

19 July 2012

All Members of Indian Broadcasting Foundation (IBF):

Advisory on Depiction of Animals/Wildlife in Television Programmes

There is a growing availability of television content featuring animals, domestic and wild. Besides full channels devoted to animal-related programming, there are also several lifestyle channels that feature pet programmes. Most of the content on these channels is designed to educate the viewer about habitats, extinction threat, humane training and treatment. Such programming merits active encouragement to make people understand the benefits of preserving the environment, species and so on.

However, many of the general interest entertainment channels, in particular those airing reality shows, are exhibiting content that is extremely harmful to animals. Not only are animals hurt and killed before, during and post filming, in many cases animals, especially reptilian and wild mammalian, are depicted as cruel and fearful, when in fact they are placed in unnatural environments, and their natural behavior is repressed. Wrong impressions are thus created and unfortunate myths spread.

For instance, live insects are eaten to show courage in a manner that is distasteful and not conducive to health. A few channels have a reality show in which animals are killed week after week and animal parts such as sheep eyeballs and worms eaten in order to show bravery. What is also disturbing is that some channels rope in popular movie stars in serials in which animals are depicted, and project their being stalked; teased; tails being pulled at; food being pulled away, etc., i.e. veritable torture of animals as an 'act of bravery'.

Animals must not continue to be exploited for human entertainment especially when we live in an enlightened age that recognizes the value of all species in a universal ecosystem. Responsible television content can and must go a long way in depicting animals and the environment in a manner that is healthy for the planet.

Television channels are hereby advised not to produce, support the production of, purchase and broadcast content that is in any way harmful to the health and well being, as well as the depiction, of any animal or species. It is hereby affirmed, that all such content, IS NOT SUITABLE FOR PUBLIC VIEWING because it is at variance with:

Point 10 of Theme 6, contained in Chapter 3 of the IBF's Content Code & Certification Rules, 2011, which specifically stipulates that,

"The subject-matter treatment of any program under all categories shall not in any manner:

BROADCASTING CONTENT COMPLAINTS COUNCIL

10. Glamorize, promote, encourage such activities & sports, which encourage ecological imbalance and hurt animals.”

Moreover, unrestricted depiction of wild animals in serials may also encourage the possession of wildlife as trophies, and consequently, would be at variance with

Point 9 of Theme 1, contained in Chapter 3 of the IBF's Content Code & Certification Rules, 2011, which specifically stipulates that,

“While the overall theme, storyline and characterization may justify one or more specific scenes of crime or violence, the subject-matter treatment of such content under all categories shall not:

9. Encourage the possession of wildlife as trophies.”

Moreover, ‘depiction of cruelty to animals’, which is defined in Clause (j.) of Chapter 1 of the IBF's Content Code & Certification Rules, 2011, as being a depiction in which “a living animal is intentionally harmed, maimed, mutilated, tortured, wounded or killed or any other such conduct that is illegal under the animal-protection laws”; and depiction of animal ‘suffering’, which is defined in Clause (q.) of Chapter 1 of the IBF's Content Code & Certification Rules, 2011 as “physical or mental pain or distress or trauma caused to a human being or an animal by mistreatment”, may promote the willful infraction of animal protection laws, and the breach of the fundamental duty cast upon every citizen of India by Article 51 A (g) of the Constitution of India, to show compassion for living creatures.

It is therefore hereby required that the depiction of animals that is resorted to, may be such as does not denigrate or detract from the ideal of co-existence, and respect for all forms of life.

We also suggest that the code of conduct for advertising agencies and film production prescribed by the Animal Welfare Board of India pertaining to the use of performing animals is also applicable to broadcast media. These rules govern the manner in which performing animals should be treated during training, during the actual shoot, and during retirement. These rules also require special permissions to be obtained, and or furnished as evidence, before using animals, and apply to imported content and foreign locations as well.

A.P. Shah

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P.S.: The BCCC records its appreciation of Ms. Maneka Gandhi, MP, whose valuable suggestions helped in the preparation of this advisory.