

Nonharm

The constitution of the Hindu caste body entailed a reconstitution of the Self through a regime of bodily discipline centered on austerity. This effort to protect nonhuman lives was a crucial part of the eighteenth-century construction not only of the Other, the Untouchable, but also the Hindu. The ethical imperative of nonharm to living beings was a central tenet of both Vaishnav devotion and Jainism. The initiation of Maharaja Vijai Singh into the Vaishnav sect of the Vallabhites in 1765 no doubt played an important role in the imposition across the kingdom of laws banning animal slaughter. At the same time, the role that merchants, both as administrators and as wealthy subjects, played in driving the hard edge of this campaign into the body politic is one that needs greater attention and offers a better explanation of the temporal and kingdom-wide scale of this campaign.

From the 1770s until about 1820, the Rathor state threw the weight of its authority, punitive powers, and means of surveillance into stamping out meat eating. In the same years, as shown in chapters 2 and 3, Vijai Singh and his officers facilitated the expansion of sectarian Vaishnavism in the Rathor domain as well as the crystallization of a self-conscious Hindu community. This helped to elevate the status of groups—particularly merchants—that were seeking to cordon off an exclusive Hindu realm of prestige and privilege. Vaishnavism, from the outset, enshrined nonharm (*ahimsā*) in general and vegetarianism in particular as a core value, adherence to which was essential for its followers. Jainism, widely influential among mercantile groups since the medieval period, too held an ethic of nonharm at its core and demanded adherence to a vegetarian diet. The norms enshrined by the sect of which Maharaja Vijai Singh was a part aligned with the ethical values held dear by the Vaishnav-Jain officers, along with brahmans, who manned the Rathor administration. In the same decades that they issued commands decreeing the Hindu to be all who were not leatherworkers, sweepers, landless vagrants, and Muslims, in which they facilitated the separation in everyday life of “high” and Hindu from “low” and Muslim, and in which they worked to

discipline their own bodies into a more austere way of life, these merchant and brahman officers participated in a campaign to criminalize injury to animals.

By arrogating for themselves the authority to speak for the voiceless, the merchant-dominated Rathor administration and its merchant-brahman subjects sought to accumulate the moral capital they needed to tighten their grip on power. While some rajput lineages, particularly the more cosmopolitan and elite ones exposed to the world of Mughal *bhakti*, had also joined the vegetarian and Vaishnav fold, other rajputs remained immersed in Shakta-Shaiva and meat-eating practices. This caused conflict, as I will show. Further, for the merchant and brahman elites of the kingdom, the sustained campaign to stigmatize and criminalize meat eating helped to naturalize the correlation between social status and diet, making vegetarianism a hallmark of elite caste status and pushing meat eating firmly into the domain of the “Untouchable.”

LAYING DOWN THE LAW

In decrees dispatched to the administrative headquarters of each district, the Rathor administration exhorted its officials to ensure that arrangements to eradicate violence against sentient beings (*jīv haṃsyā*) were made in each town and village within their jurisdiction.¹ An early articulation of this policy was in a stray order issued to the governor of Phalodhi district. It approvingly noted, “Animals and other creatures (*jīv jīnāvar*) are never killed in the villages of the Bishnois and they never cut the *kheḍā*² and other trees. Write to the *paṭṭā* holders in the villages that they should not kill animals. It is the order of Śrī Hajūr.”³

This effort picked up momentum by the late 1770s. The king and his administrators in Jodhpur imposed a total ban on the killing of animals across Marwar, forbidding the slaughter of animals both for sport and for food. These injunctions were often issued as kingdom-wide pronouncements, such as the ones authorized in 1781 by Pancholi Nandram and in 1791 by the *divān*, mahajan Bhandari Bhavani-das, and in 1803 by the *divān* at that time, mahajan Bhandari Gangaram. The broad injunction to state officers to prohibit violence against animals was accompanied in these kingdom-wide orders by more specific commands, such as the one in figure 6, that brought within the ambit of *jīv haṃsyā* forms of violence against animals that may otherwise go unnoticed. Toward this end, official decrees mandated the use of a sieve to strain water as it was drawn from water tanks and ponds, in order to save the lives of hapless creatures that might otherwise die by drifting into a water vessel.⁴ Royal officers were directed to ensure that a sieve was placed for public use at all the major public sources of water supply and to ensure that no one defied the royal order while potting water.⁵ If a creature did make its way into a pot, it was to be released back into the water.⁶

The prohibition of *jīv haṃsyā* extended also to a ban on the castration of bulls (*baladh khasī karnā*). In early modern Marwar as in other agrarian societies since ancient times, bulls were castrated in order to render their bodies and

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FIGURE 6. JSPB 23, VS 1836/1779 CE, f 355b–356a: Laws to protect nonhuman lives. Image courtesy of the Rajasthan State Archives, Bikaner (RSAB). Do not reuse or reproduce without permission from the RSAB.

temperaments more suitable for work. From the late 1770s onward, Rathor administrators outlawed the castration of bulls, an act that rendered them incapable of reproduction, on the grounds that it was a form of violence against living beings.⁷ The Rathor state strove to protect the lives of winged insects that were susceptible to dying by accidentally flying into the flames of lamps.⁸ It instructed the officers across the towns in Marwar to ensure that when people lit oil lamps at night, they covered them with shades.⁹ The gathering of fresh cow dung into dung cakes to use as fuel was a common practice. Royal orders declared that because tiny insects burrowed in the dung in the rainy season, the rolling of dung cakes during the *chaumāsā* (the four months of the rainy season) was now prohibited in order to save their lives.¹⁰

The Rathor state's effort to protect the fauna in its domain went so far as to prohibit even the killing of parasites, pests, and venomous creatures. Royal decrees noted that the more ignorant of their subjects tended to deal with lice and spider infestations by eliminating the pests through exposure to high heat or water. This was no longer acceptable.¹¹ A crop-eating caterpillar (the tiger moth caterpillar or *kātrā*), known to attack the monsoon (*kharīf*) crop, and the Bengal monitor lizard (*goydā* or *goyrā* in Rajasthan) were among the other creatures that were blessed with the crown's explicit protection.¹² Jodhpur administrators also forbade the killing of poisonous creatures such as scorpions, snakes, and spiders (*mākaḍ*), even in self-defense.¹³

Many of these injunctions, especially those concerned with the well-being of invisible insects and microbes, echo not just a Vaishnav concern with nonharm but also a recognizably Jain ethos. In comparison with other parts of South Asia, western India, including Marwar, had by the end of the first millennium CE become home to a relatively large Jain population. This Jain population consisted overwhelmingly, if not exclusively, of merchants. The merchants of western India were largely either Vaishnav or Jain, and by the eighteenth century, men from these two communities dominated regional and subcontinental fiscal networks as well as the Rathor administration.¹⁴ Across the Vaishnav-Jain divide was a shared preoccupation with nonharm, an imperative placed not only upon monks and priests but also upon lay practitioners of both creeds. Whether it was Krishna or a *tīrthaṅkar*¹⁵ before whom they bowed, the merchants of western India by the eighteenth century were united by the distinctive cultivation of an ethico-moral stance that valued nonharm, chastity, and personal austerity combined with generous religious gifting.¹⁶ Many Jains also worshipped other brahmanical divinities such as Hanuman, Shakti, and Shiva as Bhairav.¹⁷ Jains celebrated the festival of Diwali, in late October, just like Vaishnavs and other brahmanical sects, although they linked it to the final spiritual liberation of the *tīrthaṅkar* Mahavir. Like Hindus, Jains in western India considered Diwali as the beginning of the new year for ritual and commercial purposes and inaugurated new account books after praying to the goddess of wealth, Lakshmi.

Further, the Vaishnav-Jain boundary, particularly that between Vallabhite Vaishnavs and Jains, was a fluid one, at least among eighteenth-century merchant groups. Mercantile castes, such as the *bhaṇḍārīs* who played such a prominent role in administration, could consist of both Vaishnav and Jain members.¹⁸ Marriages occurred across the line and the two groups collaborated in professional and civic endeavors to further their common economic interest.¹⁹ People too could move across this boundary, as indicated by the early nineteenth-century example of the Marwari Jagat Seth family in Bengal turning Vaishnav, from the Jains they had earlier been, without having to perform any ritual or formal conversion.²⁰ From the perspective of law and civic participation, the caste category “mahajan” as used from the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries in Marwar encompassed both Vaishnav and Jain merchants and moneylenders.²¹ Scholars have noted the dwindling of Jain mendicant orders in Rajasthan by the mid-nineteenth century, suggesting that the process may have begun in prior decades. It is possible that the Vallabh Sect won over many Shvetambar Jains, causing a shrinkage in the patronage available to support mendicant orders as well as reduced interest in taking initiation into them. Certainly, the Osvāl caste, despite its Jain origins, is noted to have included Vaishnavs in its ranks in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Theologically, as well, the two realms overlapped, with Vaishnavs incorporating the first Jain *tīrthaṅkar* Rishabh as a minor avatar of Vishnu and the Jains absorbing Krishna by claiming the *tīrthaṅkar* Neminath to be his cousin.²² By this I do not mean to completely collapse Jainism and Vaishnavism together; Jain thinkers maintained opposition to brahmanical thought and practice through the early modern period.²³ From its inception, Jainism was marked by a rejection of the Vedas and of the authority of brahmins. In that sense, it attacked the very foundations of brahmanism. Jain polemicists criticized the Hindu god Shiva and rejected the mythological accounts of the medieval *Purāṇas*. Medieval Jain texts regarded the worship of Hindu deities as inconsistent with the Jain path.²⁴ Given the tremendous variation in the social and political contexts in which Jains wrote and practiced in two millennia since the emergence of Jainism, considerable variation can be found in their attitudes toward brahmanism.²⁵ Jain writers were not, for instance, as dismissive of Vishnu as they were of Shiva, even according the former with a degree of respect.²⁶

Yet, in practice and in social constitution, Jainism and Vaishnavism overlapped, particularly the Vallabh Sect.²⁷ The proximity between the two groups by the eighteenth century is indicated by the insistence of some Jains in early British censuses of India to report themselves as “Hindu,” leading the census-takers to record them as “Jain-Hindus.”²⁸ Ethnographic studies have pointed to a persisting ambiguity among present-day Jains toward Hindu identity, with some claiming it and others resolutely rejecting it. Still, Jains today worship in Hindu temples and take part in Hindu festivals.²⁹

Scholarship on premodern Jainism has tended to remain focused on the enormous intellectual output of Jains, spanning not just issues of debate among Jains regarding theology and orthopraxy but also areas such as philosophy, aesthetics, literature, and the sciences.³⁰ At the same time, scholarship on Jains in the world makes clear that they forged intimate ties with Muslim kings, participated in lively court, literary, artistic, historiographical, and intellectual cultures in a range of languages, thrived as scribes, accountants, and traders, and adapted in response to the historical changes, even reformulating aspects of their own tradition.³¹

NONHARM AND VEGETARIANISM IN HISTORY

While the extent to which the Rathor state went to impose its ban on animal slaughter is unprecedented in South Asian history, the complicated and often contradictory roots of this development run deep. The Vedas, among the earliest extant texts composed in South Asia and held in brahmanical religious practice as revealed words whose authority cannot be questioned, contain numerous references to the consumption of meat and to animal slaughter for ritual sacrifice. The horse, the sheep, the goat, and even the cow were among the sacrificial offerings to the gods that the Vedas permitted and the consumption of whose meat they condoned. Somewhere in the middle of the first millennium BCE, due to profound changes in social, economic, and political life, emerged new religious ethos that emphasized asceticism. This gave rise to such new religious orders as Buddhism and Jainism, and these new orders in turn may have stimulated a turn in brahmanical practice toward an embrace of *ahimsā* or nonharm.³²

Henk Bodewitz has argued that it is the rise of asceticism as a social and religious practice in the centuries immediately preceding the Common Era to which the origins of the emphasis on nonharm, sometimes also discussed as nonviolence, can be traced.³³ The growing tendency toward asceticism, crystallized especially in Jain and Buddhist practice, challenged brahmanism on a number of counts, prominent among which were the ritual preeminence of the brahman and the violence that the brahmanical ritual performance of animal sacrifice entailed.

Scholars such as Ludwig Alsdorf, David Seyfort Ruegg, and Paul Dundas have argued that an adherence to nonharm need not and did not necessarily equal vegetarianism. For instance, in Jainism, the scope of the potential for violence is understood as so vast, given its concern even for the lives of microbes and insects, that selectively avoiding the consumption of meat while continuing to cause injury or death to other beings would not go far enough in achieving a full adherence to nonharm. Historically, it is only a few centuries after their emergence and their insistence upon nonharm that Jain and Buddhist texts began to prescribe a vegetarian diet. Gautam Buddha is said to have eaten meat.³⁴ Whether Mahavir ate meat or not has been debated.³⁵ In both cases, however, the two figures are said to have adhered to the principle of making sure that the animal was not killed for them or

before their eyes. While for Jains an explanation is yet to be offered, for Buddhists, Ruegg attributes the move to the rise of a new philosophical approach around the second century BCE that held all sentient beings as holders of the potential to attain enlightenment. To kill or harm a being with such spiritual potential would then be a sin.³⁶ In brahmanical thought as well, suggests Lance Nelson, two principles aided a growing tendency toward compassion and empathy for nonhuman animals. These were the idea that all beings, human or nonhuman, had qualitatively identical spiritual selves (*ātman*) as well as the belief in rebirth, entailing the possibility that an animal could contain the spirit of a deceased human, including one's own kin.³⁷

Rising to the challenge of, or perhaps influenced by, the increasing popularity of Buddhism, Jainism, and renunciant religiosity more generally, brahmanical texts also began to express ambiguity toward animal slaughter and meat eating in the last centuries before the Common Era. Often, the same text would condemn meat eating and animal sacrifice in some verses but condone them in others, as in the *Manusmṛiti* circa 100 BCE.³⁸ The epic *Mahābhārata* contains similar tensions but also includes some of the earliest articulations of the connections among nonharm, vegetarianism, and the growth of Vishnu worship.³⁹ The condemnation of animal sacrifice and meat eating always stood in a relationship of tension within the brahmanical corpus, since a complete rejection of these practices meant a rejection of the Vedas that prescribed them. Edwin Bryant shows that in the course of the first millennium CE, brahman scholars found ways to reconcile the increasingly uncompromising textual insistence upon vegetarianism and nonharm with Vedic prescriptions of ritual animal slaughter and meat eating.⁴⁰

By the end of the first millennium CE, Vaishnav texts such as the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* unequivocally demanded an adherence to nonharm and vegetarianism.⁴¹ Histories of vegetarianism in South Asia tend to stop at this point. Studies of Vaishnavism, including those of early modern Krishna-centered devotional groups, recognize the centrality of nonharm and of vegetarianism to it but do not offer a historical account of how this came to be. That said, it is important to note that in premodern South Asian thought, the emphasis upon nonharm could be more focused on the relationship between human and nonhuman beings and not as much on violence between humans.⁴² In her study of the third-century BCE emperor Ashoka, for instance, Upinder Singh has noted that his attitude of nonharm, particularly toward animals, did not extend to the people who lived in the forests.⁴³

While Buddhism had ceased by the end of the first millennium CE to be influential in most of South Asia, Jainism too found its hold waning despite attracting followers in prior centuries in Odisha, Mathura, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu. By the twelfth century, Jainism retained a following in large part only among mercantile groups and was largely confined to western India. Even though it began as an ascetic movement, by the thirteenth century a large corpus of Jain literature laid out the duties and obligations of the layperson. Foremost among these was the

injunction to try as hard as possible to avoid injury to any life form. This literature proscribed certain occupations that necessarily entailed the performance of violence upon living beings or caused them distress, such as animal husbandry and farming. This restriction, in turn, further helped concentrate Jains in the realm of mercantile activity.

In Marwar, and in western India more broadly, Jainism had come to enjoy by the eighth century CE a stable following among merchant communities. The town of Osian, near Jodhpur, emerged around the eighth century as the locus of an active and prosperous community of the region's Jain merchants.⁴⁴ The origin myth of the Jain community in Osian asserted that both the local deity, Sachiya Mata, a goddess requiring blood sacrifice, as well as a population of local rajputs converted to Jainism. Both the deity and the erstwhile warriors embraced the Jain ethic of nonharm, resulting in a cessation of ritual animal slaughter for this goddess. The existence of a stable and lively base of followers in the region meant that Marwar gave rise to major figures in Jain history. Among these was Jinachandrasuri II, the fourth and last of the *Dādāgurus*, a lineage of miracle-working, reformist ascetics who have since themselves become recipients of veneration in the Khartar Gachchh mendicant order of the Shvetambar (White-Clad) Jains.⁴⁵ In the eighteenth century, the charismatic Jain reformer and founder of the Terapanth sect among the Shvetambar Jains, Acharya Bhikshu (1726–1803), made Marwar the center of his preaching activity, crisscrossing the region for almost half a century as he amassed followers.⁴⁶ Already by the early modern period, sites in Marwar—the village of Osian with its Sachchiya Mata and Mahavir Temples and the town of Bhinmal (earlier known as Shrimal)—were claimed by many diasporic Jain lineages across north India as the place of their origin.⁴⁷ As I showed in the first chapter, from around the early sixteenth century, men of mercantile castes, including Jains, rose to the highest positions in the Rathor government in Marwar, whittling away, in concert with successive Rajput kings, the political authority of rajput chiefs.⁴⁸ In both a worldly and ritual way, Marwar and developments in it were significant to the history of Jains.

These histories of nonharm and vegetarianism provide a sense of the evolution over time of these values as ideas but do not provide a sense of how and to what extent they were practiced. In particular, studies of shifting textual positions on nonharm and vegetarianism, illustrative as they may be about the intellectual, philosophical, and religious history of these ideas, do not leave us with much of a picture of how it is that their practice became widespread and even normalized. Further, as normative prescriptions, we are left with little sense of whether temporal or ritual authorities enforced an adherence to these values.

Based on the current state of our knowledge it appears that through most of South Asia's past, vegetarianism remained largely limited to textual prescriptions followed by clusters of brahman and Jain communities scattered across the Indian subcontinent. There are a couple of well-known instances of kings embracing

religious or ethical codes demanding nonharm or vegetarianism, but none of these kings imposed their beliefs as law upon their subjects. The third century BCE emperor Ashoka, a Buddhist, embraced an ethic of nonharm (*avihiṃsā* or *anālambhā*) to which animals were central.⁴⁹ As emperor, Ashoka saw it as his duty to help his subjects do good, attain merit, and progress in their quest for liberation from the cycle of rebirth. He placed rock or pillar edicts at busy crossroads and in the frontier regions of his vast territories, spanning a large swath of the Indian subcontinent. In these edicts, he exhorted his subjects to give up animal slaughter and meat eating but never imposed the policy upon them.

In one of the edicts, recently understood as representing an accommodation to the impossibility of eradicating all violence toward animals, Ashoka sought to at least regulate and reduce the amount of animal slaughter in his domain. At most, he tried to impose vegetarianism on his royal kitchen, but when met with resistance, he was willing to allow some animal slaughter there. Apart from Ashoka's own giving up of hunting and his efforts to adhere to a vegetarian diet, his efforts to protect animal life are thought to have had little direct effect on curbing animal slaughter.⁵⁰

In the early modern period, kings, including Mughal emperors Akbar and Jahangir, embraced vegetarianism to a certain degree in their own personal lives. Akbar, at different points, gave up meat for a day of the week or for a few months at a stretch, aiming to eventually achieve total vegetarianism. He never gave up the hunt, though, and did not succeed in becoming fully vegetarian.⁵¹ Akbar encouraged his nobles too to strive toward a vegetarian diet and, according to court historian Abu'l Fazl, he convinced some of them. Akbar's son and successor Jahangir too gave up meat for a period of four years, and even when he resumed meat eating, would eat only vegetarian food on certain days. He was less successful than Akbar in remaining committed to vegetarianism.⁵²

Jain sources take credit for Akbar's interest in vegetarianism, attributing it to the influence of Hiravijaya Suri and Jinachandra Suri II, whom Akbar summoned to his court for a discussion on questions of religion in 1587 and 1591 respectively.⁵³ Mughal sources attribute it to a mystical vision that Akbar had while hunting in 1578, leading him to release all the animals in the hunting ring (*qamargāh*) before him and to become vegetarian.⁵⁴ It is perhaps not a coincidence that Akbar's sympathy for vegetarianism emerged in the very period in which he and his leading nobles were extending generous patronage to the nascent Krishnaite sects in Brindavan. The Mughal-Vaishnav compact, a "Mughal Bhakti" as Jack Hawley calls it, solidified in these very decades. It was perhaps then the influence of Vaishnav nobles, of Vaishnav and Jain financier-bureaucrats, and of the invigorating rise of a new and public form of Krishnaite devotion so closely associated with Mughal authority that pushed Akbar toward vegetarianism. According to Jain sources, Akbar and his son and successor, Jahangir, outlawed animal slaughter during the Jain holy days of *pariyūṣaṇ* that lasted from eight to twelve days in a lunar calendar

year.⁵⁵ Still, Akbar did not go so far as to impose vegetarianism on anyone, let alone impose it as a law upon all of his subjects. This is where the case of eighteenth-century Marwar, while demonstrating overlaps and interconnections with wider phenomena in South Asia, remains unique.

SPEAKING FOR THE VOICELESS

The prohibition of violence against living beings and the more extreme interpretations of this law, discussed at the beginning of this chapter, were part of a larger legislative drive by the Rathor state to bring its body politic in line with its ethical beliefs. The declarations against animal slaughter oftentimes also contained rules directed toward other ethical goals of the state. Directives that were listed alongside orders to prevent injury to animals include instructions reflecting concern for the welfare of those infirm with age, placing the onus of their care upon their sons. In such decrees, such as ones issued in 1779, 1782, 1787, and 1797, various officers of the Rathor state and perhaps also the Maharaja himself ordered its district magistracies to ensure that no subject neglected his duty to look after, feed, and clothe his parents.⁵⁶ It also ordered its subjects to look after their mentally ill kinsfolk.⁵⁷ The state took on the expense of feeding the blind, disabled, and mentally infirm who wandered through Nagaur and Merta towns.⁵⁸ The crown observed that greed induced brahmans and mahajans to marry their young daughters to old men (*virāmaṇ mahājan vagairai rupiyā rai lālach budhā nū beṭi paraṇāvai hai*).⁵⁹ Disapproving of this practice, the crown commanded these subjects to refrain from it and set the age of fifty as the oldest a man could be at the time of engagement.⁶⁰

Noting the incidence of female infanticide in its dominions, the crown outlawed this practice among its subjects,⁶¹ although when read against the one hundred and ninety-odd orders pertaining to violence against nonhumans or *jīv haṁsyā*, the issuing of only three orders prohibiting female infanticide is revealing—saving animal lives was a much higher priority than saving female infants. Veering back to the welfare of its nonhuman subjects, the state ordered the punishment of anyone who failed to feed and take care of aging cattle and directed the local administrations of Nagaur and Merta towns to throw half a *man* (about twenty kilograms) of coarse *roṭis* (bread) daily to stray dogs and five extra *sers* (almost five kilograms) of seed to pigeons.⁶² It discouraged the chopping down of shade-giving trees.⁶³ Toward the sustenance of those whom it thought needed a helping hand, the crown ordered the daily scattering of grain for birds and ants as well as the distribution of food to mendicants and holy men, singling out members of the Vallabhite order (here, *viṭhalām*) as beneficiaries of its largesse.⁶⁴ Of all these constituencies, it was animals who were the beneficiaries of the most zealous protection by the crown. The proclamations prohibiting female infanticide and the marriage of young girls to old men did not generate the mass of judicial and punitive activity that the stipulations about animal slaughter did.

Read in the context of the other laws with which they were laid down, the anti-animal slaughter rulings of the Rathor crown reflect the crown's adoption of the posture of a guardian of the "defenseless"—the elderly, women, animals, mendicants. For the Vaishnav Maharaja Vijai Singh and his largely merchant administrators, this quest to defend the defenseless achieved two goals. First, it idealized the ethical perspective and practices of the religious communities of which they were part—Vaishnav and Jain orders that held noninjury as an inviolable code. The state imposed as law upon all, and without any effort to dress as custom or precedent, merchants' particular caste and sectarian code of adherence to nonharm. Through this elevation to universal law, the effort to claim nonharm as a social ideal and a righteous path gained momentum. Second, as defenders of the defenseless and spokespersons for the voiceless, Vijai Singh, his merchant bureaucracy, and their merchant and brahman social allies earned moral capital. Adopting the role of virtuous protectors of the nonhuman subjects of the Rathor state provided the merchants in particular with the moral capital needed to justify their move from middling to the highest echelons of the region's social order. This moral capital also cut against the ethical stain of amassing wealth through the levying of interest and pushed against the shadows cast by getting rich literally at the expense of others. Central to the pursuit of a vegetarian body politic in Marwar was the overlap between mercantile communities and state power in early modern Marwar.

CASTE AND DIFFERENTIAL PUNISHMENTS

The Rathor state under the leadership of Vijai Singh, his successor Bhim Singh, and their merchant-administrators resolutely implemented its laws against animal slaughter. Yet, the handling of those accused of *jīv haṃsyā* was far from uniform. As also shown in the previous chapter's discussion of the punishments given to *thorīs*, *bāvrīs*, and Muslims, the state's response to the commission of violence against animals depended on the social location and the political clout of the person charged. In addition, district authorities, perhaps due to their ties of caste or acquaintance with the accused, would sometimes be more lax in their punishment of those accused of animal slaughter than the crown in Jodhpur. For instance, local authorities sentenced a brahman who was found guilty of slaying a large number of animals with the very light punishment of distributing fifteen rupees' worth of fodder among cows. When news of this reached the crown, officers Singhvi Motichand and Pancholi Fatehkaran commanded that the magistrate should reprimand those at the *kachaiḍī*, the governor's office, that let off the brahman with such a light fine and that it should impose a higher fine on the brahman.⁶⁵ At other times, crown officers too were willing to pardon offenders. Singhvi Tilokmal pardoned Charans Gordhan, Tejsi, and others of a village in Jaitaran for their involvement in a case of animal slaughter after they agreed to being roundly punished if they were ever involved in the crime again.⁶⁶ The state dropped allegations of

drinking and meat eating (*mand mās vaprāyo*) against Mahajans Dunga and Dipa, discussed earlier, when they argued that the allegations were false and that the magistrate's men stationed at their houses as punishment had become a source of humiliation for them and the rest of the local mahajan community (*īṇ jāb bābat mārāi ghare ādmī baiṭhāṇīyo chhai su īṇ bāt su mhā nai nyāt jāt mai chharā lāgai chhai*).⁶⁷

In another episode, local authorities arrested a brahman for killing a snake in self-defense but he was released, at the crown's command, without punishment.⁶⁸ When the crown heard that some yogic ascetics (*svāmīs*) near the town of Kotda were continuing to hunt on the revenue-free lands (*sāsan*) that had been granted to them, it ordered an immediate end to this violation of its laws without ordering a punishment.⁶⁹ Another *svāmī* was able to convince the crown to order the return of a camel of his that had been confiscated by the governor of Phalodhi for his alleged involvement in animal slaughter.⁷⁰

Mehra Godhu, of a merchant caste, was able to escape punishment for castrating a bull when he argued that the crown's newswriters had falsely implicated him due to the personal malice that they held toward him. In light of his service to the crown, and perhaps due to the doubt cast by his testimony upon the allegations against him, the crown dismissed the case against him.⁷¹ In similar cases, charges were dropped against members of high-ranking or well-to-do communities.⁷²

Often the crown's own rajput subordinates refused to comply with its orders outlawing animal slaughter. The state was appalled by the refusal of a *jāgīrdār* of a village in Nagaur to refrain from hunting despite the crown's directives outlawing it. It ordered the district's governor to explain this inaction by having each of his officers submit a separate report on the progress made toward getting the rajput to stop hunting.⁷³ Despite the crown's efforts to rectify the situation, it is worth noting that it did not explicitly order the *jāgīrdār*'s arrest. In a separate incident, upon discovering that a young rajput, the son of a Rathor, had killed a large number of animals in the countryside, the crown merely reiterated the strict and total application of its prohibition of animal slaughter.⁷⁴

Elsewhere, in Didwana, the governor Pancholi Fatehkaran's son arranged for a fawn to be captured and kept as a pet for his amusement (*tathā itlāk naves ra kāgad su samāchār śrī hajūr mālam huvā hākam beṭā ramāvaṇ nu hīrṇī ro bacho mangāyo tho*). After a while, he grew tired of the fawn and threw it out, leaving the fawn to the fate of being eaten by dogs (*pachhai kiṇī kayo tarai kāḍh diyo su hej liyo nahīm su mar gayo tathā kutai mārīyo*). When Asopa Surajmal, a brahman officer, got wind of this through a newswriter, he asked for a confirmation of whether this had indeed happened.⁷⁵ Yet, Asopa Surajmal did not punish the governor or his son for causing the fawn's death.

Faced with the disobedience of its own employees, the crown officers demanded explanations and, in some cases, commanded that they be punished. In Siwana district, the son of Sawaisingh Partapsinghot, a rajput landlord, continued to kill

animals, despite a public recognition of the crown's prohibition of the practice. In spite of being repeatedly upbraided, the young rajput could not give up his taste for meat. When the crown discovered that, on the occasion of another rajput's visit, he had recently killed a deer, it ordered the immediate suspension of the payment of his father's salary.⁷⁶ In another episode, Bhandari Dayaldas ordered from the capital the immediate fining of four *jāgirdārs* in Desuri whom the crown's newswriters observed to have hunted animals after the outlawing of animal slaughter.⁷⁷ Five years later, in 1782, the crown ordered the heavy fining of those of its *rajput* office-holders who were found to be capturing *raibārī* pastoralists' goats for slaughter.⁷⁸

A *rajput* in Siwana lost his title (*paṭṭā*) to a village and had to pay a fine of a hundred rupees for killing an animal.⁷⁹ Other rajputs, this time in Desuri district, were fired from their posts as an inspector of weights and as a watchman, respectively, for killing animals.⁸⁰ In other cases, the Rathor crown insisted on fining or upbraiding more seriously rajput landholders whom the governor's office had failed to punish at all for the crime of animal slaughter.⁸¹ The crown rued the lack of inquiry into a rajput's complicity in the killing of a deer in Maroth district, a crime that was discovered when the man charged with delivering the venison to the rajput's father was intercepted by the authorities.⁸² Clearly, locally influential and landed rajputs continued to kill animals and eat meat, in spite of the crown's ban. This even included those rajputs who held the state-issued office of *jāgirdār*.

It is possible that district officers simply hesitated to punish the powerful and the elite with whom they lived in daily proximity and with whom they had to work in order to effectively administer the territory. There are a number of cases, including some mentioned above, that show crown officers' frustration with district authorities' failure to prosecute rajput violators of the ban on animal slaughter. This is illustrated by a 1784 observation by the crown of the failure of local authorities to act on a complaint by the landlord of Bhakhri village in Parbatsar district. In it, the landlord (*bhomia*) of this village notified the governor when the village *jāgirdār*, also a rajput, killed a pregnant deer (*gyābhñī hirñī mārī*) but the local authorities failed to pursue the matter.⁸³ The *jāgirdār* of another village in the same district also slaughtered animals and then too, the case was dismissed without an inquiry.⁸⁴ In Siwana, when a dependent laborer (*hālī*) from a *jāgirdār*'s estate killed an animal, the *jāgirdār* evaded punishment by claiming that the servant had gone off to his natal village and having another rajput vouch for him.⁸⁵ The record is rife with other instances of the crown noting the local administration's failure to punish rajputs, including *jāgirdārs*, for killing animals.⁸⁶ At other times, rajputs were able to convince even the crown to drop cases against them or to reduce the punishments.⁸⁷

Other than fear of reprisals by locally powerful groups, local officials who bore the responsibility of implementing the ban on animal slaughter sometimes succumbed to inducements. In one case, a rajput managed to get away with a much lower fine than another rajput of equal standing by being willing to sell his winter

and monsoon crops at a discounted rate to all the district officials.⁸⁸ Fined for killing an animal, the *jāgīrdār* of a village in Koliya district paid a bribe of twenty-five rupees to local officers and, as a result, was let off with a lower payment of fifteen rupees.⁸⁹ Fines in Marwar were decided in proportion to the gravity of the crime and the financial standing of the guilty. By that measure, this was a small amount for a landed person.

On other occasions, the perpetrators of violence against animals were beyond the punitive reach of the state. A rajput in Sojhat raided a village, carrying away forty animals into the fastness and killing eleven.⁹⁰ With the rajput raider already beyond its reach, the crown could do no more than issue a directive for the recovery of the raided pastoral wealth and for the punishment of the thieves. From Daulatpura district, a rajput *jāgīrdār* reported a raid on his village in which, apart from the theft of residents' belongings, an animal had been killed and carried off. Despite its desire to catch the killer of the animal, the crown under the circumstances could do no more than order his capture.⁹¹

Toward people of agriculturist and other middling castes who got caught up in accusations of animal slaughter, too, the local authorities were frequently quite lax in imposing punishment. It was only when the crown got wind of this that strict punishment was ordered. The governor summoned Jats Sukha and Jalap and a few of their caste fellows for castrating bulls, but due to the intervention of the employees of the village *jāgīrdār* in their favor, they were let off without any punishment.⁹²

There were a few other cases from different districts in which *jāts* accused of *jīv haṁsyā* were not punished by district authorities, leading crown officers such as Pancholi Bansidhar to command immediate punishment of the guilty.⁹³ In 1784, district officers arrested but soon let off Mali Durga, of a peasant caste, who was involved in hitting a cow so hard that she aborted the fetus she was carrying.⁹⁴ In 1801, the governor of Desuri did not charge a *sirvī*, also of a peasant caste, despite his having killed a snake.⁹⁵ In all these cases, when crown officers discovered, through their newswriters, the laxity of the local authorities in prosecuting those guilty of hurting animals, they ordered the immediate punishment of all those who had committed the crime. The value of peasants as the agricultural backbone of the economy and the state's fisc likely prevented district administrators, whose offices were also involved in the collection of land revenue, from bearing down too hard on them for injuring animals. In any case, like the mahajans, peasant castes, particularly *jāts*, had come under the sway of Vaishnav sects and had largely embraced a vegetarian diet.⁹⁶ Most of the cases involving them entailed the injury of animals. In cases in which they were accused of taking animal lives, these appeared to be accidental killings.

In line with the value that the state ascribed to *jāts* and other peasant castes, occasionally, in response to petitioners pleading their innocence at the capital, crown officers would order district authorities to waive the fine. This is what happened in the case of Jat Godiya, whom a *ḍom* (drummer) named as being the one who had asked him to kill a goat. The drummer said that the *jāt* had

commissioned a new drum to celebrate the birth of a son and that he killed the goat in the *jāt's* barn. When local authorities got wind of this, they arrested and interrogated the drummer. Since four *jāt* families had divided up the slain goat's hide among them, local authorities in Merta had fined them a total of ninety-five rupees. At Godiya's persistent petitioning—he appeared in Jodhpur twice in a span of four months—Muhnot Savairam and Pancholi Parsadiram ruled on behalf of the crown that all the accused were innocent. The goat had died due to the barn's roof collapsing upon it.⁹⁷

The treatment of artisanal castes, those that fell under the ambit of “lowly” as chapter 2 showed, was entirely different. This underscores that the place of artisanal castes was distinct from and “lower” than professionally “peasant” castes such as *jāts* and *sirvīs*, even if artisans in the countryside may also have tilled land. The few members of artisanal and service castes who were caught on charges of animal slaughter were always punished. Unlike the many rajputs, brahmans, mahajans, and peasants who were accused of animal slaughter but managed to escape punishment through appeals, local ties, or bribes, the artisanal castes were largely unable to wiggle their way out of punishment. This was true even if the accusations against them stood on shaky ground. In 1782, a keeper of the crown's fodder supply, Charvadar Bakhtiya, falsely accused Nai (barber) Rodiya of having killed an animal as retaliation for the barber's having reported him to the crown for killing an animal. Before releasing him, a local official had the barber hung from a tree and flogged until his skin began to peel off. Meanwhile, the fodder keeper was arrested so that he could be forced to explain his lie, but he managed to sneak past the jail guards and escape from the fortress in which he was imprisoned.⁹⁸ Women of the salt-maker (*khārol*) caste, Ajbi and Khetudi of Pachpadra, cloth-printer Maniya of Nagaur, brewer Daliya of Parbatsar, carpenter Lavara of Maroth, oilpresser Kesariya of Sojhat, and a tailor from Sojhat were all fined in different orders for their involvement in injuring animals (*jīv haṁsyā*).⁹⁹

Jagris Jodhiya and Kusyala, of a caste of musicians, were arrested by the Pali magistrate for eating meat at the house of Patar (courtesan) Ramba. The meat had been brought by a rajput, Bhati Bhabhut Singh, of a village in Bikaner. There is no mention of how the rajput was treated, but the Patar's male caste fellows, the *jāgrī* men listed above, found themselves in jail. In response to a petition submitted by another *pātar*, Jiu, the crown's officers ordered the men's release on submitting an undertaking (*muchalkā*) to never eat meat again. Of these, the tailor was fined for selling a herd of goats to a butcher. Some of them petitioned the crown for a reduction of the fine since it was too heavy for them to pay. An exception to this pattern is a single case in which Bhandari Dayaldas and Mumhta Bhavanidas pardoned a group of oilpressers, textile-printers, and cotton-ginners for killing animals, identifying all of these as titleholders of land.¹⁰⁰

For those who belonged to leatherworking, sweeping, and “*achhep*” castes, an allegation of *jīv haṁsyā* translated automatically into punishment, typically fines but in some instances imprisonment or corporal punishment too. Sometimes,

the crown even concluded that the fine originally imposed was insufficient and that it be raised. Even as leatherwork continued due to the availability of skins from animals that died of natural causes or disease, it became fraught with risk due to the looming possibility, especially for skinners, of being accused of having killed the animal whose hide they were treating. The governor of Daulatpura district imprisoned for four months and slapped with a large fine of twenty-five rupees leatherworker Balai Natha and his sister's son, but he only fined and did not imprison the others accused of animal slaughter with them.¹⁰¹ In another case, the crown demanded a higher fine than the ten *annas* (less than a rupee) each that the governor's men had imposed on the leather-working *meghvāls* of Sojhat for eating meat.¹⁰² It also ordered the punishment of leather-working Balai Dala for hitting a pregnant buffalo so hard that she aborted her fetus.¹⁰³ Muhnot Savairam and Pancholi Parsadiram ordered that a *khaṭīk* (butcher) of Didwana be fined for *jīv haṃsyā*.¹⁰⁴

A *dhedh* (also a leather-working caste) from Maroth killed an animal and ran away for fear of the punishment. The rajput *jāgīrdār* of the village arrested the *dhedh's* son and handed him over to the district governor, using this service to the crown as grounds to demand the canceling of outstanding summons against his subordinates.¹⁰⁵ A *bhaṅgī*, unnamed, of Jodhpur district was arrested and beaten for his involvement in *jīv haṃsyā*.¹⁰⁶ District officers fined a *jhāḍūkas*, another name for the caste of *bhaṅgīs*, twelve rupees for killing an animal.¹⁰⁷ By way of comparison, seven rupees was the monthly salary of a clerk in the magistrate's office. A brahman accused Balai Hira of stabbing his cow, for which Pancholi Fatehkaran and Lakhotiya Suratram, a Maheshwari mahajan, ordered that the leatherworker be properly fined.¹⁰⁸ As the previous chapter showed, for other castes elsewhere deemed "achhep" or Untouchable—*thorīs*, *bāvrīs*, and Muslims—this effort to protect nonhuman lives resulted in banishments, dispossession, and criminalization. In the case of the "Untouchable" then, there were no instances of a reduction of punishment at the hands of the crown, unlike many examples of just such an action for merchants, brahmans, and rajputs.

The ban on animal slaughter was the one ethical pursuit that the Rathor state and its Vaishnav-Jain officers sought to enthusiastically impose upon all. Even as Vijai Singh and his Rathor administrator announced bans on brewing and drinking liquor, gambling, and abortion, those prohibitions were generally imposed most enthusiastically among members of the very castes that made up the leadership of the state. The ban on animal slaughter on the other hand was pursued, this chapter and the previous one have argued, with immense vigor with respect to all subjects. Vijai Singh was not the first king to embrace or prescribe vegetarianism in South Asian history, but he may have been the first one to use the coercive and surveillance powers of his state to ensure adherence to a code of animal protection. In this, his merchant officers were not just passive instruments for the channeling of the top-down ethical vision of the king. Their own ethical codes and

ideals emphasized the practice and preaching of nonharm beyond their own sect and caste. As indicated by merchant and brahman communities' policing, through intra-caste mechanisms as well as the state, of their own members' adherence to vegetarianism and nonharm, the merchant and brahman officers of the Rathor state were deeply invested in pursuit of these virtues. Their active role, as state officers, in the imposition of these values upon those whose caste codes did not prescribe vegetarianism or nonharm, can be read as an effort to align their larger ethical vision with the world around them. Rather than reading Vijai Singh's effort to save the lives of moths, snakes, and pests as a curious and anomalous chapter in South Asian history, the role of his merchant officers in the practice and implementation of these laws suggests that these developments were in fact related to a new ethical orientation of the Rathor state. This new ethical orientation in turn was the product of increasing cohesion between courtly rajputs, such as Maharaja Vijai Singh, and the world of merchants.