CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

The issue of animal right is one of the most important issues in the contemporary globalizing world. Now more and more people are paying attention to the issues of welfare relating to animals. A large number of non-governmental organizations have mushroomed all over the world which take up the issue of animal rights. Many governments have also legislated on matters relating to the welfare of animals. As now more and more scientific evidence is coming to light which shows that animals feel pain and suffer like human beings. They also have a fair level of language development, family sense, and above all, culture. Thus, it is now generally believed that it is high time that we stopped treating animals as machines. It is only in this sense that more and more people are becoming vegetarian because eating animals is seen as morally incorrect.

Animals and human beings have existed on the earth for a long time. The earth is a place where are all living beings give birth to propagate their species and exist. However, animals came into existence before the animals. This indicates that animals have equal, if not more, right to the resources on planet earth. On the same basis also, they have the right to life and existence. As the animals are not as developed as the human beings in terms of the brain, they are like innocent children and need human protection and care. So human beings are like parents and elder brothers and sisters to animals.

The Buddha spent many of his previous lives, as a man, animal and deity, building up the moral and spiritual perfections necessary for
Buddhahood. These lives are described in what are known as the Jātaka stories.¹ The Buddha took birth many times as an animal sometimes a deer, or a monkey, or a fish, or a dog etc. He knew what it was like to be an animal. He also taught that we have been animals in our past lives and in fact all the animals are related to us, quite literally. At some point in the past they have been our mothers, fathers, sisters, cousins. So if we harm animals, we are actually harming members of our own family.

‘All male beings have been my father and all females have been my mother. There is not a single being that has not given birth to me during my previous lives; hence all beings of the Six Destinies are my parents. Therefore, when a person kills and eats any of these beings, he thereby slaughters my parents.’² We do not know which living being was related to us in our past life. One might have been our father, our brother, or our sister. We cannot know for sure. Perhaps they were our children, or our friends. Right now we have not gained the use of the heavenly eye or the penetration of past lives, and so we do not know what kinds of causes and effects belong to each animal and yet, when we see these creatures, we feel uncomfortable and want to set them free.

The Buddha advises that “A person who loves the self should not harm the self of other”.³ Therefore, to maintain peace and law and other society, we should not do anything to others that we would not like them to do to ourselves. Following this logic, it is important to contemplate on the

issue that of living beings eating the flesh of other living beings. We people are living beings and what we eat is other living beings. So this is a case of living beings eating other living beings. Horses, cows, pigs, sheep, chickens, and dogs are all animals. And all other creatures are also living beings. Life is more precious than anything else in the world. No one wants to suffer. Day and night, even in our dreams, we instinctively try to avoid even the slightest suffering. Even insects want to live. Whenever we break any of the five precepts of Buddhism, we have violated some other sentient being.

His Holiness, the Fourteen Dalai Lama, preaches to his audiences that the human beings are social animals. The animals have no need to study philosophy, and many other professional and complicated subjects. By simply looking at these innocent animals, insects, ants, bees, etc., quite often we develop some kind of respect for them. Because they have no religion, no constitution, no police force, nothing. But they live in harmony through the natural law of existence or nature’s law or system. Morally relevant similarity of animals with humans is that both can feel pain and suffer, that they are sentient beings. Many people today still cannot accept animals on the same moral level as humanity. Although animals could speak nothing, they have sensitive sounds when they get inflicted with pain and consequent suffering. Therefore, Ryder states that: “If we are going to care about the suffering of other humans then logically we should care about the suffering of non-humans too”. It is the heartless exploiter of animals, not the animal protectionist, who is being irrational, showing a sentimental tendency to put

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his own species on a pedestal. We all, thank goodness, feel a natural spark of sympathy for the sufferings of others. We need to catch that spark and fan it into a fire of rational and universal compassion.

The Buddha has said that all beings have Buddha Nature. Therefore, we should not eat meat because all living beings are potential Buddhas and have a life. The physical mechanisms for feeling pain are the same among all the higher animals. Pain is pain whether you one is a bird, a fish, a mouse or a human. All men can think and feel alike, they can all understand the same sympathies and the same sufferings. They are all conscious beings. This is true of humans as it is true of animals. In fact, humans are simply another breed of animals. The non-human animal species are simply another oppressed group, another exploited mass. The mind of animals is essentially the same as that of man. The animals are indeed conscious beings and that they can feel as much as humans can. The animals are conscious beings. They can think and feel as any human being can. If humans are to be given rights on account of their sufferings, on account of the fact that we may all feel the same pains and desires, then it is also true that we should grant the same rights to non-human animals. Every one familiar with the dog will admit that the creature knows the right from the wrong, and is conscious when it committed a fault.  

In a society that gives few rights to animals, the most important right for a humane thinker to emphasize is the right to live; it is an intrinsic component of what is called humaneness. If we consume the flesh of our fellow creatures, then we are doing nothing but confirming that vice and

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brutality will reign in civilization for thousands of years to come. If we look forward, it is undeniably the coming to humaneness. All animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others. But in some respects human suffering can differ from that of other animals. However, the ability to reason is not unique to humans; it is a function of the forebrain one of the three basic functions present in all vertebrates. It varies in complexity from fish to the higher mammals. In human beings it is very highly developed but that is a difference of degree, not kind. Animals in Buddhism are capable of both passion and voluntary motion, and hence are not simply driven about by impulses beyond their control. If animals count in their own right, our use of animals for food becomes questionable especially when animal flesh is consumed as a luxury rather a necessity. Some people think that ethics is inapplicable to the real world because they regard it as a system of short and simple rules like ‘do not lie’, ‘do not steal’, and ‘do not kill’. When we abstain from killing, our respect for life grows, and we begin to act with compassion toward all living beings. Then what are our responsibilities towards animal? Are we justified in treating animals as nothing more than machines producing flesh for to eat? These are the issues that can arise at one time or another time in our lives.

For non-humans, such as animals or even gods, suffering only causes them distress and unhappiness, and they cannot learn anything from their pain. The position and treatment of animals in Buddhism is important for

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the light it sheds on Buddhist’s perception of their own relation to the natural world.

The Buddha was a lover of nature. He spent long periods in forests, in caves and under trees and encouraged his monastic to do so. The rules of discipline for monastic deal with measures for the conservation of nature. He loved nature includes animals. In ancient days, the Brahmins used to sacrifice cows in the hope of attaining heaven. Influenced by the teachings of love and compassion of the Buddha, the Brahmins have not only stopped bloody sacrifices but are also now propagating against cow killing. This is great victory of the doctrine of non-violence preached by the Buddha. And saving the lives of all the sentient beings with the great compassion of the Buddha, He held the three month rainy season retreat. This is one of the reasons avoiding destroying creatures by monks and nuns during three month of rainy season. Buddhism with the loving kindness, believes karma and rebirth that human and animal be changed their life together belong to their good or bad action. In the Buddhist tradition, the teaching of rebirth states that humans can be reborn as animals if they commit heinous deeds, and those animals can be reborn as humans if they exert effort to act meritoriously.

Buddhism believes in reincarnation across species, Animals form an important part of its world view. The Buddha strongly campaigned for the humane treatment of all living beings. Thus, he gave the ethical treatment of all animals a theological priority. This is a powerful and significant heritage. Buddhism believes that Animals are like young children who do not have

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the intellectual capacity to understand the world as intelligently as humans. They are therefore needed to be protected by humans.

We should morally treat animals like humans, provided the animals have relevant similarities with humans. We human beings are social animals.\textsuperscript{13} All animal species can suffer pain and distress. Animals scream and writhe like us. Their nervous systems are similar and contain the same biochemicals that we know are associated with the experience of pain in ourselves. When we purposely kill living beings, even small creatures like insects, we diminish our respect for all life and thus for ourselves. Mindfulness helps us to recognize our own aversions and to take responsibility for them.\textsuperscript{14}

In this thesis, an attempt has been made to discuss the role of animals in Buddhism, in the light of the above mentioned background. It goes without saying that Buddhism pays direct attention to the role and importance of animals in the world dominated by men. The methodology used in this research work consists of mainly description and analysis based on the \textit{Pañca Nikāyas}, special reference to the \textit{Jātakas}. Beside these texts, we have also made use of survey method.

Including the present introductory chapter, this thesis consists of six chapters in all. The second chapter is entitled \textit{Animals versus Humans: Buddhist Perspective}. This chapter relates largely to the ethical and moral aspects of issues concerning human use of animals for the purposes of food, labour, and various other needs. An attempt has also been made to show as to how Buddhism considers it immoral for humans to exploit animals. It is

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid. 118.
no doubt that the Buddha after leaving home refused to ride an animal or travel by a vehicle driven by an animal. The major portion of this chapter is devoted to the tricky issue of meat-eating. The Theravādin principle of Tikōtiparisudha has been analyzed in detail here and along with it the Mahāyāna regulations regarding vegetarian food have been discussed.

The third chapter is titled Animal characters in the Jātakas: Buddha nature and Jātakas. Many a time, the teachings of the Buddha are conveyed through stories in which animal characters play a central role. This is done in a variety of ways. The first is a tendency toward animism, the idea that animals have life in the same way as humans. The second is the great influence of the teaching of kamma (Sanskrit, karma) in Buddhism. This is the teaching of samsāra (the cycle of births and deaths) where individual beings are born again and again in different forms depending upon their karma. The third is the personification of animals which was greatly developed at that time. It was very easy to adapt these personifications for oral purposes and thus animals and men talk to each other on the same footing. These three themes are widely available in the Jātakas stories literature.

The Four chapter is entitled Aniamals, Buddha-nature and Jātakas. As the expression ‘sentient beings’(sattva) means living beings which have feelings, animals would naturally fall within this group. Though the concept of Buddha-nature belongs largely to Mahāyāna Buddhism but its roots lie in texts such as the Jātakas. In this chapter, an attempt has been made to show as to how the Early Buddhist argument, which has been profoundly explained through the Jātaka, that all beings are sentient, lies at the very basis of the concept of Buddha-nature.
The title of the fifth chapter is ‘The spirit of kindness to Animals’. The teachings of the Buddha are full of many tales of love towards animals. The precepts that the Buddhists follow are actually restrains on their actions and one of these rules is that one must not take the life of man or beast. This forms part of five precepts, eight precepts and again ten precepts. None of these differentiate between man and beast. In other words, Buddhism is one of the very few religious systems that champion the cause of animals. Thus, in this chapter the question of animal rights shall form the core.

The final chapter is ‘Conclusion’. In this chapter, we have summed up the arguments drawn in the previous chapters.