

My Visit to A Dairy Farm

Pravin K. Shah
Jain Study Center of NC

I visited a dairy farm located on Route 2 north of Burlington, Vermont (USA) in May of 1995. The dairy owns about 150 cows. All its milk production is used to make ice cream.

Here is the summary of what I saw and learnt:

It was milking time (5:00 PM) and the machine was milking the cow at 3.5 minutes per cow, without regard to how hard it was on the cow. It was extremely difficult for me to watch the cows' sufferings during the milking. The machine has no feeling. To extract the last drop of milk, sometimes traces of blood gets mixed with the milk.

Every morning hormones or drugs are injected into the cows to increase their milk yields.

Since cows produce the most milk after pregnancy, they are kept pregnant for their entire fertile life through artificial insemination.

The pregnant cow delivers a baby after 9 months same as human does. If a male calf, of no use to the dairy industry, is born, he is shipped to the veal industry within two or three days of birth. The evening I was there, the farm was shipping three baby calves in a truck to a veal factory. The mother cows were crying when their babies were separated from them. I cannot forget the scene and can still hear the cries of the mother cows.

The veal industry is the most cruel meat industry in the world. It produces very tender meat for delicacy meal. The baby calves are raised in the darkness in a very confining crate, which allows practically no movements, and are fed an iron-deficient diet. This way the meat gets very tender and properly textured. They slaughter the baby calves after six months. There is enough literature available about the cruelty in the veal industry.

Within two months of delivery, the cows are made pregnant again. I did not have the stamina to watch the process of artificial insemination that the farm was showing off to us.

About four to five times a year, this farm would take the cows outside for a walk. Otherwise, the cows are tied in one place and they have no choice but to defecate where they are confined. It badly stunk when I was there; the farm would wash the confinement areas once or sometimes twice a day, and the remaining times the cows would then live in their own waste.

The life expectancy of cows is about 15 years. However, after 7 to 10 years, their milk production drops significantly so these cows are sent to the slaughterhouse for cheap meat.

I also visited a dairy farm near Bombay in India in November 1996. I observed similar things; overall, things were actually probably worse because there are few enforced regulations.

In the past (before the birth of a high tech dairy farm) in India, the cows were treated like a part of the family,

and after feeding the baby calf, leftover milk was consumed by humans. This may be the reason why milk and its product is not considered violent in our scriptures.

As I learned about cruelty in the dairy industry, I at first found it hard to believe. On a personal level, I feared that it would be impossible for me to become vegan. How could I eliminate milk, yogurt, butter, ghee, and cheese from my diet? To become vegan means that I cannot drink tea with milk, eat any Indian sweets, pizza, milk chocolate, ice cream, eggless but dairy-containing cake, and many other items.

My daughter Shilpa always says, cows' milk is for baby cows and not for humans or their babies; no other animal consumes the milk of another species. We do not have the right to consume their milk for our benefit, and furthermore milk and its products are not essential for our survival.

However needless to say that the dairy farm tour made me an instant vegan.

Health Issue:

I was 55 years old when I became vegan. I had some concern that my health may suffer if I stop using dairy products. Following is the summary of my health data after I became vegan:

	Before becoming vegan (1995)	After becoming vegan (1997)
--	------------------------------	-----------------------------

Cholesterol	205	160
-------------	-----	-----

HDL	34	42
-----	----	----

Triglyceride	350	175
--------------	-----	-----

After becoming vegan I feel more energetic. I do not have any calcium deficiency. However, one should monitor his/her own body chemistry after becoming vegan. My doctor is very pleased with my results and has not put me on any vitamins or calcium substitutes.

I have also learned that the protein in animal products (such as milk, cheese or meat) is acidic. The body neutralizes it by drawing calcium, a base, from bones, causing diseases like osteoporosis.

However, vegetable protein is not acidic, and the calcium absorbed by consuming dark green vegetables and various other sources is absorbed and maintained by the bones at a much healthier rate. The end result is vegetarians who get their calcium from non-animal sources such as dark green vegetables develop stronger bones, but not weaker ones.

Religious view:

Nonviolence is the highest principle of our religion. However for our survival the religion permits certain minimum violence.

Our scriptures clearly indicate that:

For our survival, the survival of our ascetics, and the survival of our scriptures, temples, libraries, and upasrayas; limited violence to one sensed (Ekendriya) souls such as vegetables, water, fire, earth, and air are allowed only by the Jain lay people (sravaks and sravikas).

Under no circumstances violence to two to five sensed (Tras) living beings such as animals, birds, and humans are allowed even by the lay people.

Ascetics should be totally nonviolent to all souls including vegetables, water, fire, air, and earth.

A cow is a five-sensed (Panchendriya) animal and cruelty to a five-sensed animal is considered the highest sin and is totally prohibited even by the Jain lay people.

In today's high tech environment, there is no difference in cruelty between meat and milk production. In the production of meat, cows are killed instantly. However, during milk production the cows are not killed instantly but they are tortured badly during their prime life and ultimately slaughtered before the end of their natural life. The dairy cows have no chance to escape from this cruelty and death.

Usage of Dairy Products in the Jain Temples:

Both Svetambar and Digambar sects use milk and its products in temple rituals. This is an old tradition and as I mentioned above that in the past the milk was not produced using the modern day dairy technology, which tortures the cows and ultimately slaughters them.

We should reevaluate the usage of milk in the temple rituals under the new technological environment. The tradition should not be followed blindly. The highest Jain principle of nonviolence should not be compromised under any circumstances.

With regards to Svetambar tradition I can definitely say that no scriptures support the usage of milk in the temple rituals.

When we consume dairy products for our personal use we are personally responsible for our actions and the resulting karma or sins. However when we use and allow others to use dairy products in the temple, it is considered that the entire community is involved in committing the highest sin.

Milk and other products represent certain religious symbols in the Jain rituals. However, the product we use in the rituals must be of nonviolent source. The intention of our rituals is to inspire us to grow spiritually and become more religious. The net outcome of the rituals should result in the reduction of our ego, greed, anger, lust, and attachments. Milk and other dairy products derived using such a violent method can not help us to grow spiritually. In our rituals, we can substitute the regular milk with simple water or soya milk, and other dairy products (sweets etc.) with various types of dry nuts and grapes. Our youths will appreciate such changes in our rituals.

If you would like to further discuss with me, please call me at 919-469-0956 or send me E-mail with your telephone number.

Pravin K. Shah
President, Jain Study Center of North Carolina (Raleigh)
401 Farmstead Drive, Cary NC 27511-5631 USA
E-mail - pkshah1@ibm.net
Tele - (919) 469-0956