

Two Extremely Rich Countries—Norway and Japan—Continue Horrible Cruelty to Whales

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When a whale is sighted, a gun is used to fire a harpoon with tipped grenade at it. As the weapon enters the body of the whale, the grenade explodes inside the body, creating a pool of blood all around.

The whale writhes in pain, but may not die immediately. It is attacked more. Still it may be alive when brought aboard the factory ship for butchering.

All this has been happening for many decades as whaling has been 'modernized' and 'advanced'. Norway, Japan Germany, Britain -expert whalers from these various 'developed' countries made their own contributions to more and more barbaric and cruel ways of using new technology for whaling —the grenade tipped harpoon (even patented ones), specially designed cannons, doubled barreled whale guns with a separate harpoon and bomb lance.

At present two of the richest countries are still engaged in big-time whaling—Japan and Norway. Norway alone kills about 500 whales a year. Iceland is hopefully on way to ending commercial whaling. However other smaller offenders still remain. The Danish autonomous territory of Faroe Islands organizes an annual 'festival' based on killing of whales in which hundreds of whales and dolphins are killed.

All this is still happening despite years of highly dedicated efforts by conservationists and all those who value life. If it was not for these efforts, the scale of the cruelty would have been much higher. At the height of the slaughter, about a century back, nearly 50,000 whales were being killed in a year. More of these were females, many of these pregnant. This is because pregnant whales move more slowly and tend to come closer to shores, hence becoming easy targets.

Whale hunting extended far and wide. Juro Oka, called the father of Japan's whaling,

gloated,

“The day will come when we shall hear in the morning that whales have been hunted in the Arctic and we shall hear in the evening that whales have been hunted in the Antarctic.”

Japanese whalers kept consolidating to gather big business clout, supported by their government. Only World War II reduced their hunting and killing, but this too only for a short while as the American General MacArthur encouraged and helped them to revive this so that the Americans and Europeans could also get some of the whale oil profits.

Earlier also the Japanese whalers had made their profits not just from whale meat but also more and more significantly from whale oil (sperm oil, train oil, melon oil etc. from various different species). Over a period more and more uses of the oil—obtained from whale blubber, bones and partly even flesh—were found ranging from soap to lighting, from lubricants to cosmetics, but what became more and more valuable in the run-up to the war was the use of whale oil to make nitroglycerin for explosives. Japan collected stocks and also sold to Germany.

In the post war years the shipping magnate Aristotle Onassis also made huge money from whaling by ignoring regulations, but when he got into trouble the Japanese were quick to buy his whaling business, so that his whaling vessel The Olympic Challenger now made its appearance as the Kyokuyo Maru II. The Japanese too had hardly any inhibitions about breaking conservation regulations. In 2002 the World Wildlife Fund for Research published an open letter by an international team of scientists which stated that Japan’s whaling research program had failed to meet minimum standards for credible science.

In fact to the extent that science has been used as a cover for whale hunting it can only be called the science of slaughter. To maintain profits whale meat continued to be promoted even there were reports of high levels of methyl mercury and other health risks. Criticism was often met with aggression. There was even a case of a flashbang grenade being thrown into a ship of Sea Shepherd Conservation Society by whaling interests. The International Convention on Whaling sought to check commercial whaling from 1986 onwards but whalers continued to exploit loopholes like allowing ‘research based hunting activities’! So all that the whale killers had to do was to get scientific papers written as a part of their killing sprees!!

The most obvious aspect of science being neglected by the whaling interests is that whales actually make a very important contribution to maintaining the balance of ocean life. When whales dive deep in the ocean and then come up, they bring with them important nutrients from the bottom to the surface. This circulation of nutrients helps to create conditions for the abundance of phytoplankton. In addition feces of whales also contribute to this. Phytoplankton in turn provide the basis for the flourishing of a vast diversity of smaller forms of ocean life. In addition these also absorb carbon while releasing oxygen.

Hence while abundance of phytoplankton has always been important for ocean life, in times of climate change this significance has further increased due to their role in absorbing carbon. In addition whales also store a lot of carbon within them. This remains within them when they are alive and when dying a natural death they sink to the bottom of the sea and this carbon remains within their bodies for a very, very long time.

Hence apart from being extremely cruel, killing of whales is very harmful for environment and ocean biodiversity. Killing of whales and all activities relating to hunting whales and processing them are harmful for environment in many diverse ways.

In any case whales face threats from ecological ruin and pollution of oceans, including chemical and plastic pollution. Hunting of whales adds greatly to these threats, particularly as more females and pregnant ones are killed.

Hunting of whales often leads to reduction of smaller fish catch for traditional fishers and their livelihood is therefore adversely affected. As a result several times conflicts have developed between traditional fishers and big whaling interests but big whaling interests have the power of money on their side.

Keeping in view all this, conservationists and all those who value animal life should raise a much stronger voice to stop hunting and killing of whales as already so many of them have been killed in recent decades.

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Featured image: A whale and a sub-adult being loaded aboard a factory ship, the Nisshin Maru. The sign above the slipway reads, "Legal research under the ICRW." Australia released this photo to challenge that claim. (Licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0 au)

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