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Modernising Slaughterhouses

THOSE who have any knowledge of the appalling condition of the slaughterhouses in this country will be more than perplexed by the agitation against the proposal for setting up a modern slaughterhouse in Devnar near Bombay. The slaughterhouse in Bandra is so abominable that it is a standing disgrace for the City. The proposal of setting up a modern abattoir in Devnar is not only highly desirable, in fact, it is long overdue.

To suggest that killing of animals can be made more humane or that it can be less cruel and painful to the animals may be dismissed offhand as hypocritical nonsense by those who revolt at the thought of killing animals for food. But even staunch vegetarians who detest meat-eating should not fail to see that conditions of slaughterhouses can be vastly improved from the general public health and hygienic point of view, that the dirt and filth found in most slaughterhouses can be and should be eliminated and that there is a great deal of wastage of animal products of considerable economic value which can be prevented and by-products utilised to considerable advantage by modernising these establishments.

The attitude to these questions, however, is so strongly coloured by emotions that vegetarians choose to ignore that there are slaughterhouses, that "the vast majority of Indian people are not vegetarians, that the quality of meat which is sold in the market is far below the standard desirable and that a poor country, particularly one which is bent upon economic development, cannot afford the continued wastage of valuable animal products.

The agitation against the abattoir is not because the location chosen for it is considered unsuitable from social, aesthetic or public health point of view. No one says that the present slaughterhouse at Bandra is good enough, why bother to disturb it. The idea of an abattoir comes as a painful reminder to the people who agitate against it that there are slaughterhouses in the country, however much they may dislike it, but having accepted them and got inured to them, they do not mind the filth, the wastage and the cruelty to 'be animal which are being slaughtered today. What they are opposing is something which is so much better from all other points of view except one. That it will have a bigger capacity than the present slaughterhouse and therefore that it will mean the killing of more animals. That Bombay's population has vastly increased since the establishment of the present slaughterhouse in Bombay does not impress the agitators.

Though there is no basis for it, the agitation is also focused on the possibility of meat packing and export of packed meat from the abattoir. No such provision has actually been made in this project of setting up a modern slaughterhouse in Devnar.

The main opposition to the proposal has come from the trading community both in Bombay and Ahmedabad. Every trade organisation of any importance has protested and observed a one-day hartal to register the intensity of its feelings in the matter.

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