



View Point

Zoophilia: Myths in Indian Context

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Dear Editor, IJHSC

Zoophilia is a paraphilia characterized by arousal and attainment of sexual gratification through contact with animals. It is often used synonymously with bestiality. The prevalence of zoophilia is quite underreported throughout the world due to the taboo nature of the subject and its legal implications. The prevalence of zoophilia is higher in patients suffering from psychiatric disorders. It was found in a study that the prevalence of bestiality amongst psychiatric patients was 55% which was significantly higher than that among medical inpatients (10%) (Alvarez & Freinhar, 1991). Many isolated cases have been reported, but robust research on the topic is still lacking, especially in the Indian scenario. Zoophilia is not a recent concept, it has always been a part of human history.

Sexual contact with animals has its roots in Indian mythology. Mythological tales say that all animals were born when Prajapati and the Goddess of dawn copulated while she adopted different animal forms. Since many Hindu Gods and Goddesses have animal forms, sexual contact with animals was considered as contact with the higher being in the form of an animal (Rosenberger, 1968). Many sculptures on the exterior of the famous Indian temple of Khajuraho depict man having coitus with animals such as a horse. History gives evidence of acceptance towards bestiality in Indian culture in the early times. Historical records say it was punishable by far less amount than was anal intercourse during the time of Kautilya. Animals were kept in harems for sexual indulgence (Bullough, 1976). Even tantrism portrays humans as animals and the ultimate aim of the yogic

practice is to experience sex in its totality by assuming the form of a beast.

There have been reports of public acts of bestiality in the last century. Such acts were encouraged during the festival of Holi amongst women to become closer to God. Youths often had their first sexual experience with an animal even though the reported rates of actual desire for animals are as low as 1% in the adolescent population (Nagaraja, 1983).

In many areas in South India, public ceremonies celebrating human-animal marriage which could essentially be seen as another form of zoophilia. The purpose of such a marriage is that it is believed to bring good luck in the form of rainfall to drought-stricken villages. Another instance of such a marriage between a female and a dog was reported, to ward off evil spirits from the village. Many people believe that bestiality is a cure for many sexually transmitted diseases. These myths propagate by word of mouth and undue media publicity. These myths remain unchallenged due to the taboo associated with the subject.

It is seen that sex with animals may cause more injury in the animal as it does not anticipate such advances. Also, the act of

penetration can lead to significant damage to the internal organs of the animal due to its disproportionate size. Zoophilic behavior might go unreported also because the victim in this sexual encounter viz-a-viz the animal is unable to express its condition (Sendler, 2019).

Zoophilia is not only a sexual perversion but is also known to cause many health problems. Diseases transmitted from animals to humans known as zoonoses. Many of these can be transmitted via sexual contact including potentially lethal ones such as leptospirosis and rabies (Sangeeta, 2017). The practice of zoophilia also raises many questions about animal cruelty. The significant underreporting of the prevalence of zoophilia and the health risks it portrays need more attention. It is a community health concern of importance and this deviant behavior should be seen as a whole in perspective of personality and health concerns associated with it. Early identification and addressal of zoophilic tendencies are needed. Awareness needs to be spread about the health risks associated with it and psychotherapeutic interventions should be started in people who have this sexual perversion (Satapathy, Swain, Pandey, & Behera, 2016).

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