at your disposal, for you are responsible even for the survival of animals." According to Islam, when someone takes possession of an animal, he/she has a responsibility for its living conditions and in case that he/she would not accept the responsibility, it would be the Islamic ruler's duty to obligate him/her to observe animal rights. Different books attribute many divine favors to feeding animals. In general, major animal rights in Islam are preparing suitable feed and water as well as mental and physical living conditions for animals, observing hygiene and specially treating sickness, manipulating them correctly, and no abusing, maltreating and/or misusing of them (Naeinei, 2000).

Several Islamic manuscripts state that animals have their own position in the creation hierarchy and humans are responsible for the facilities and animals at their disposal, including animals' health and feed. Islam determines the living costs of animals and orders humanity to respect and not to abuse them.

Acknowledgment

Authors would like to express gratitude to Dr. Ali Reza Naeini and Dr. Mohammad Rabani for their valuable research on animal rights in the Quran and Hadiths' points of view.

This study was supported by Atyeh Sazan Hafez and Middle East Breast Cancer Institute. We gratefully acknowledge the contribution of Mr. Sohail Sadegh, Dr. Seyed Hasan Razavi and Razavieh Publication Inc.

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