

Why Vegetarian?

— R. R. Diwakar, Gandhi Peace Foundation, New Delhi —

All living beings live by instinct guided by an in-built directing power of which they are themselves unconscious. Man too partly lives by instinct, for instance, the instinct to survive, to reproduce are there. But in the course and process of evolution, he has developed certain violations which have given him the freedom and options of variation even in the exercise of these two instincts mentioned above. But these options and or variations he may adopt at his own risk and with unknown and unpredictable results.

What is man doing with the options as regards food? There is no doubt that man, especially the more civilized and sophisticated man, has strayed away from what may be called natural norms. He is making experiments which may be adding quantitatively to the sum of what are called sensual pleasures, but perhaps he is losing something psychologically. Now let us see how far man has strayed in the matter of his food.

Biologically man belongs to the category of monkeys. In fact the rhesus monkey is said to be his immediate predecessor. Now monkeys as a species, are herbivorous and vegetarian. Structurally too man's nails and teeth are not those of carnivorous and his long intestines are like those of other vegetarian animals.

One need not go into the history of how from being an herbivorous and vegetarian animal by nature, man began to live by hunting and killing animals, including perhaps human beings also. We have to consider this matter in the light of the present scientific knowledge about 'food for man', from various points of view, such as nutrition, economy, morality, emotional and psychological reactions and so on.

Of course, there is an age-old religious point of view that injury to any living being is a sin and that Non-injury (Ahimsa) is the highest religion, virtue and duty. But today one is able to summon science to help and support points of view and opinions which earlier had to seek the sanction of religion, or of saints, or of some traditional authority. For instance abstinence from narcotics and alcohol need not be preached any more only in the name of any religion or morality. Science has proved that they are all harmful physiologically and psychologically. So in the case of food and meat-eating also, considerations other than religious and moral are more relevant and effective today.

The considerations of compassion and or emotional reaction against killing animals for food is on a footing different from that of religion or morality. Man being a living animal himself feels and sympathises or even empathises when he sees another animal being slaughtered or injured or ill-treated. In many cases it has happened that the feeling of compassion itself has prompted people to abstain from meat. There is the case of Rabindranath Tagore, who on seeing a youngling of a sparrow which fell from a ceiling, writhing in pain and struggling for life, immediately felt of abandoning meat.

Nutritionally speaking it is not at all necessary to eat meat for that purpose. In fact, vegetarians prosper on their diet quite healthily and are at vigorous in their energy, physical, vital and mental as the non-vegetarians. There are millions of vegetarians, who have proved themselves equal in every respect to those who are habitually meat-eaters. In fact, in matters like endurance and steadiness they are somewhat superior.

The economic point of view of recently being stressed in favour of vegetarianism. It is said that there is no meaning in feeding animals for years and then killing them for what is called 'animal protein'. While you get enough of digestible proteins in dairy products as well as pulses and beans like soyabean. The land necessary for feeding animals and then slaughtering them can easily sustain more people if cultivated properly.

From the psychological and spiritual point of view, men and women in all climes and ages have advocated and practised vegetarianism as a matter of principle and self-control. The Upanishads declared that the purity of the being of man depends upon the purity of the food which, in addition to being light and clean, should be such as does not involve injury to any other living being.

Dr. John Rossner, the Founder President of the International Institute of Integral Human Sciences of Montreal, Canada is a vegetarian and a researcher in psychological sciences. According to him, "Animals when being slaughtered release some hormones in the midst of their struggle for living. They are full of painful vibrations any they affect the flesh of the animals slaughtered. To eat such surcharged meat has its own unseen and unknown effect on those who feed on the flesh. It is wise to avoid".

One does not see how much more scientific data would be available against meat-eating as science advances. The ancient insights of seers in the matter, arrived at by intuition are being now attested by modern science.