

SECOND ASSESSMENT OF THE WELFARE OF HORSES USED FOR RIDES IN KOLKATA



**A STUDY BY PEOPLE FOR THE ETHICAL
TREATMENT OF ANIMALS (PETA) INDIA**

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I. CASE STUDIES OF ROAD ACCIDENT INJURIES AND OTHER CONDITIONS IN KOLKATA HORSES

Case Study 1: A Male Pony With Multiple Fractures on the Left Foreleg

On the night of 26 February 2022, a 7-year-old male pony who was wandering the streets foraging was hit by a vehicle, in an accident which caused multiple fractures on his left foreleg. Fractures were found on the humerus, radius, ulna, and metacarpal bones. Following the incident, a local volunteer transported the animal to the flyover in Hastings, where he was tethered without any veterinary treatment, such as pain-relieving drugs, for two days.

In a desperate attempt to kill the animal, the pony's handler ill-advisedly injected chlorhexidine digluconate (trade name Savlon) into the animal's trachea, which led to a lot of frothy orange discharge from his nostrils and caused him serious respiratory distress. A government veterinarian who was visiting the location to treat another horse with a fracture failed to notice this animal in pain and distress. Since the prospects of recovery were grave (death was imminent), PETA India immediately intervened to ensure that the horse was relieved from suffering by following humane and scientific euthanasia protocols.



Photo 1: This pony had multiple fractures on his left foreleg.



Photo 2: Orange frothy discharge was coming out of this pony's nostrils.

Legal Interpretation

- Section 11(1)(i) of The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (PCA) Act, 1960, states that abandoning an animal is a punishable offence.
- Section 13 of The PCA Act, 1960, allows a veterinarian to prescribe euthanasia when it is cruel to keep such an animal alive.

Veterinary Interpretation

Multiple fractures, especially in the upper part of a horse's leg, are difficult to treat and manage under field conditions. Immobilisation of the affected area is hard to achieve, as the animal will put weight on the affected leg and will experience tremendous pain and suffering before dying due to complications.

Euthanising an animal through the injection of chemical agents, such as solutions of saturated magnesium sulphate, chlorhexidine, and potassium chloride, without a preceding anaesthetic overdose can result in an extremely painful death, which contradicts the principles of euthanasia, whose purpose is to relieve suffering.

Case Study 2: A Female Horse With a Fracture on the Left Foreleg

On 18 February 2022, at around 8 pm, after being used for a wedding ceremony, a mare met with a road accident that caused severe lameness in her left foreleg, likely due to an incomplete/hairline fracture. The mare was then walked nearly 5 kilometres from the site of the accident to her tethering spot under a flyover in Hastings. The owner forced the animal to work again for the next three days, despite her severe pain and lameness, which led to the complete fracture of the affected bone, the left metacarpal. Though the owner stopped using the mare for work thereafter, he failed to provide her with any emergency veterinary treatment until PETA India and CAPE Foundation learned about the case on the evening of 25 February and contacted senior officials at the Animal Resource Development (ARD) Department. The ARD Department sent a government veterinarian on 26 February to examine and treat the injured animal. The veterinarian put a plaster cast on the affected leg and created a cradle to restrict movement and also probably for support. The mare was not provided with any treatment or pain relief until 26 February. The police registered a first information report (FIR) based on PETA India and CAPE Foundation's complaint but failed to seize the animal. The whereabouts of this animal remains unknown.



Photo 3: This horse has a left metacarpal bone fracture.



Photo 4: This horse has an incorrectly fitted plaster-of-paris cast, and her movement is restricted by a cradle.



Fig. 3. A Robert Jones bandage with caudal and lateral splints is used to stabilize level 2 fractures in the forelimb.

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Photo 5: This image shows an ideal Robert Jones bandage for the effective immobilisation of a fracture area. It incorporates one joint above and one joint below the fractured bone and includes thick uniform cotton padding and lateral and caudal padded splints.

Legal Interpretation

- Forcing a severely lame horse to walk nearly 5 kilometres and using the injured animal again for work for three more days, aggravating the injury and causing unnecessary pain and suffering, is apparently a punishable offence under Section 3 and 11(1)(a) of the PCA Act, 1960.
- Forcing a severely lame and unfit horse to work is apparently a punishable offence under Section 11(1)(b) of The PCA Act, 1960.
- Using an animal to work late in the evening (after sunset) is against the spirit of Rule 12(1) of The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Transport of Animals on Foot) Rules, 2001.
- Forcing a severely injured horse to work, leading to further aggravation of injury and thereby maiming or rendering the said animal “useless” is apparently a punishable offence under Section 429 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), 1860.
- Failing to guard against any probable danger while using an animal is negligent conduct – whether it is done knowingly or not. Using animals in public places, especially on roads and at night when visibility is extremely poor, is dangerous for both humans and other animals. Such negligent conduct is apparently a punishable offence under Section 289 of the IPC.

Veterinary Interpretation

- The prognosis of the clinical condition is “poor” considering the field conditions. Unlike humans, who can be instructed to rest in bed or use crutches to put no weight on their leg, horses want to use their legs to bear their body weight, which often leads to complications, such as infections, and death. Even if the fractured ends of the bones fuse, there is often poor alignment, resulting in a deformed leg which compromises the animal’s quality of life and causes persistent pain.
- Current treatment for fracture immobilisation and pain management is grossly inadequate. Metacarpal bones have little soft tissue coverage, and if breach of the skin occurs due to external pressure, poor blood supply to the affected area, or the sharp edges of the fractured bone, it may lead to subsequent infection and pus formation.

Case Study 3: A Horse Who Collapsed on the Road

On 5 February 2022, at around 5 pm, a commuter passing by Victoria Memorial witnessed and recorded the collapse of a bay horse, who was hitched to a carriage. The video shows the carriage blocking traffic, the passengers getting out of the carriage, and a group of people struggling to unfasten the tack from the horse's body before pushing and nudging him to get up. Based on PETA India and CAPE Foundation's complaint, the police registered an FIR but failed to seize the animal.



Photo 6: People struggle to unfasten the tack from the horse's body to help him get up.



Photo 7: The collapsed horse lies on the road.



Photo 8: The emaciated horse is finally made to get up.

Legal Interpretation

- Forcing an unfit animal to work is apparently a punishable offence as per Section 11(1)(b) of The PCA Act, 1960.
- Such negligent conduct with respect to an animal in a public place is apparently a punishable offence under Section 289 of the IPC, 1860.

Veterinary Interpretation

Horses can collapse from weakness and exhaustion, which is usually a result of poor nutrition and lack of water, combined with being forced to work.

Case Study 4: A Horse With Severe Wounds Caused by a Road Accident

On 16 February 2022, at around 7:30 pm, a visitor entering the ITC Royal Bengal hotel for a business meeting noticed a grey horse at the gate. The horse's handler informed him that the animal had recently met with a road accident, leading to serious injuries to both knees, the pastern of the left hind leg, and the stifle region. The deep-cut wound on the pastern region of the left hind leg had been hidden with lime. The handler also said that the animal had been standing at the hotel's gate since 2 pm without any food, water, or shade, having being hired by an event management company for a wedding ceremony. The horse could barely stand and kept shifting their weight onto their forelegs because of the severe pain and discomfort. Both the handler and a representative of the event management company insisted that the animal be used for the wedding ceremony since they were "still able to stand and do the job", and they refused to provide the horse with any veterinary treatment. The event management company's representative also claimed that it is common and acceptable in Kolkata to use such unfit horses for events. Based on PETA India and CAPE Foundation's complaint, the police registered an FIR but failed to seize the animal.



Photo 9: This horse has wounds on both knees.



Photo 10: The horse had deep-cut wounds on the left hind leg pastern region, hidden by lime.

Legal Interpretation

- Forcing an unfit animal to work is apparently a punishable offence as per Section 11(1)(b) of The PCA Act, 1960.
- The unnecessary pain and suffering cruelly inflicted on the animal are apparently punishable offences under Sections 3, 11(1)(a), and 11(1)(h) of The PCA Act, 1960.

Veterinary Interpretation

The major reasons for road accidents involving horses are malnutrition, weakness and ailments, and their being worked to exhaustion. Untreated wounds are often complicated by infection and maggot infestation. The crude method of treating or hiding wounds with chemicals such as lime causes tremendous pain and distress to animals and hinders the natural healing process.

Case Study 5: A Foal Suspected to Have Rabies Died Without Any Veterinary Intervention

It was reported that a male foal, approximately 6 months old, was showing neurological signs of rabies. He was showing aggression towards people and constantly trying to bite other horses tethered under the Hastings flyover. Restrained to a tree by a rope around his neck, he was found to be biting the tree as well. The morning after he was tied up, the animal was discovered dead, likely because of strangulation or the disease itself. Injuries suggestive of a dog bite were found on the horse's leg. Again, this case study proves that these animals often suffer and die without receiving any medical relief and that they are not provided with veterinary treatment – including for a serious zoonotic disease such as rabies, which has severe public health implications.



Photo 11: This foal suspected to be infected with rabies suffered and died without any veterinary intervention.



Photo 12: These are suspected dog bite marks on the foal's leg.

Legal Interpretation

- As per Section 11(1)(j) of The PCA Act, 1960, wilfully permitting an animal infected with a contagious or infectious disease to die in a public place is a punishable offence.
- Section 13 of The PCA Act, 1960, allows a veterinarian to prescribe euthanasia when it is cruel to keep such an animal alive.

Veterinary Interpretation

When animals are tethered in illegal stables or in public places, they are vulnerable to catching infectious diseases, such as rabies. When the prognosis is grave (death is imminent), it is important to euthanise a horse suspected to have rabies to prevent further suffering. Since horses cannot transmit rabies to other susceptible hosts, there is no perceived threat to humans or other animals from an infected horse.

II. ASSESSMENT OF BODY CONDITION

Out of the 20 horses assessed, who were found near Victoria Memorial and under the Hastings flyover, the majority was found to be severely emaciated and chronically malnourished. This indicates that the majority of Kolkata's horses have been starving for a long time and are routinely denied basic nutrition. The data is significantly similar to the findings of the first assessment conducted during July to August 2021.



Photo 13: This horse is malnourished and has signs of injury all over the body.



Photo 14: This horse tethered under the flyover is severely emaciated.



Photo 15: This horse tethered under the flyover is severely emaciated.



Photo 16: This horse tethered under the flyover is malnourished.



Photo 17: This horse near Victoria Memorial is severely emaciated.



Photo 18: This horse hitched to a carriage near Victoria Memorial is malnourished.



Photo 19: This horse near Victoria Memorial is severely emaciated.



Photo 20: This horse hitched to a carriage near Victoria Memorial is severely emaciated.



Photo 21: These malnourished horses are hitched to a carriage near Victoria Memorial.



Photo 22: This severely emaciated horse is being hitched to a carriage near the Maidan.

III. ASSESSMENT OF VETERINARY TREATMENT AND FARRIERY NEEDS



Photo 23: This injury near the oral commissure was caused by a prohibited spiked bit.



Photo 24: This horse has a hip injury from an accident.



Photo 25: This horse has a severe back wound.



Photo 26: This horse has a severe wound on the hip.



Photo 27: This horse has a severe deep wound on the right knee joint.



Photo 28: This horse has a “brushing” injury on the hind leg fetlock joint.



Photo 29: This horse has a wound on the breast/chest.



Photo 30: This horse has severe wounds on the inner thigh.



Photo 31: This horse has an untreated wound on the pastern.



Photo 32: This horse has untreated wounds on the pastern.



Photo 33: This horse has a “brushing” injury on the fetlock joint.



Photo 34: This horse has wounded knees.



Photo 35: This horse has a wound on the hock joint.



Photo 36: This horse has wounds on the loin and croup.



Photo 37: This horse has an untreated withers/back wound.



Photo 38: This horse has untreated buttock wounds.



Photo 39: This horse has a wound on the point of the hip.



Photo 40: This horse has a “brushing” injury on the foreleg fetlock joint.



Photo 41: This horse has untreated wounds on the withers and loin.



Photo 42: This horse has a "brushing" injury on the right hind leg fetlock joint.



Photo 43: This horse has a wound on the point of the hip.



Photo 44: This horse has an arm wound.



Photo 45: This horse has a “brushing” injury on the fetlock joint.



Photo 46: This horse has a pastern wound.



Photo 47: This horse has bursitis (capped elbow) with an infection in the left elbow.



Photo 48: This horse has a severe girth wound.



Photo 49: This horse has girth wounds.



Photo 50: This horse has a severe hoof wall injury.



Photo 51: This horse has a severe hoof wall injury.



Photo 52: This horse has a thrush condition (a degeneration of the frog with a secondary anaerobic bacterial infection).



Photo 53: This horse's hoof wall has serious cracks.



Photo 54: This horse's frog has a canker (chronic hypertrophy of the horn-producing tissues) condition.



Photo 55: This horse has an injured cornea.



Photo 56: This horse has unilateral blindness caused by cataracts.

Legal Interpretation

- Forcing an unfit animal, who is suffering from injuries or disease, to work is apparently a punishable offence as per Section 11(1)(b) of The PCA Act, 1960.
- Causing unnecessary pain and suffering to an animal by causing injuries and not providing them with necessary treatment, food, water, and shelter are apparently punishable offences under Sections 3, 11(1)(a), and 11(1)(h) of The PCA Act, 1960.
- The use of spiked bits is rampant in Kolkata, even though it's prohibited under Rule 8 of The Prevention of Cruelty to Draught and Pack Animals Rules, 1965.
- As per the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Licensing of Farriers) Rules, 1965, farriers trimming feet and shoeing horses must be licensed and must possess the necessary tools – these legal requirements are not met in Kolkata.

Veterinary Interpretation

1. **Saddle-related wounds:** Wounds on the breast/chest, girth, withers, back, loin, and buttocks are common in horses who are forced to work. The major causes are thin or very thin body condition, poor hydration, lack of protection from hot and humid weather conditions, heavy loads and other work, and poorly cleaned, maintained, or fitted saddles or those made of abrasive or synthetic materials.
2. **Brushing injuries:** Many horses in Kolkata have brushing injuries. These are found on the medial aspect of fetlock joints in the fore and hind legs. Brushing wounds are mainly caused by a gait abnormality involving overreaching of the legs on the opposite side, often due to poor farriery, debility and weakness, or dehydration and exhaustion. These wounds were often hidden by cloth, pieces of leather, or lime powder.
3. **Wounds on oral commissures:** Wounds on oral commissures are indicative of the use of spiked bits and the violent pulling and jerking of reins. Spiked bits are cruel devices that are often fitted into the mouths of horses used for weddings and rides to control them through pain. Spiked bits are often embedded more than 1 centimetre deep into their mouths, ripping their lips and tongues and causing them extreme pain, bloody wounds, immense psychological trauma, and lifelong damage.
4. **Eye injuries:** Eye injuries are common in horses forced to work in cities and are often caused by an irritant, inflammatory reaction to a foreign body, dust, flies, poorly fitting blinkers, or the application of unsuitable medicines. Because of the intense sensitivity of equine eyes, without the necessary veterinary treatment, the initial problem can quickly progress to scarring and blindness.
5. **Foot diseases:** Most of the horses examined had an abnormal hoof shape, either on the fore or hind legs, i.e. the heel-to-toe ratio was not 1:2. In many horses, the hoof horn quality was poor. The hooves were broken or damaged at the toe or heel, or there were cracks on the hoof wall. Many horses had diseased frogs indicated by a black and white, wet or dry discharge with a foul smell (thrush). Some horses were also suffering from canker, an infection that causes a chronic hypertrophy of the horn-producing tissues of the equine hoof or frog. In some horses, the frog was even missing. None of the animals were fitted with shoes appropriate for the size and shape of the hoof, and the shoes were badly fitted. Poor farriery practices, inadequate foot care by owners and handlers, and lack of appropriate and immediate veterinary treatment services are the major reasons for severe lameness among Kolkata horses.

IV. ANIMAL WASTE IN PUBLIC PLACES AND THE RELATED HEALTH RISK



Photo 57: Animal waste lies all over the road in front of Victoria Memorial.



Photo 58: Animal waste can be seen on the road in front of Victoria Memorial.



Photo 59: Animal waste can be seen on the road in front of Victoria Memorial.



Photo 60: Animal waste can be seen on the road in front of Victoria Memorial.



Photo 61: Animal waste can be seen on the pavement near Victoria Memorial.



Photo 62: Animal waste can be seen on the pavement near Victoria Memorial.

Legal Interpretation

- In the matter of Prabal Mukherjee v State of West Bengal & Ors. (W.P. 26045 (W) of 2012), Calcutta High Court, through its order dated 22 January 2013, directed that “measures be taken by the owners of each hackney carriage for removing dung excreted by the horses”. However, this direction is blatantly violated by horse owners.
- The schedule of fees and charges for solid waste management of Kolkata Municipal Corporation does not include horse faeces.

Veterinary Interpretation

Horse faeces on the road near Victoria Memorial accumulate throughout the day, leading to a strong foul odour in the area. In the absence of any mechanism to collect and dispose of the faeces, this animal waste could contaminate bodies of water meant for consumption by humans and other animals with pathogens such as *E coli*. Horse faeces also commonly contain tetanus pathogens.

V. CONCLUSION

1. Unfit horses used for rides and wedding ceremonies in apparent violation of The PCA Act, 1960, and the Rules framed under it are suffering from injury and lameness – and some endure painful deaths. No veterinary services are available for these animals – they are neither sought by owners nor provided by local veterinary service providers.
2. Since there is no system for the collection and disposal of horse faeces, in apparent contempt of the Hon'ble Calcutta High Court, there are huge risks to public health from the contamination of drinking water with harmful pathogens such as *E coli* and the threat of infectious diseases such as tetanus.
3. Allowing horse-drawn carriage rides to continue puts both horses and the public at risk.

VI. RECOMMENDATION

Horses used in Kolkata must be replaced with eco-friendly electric carriages.

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