



Original Article

Culture and Spirituality as Pathways for Promoting Animal Ethics: A Study of the Principles of Hinduism and Buddhism in Bengal

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Abstract: Amid ongoing debates on animal ethics, this study investigates whether the culturally and spiritually grounded values of Bengali traditions provide a more accessible and effective framework than modern abstract ethical theories such as Peter Singer's utilitarianism and Tom Regan's animal rights theory, particularly in the context of Bangladesh. While Western ethical theories provide intellectual scholarship and universal principles, their reliance on rational abstraction often renders them detached from the lived realities of culturally embedded societies. Conversely, some Bengali traditions, particularly in Hinduism and Buddhism, grounded in ahimsa (non-violence) and relational ethics, offer a pragmatic, emotionally resonant, and culturally integrated ethical paradigm that is more intuitive and applicable in daily life. To substantiate this hypothesis, a 40-day empirical study involving 17 participants was conducted. In Phase 1, participants were introduced to Western ethical theories and instructed to apply these principles in real-life contexts. In Phase 2, they engaged with the Bengali cultural and spiritual frameworks of Hinduism and Buddhism, including the ahimsa doctrine and other religious teachings emphasizing compassion toward animals. The findings revealed that nearly 80% of participants found cultural and spiritual frameworks to be more comprehensible and practically applicable than the abstract reasoning of Western theories. Furthermore, participants reported natural behavioral shifts toward avoiding harm to animals, attributing this change to a deeper emotional and moral connection made by spiritual teachings. Three core propositions emerge from the analysis. First, ahimsa functions as a pragmatic ethical middle ground, bridging the flexibility of utilitarianism with the moral absolutism of animal rights theory. Second, relational ethics in Bengali Hindu and Buddhist philosophy decenters anthropocentrism, proposing a worldview that emphasizes the interdependence of humans, animals, and the environment. Third, spirituality in Hinduism and Buddhism offers an intrinsically motivating, culturally embedded ethical framework that proves more sustainable and emotionally accessible than abstract philosophical reasoning. This paper argues that Bengali cultural and spiritual teachings of Hinduism and Buddhism present a more effective, enduring, and culturally congruent model for promoting animal ethics in Bangladesh, where moral frameworks such as ahimsa (non-violence) and relational ethics are genuinely intertwined with spiritual and cultural narratives.

Keywords: Animal ethics, culture, spirituality, indigenous, Hinduism, Buddhism, Bengali philosophy

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Introduction: Ethical concerns about how humans treat nonhuman animals (hereafter, “animals”) have sparked ongoing debates in both philosophical and cultural spheres. Western philosophical frameworks, particularly Peter Singer’s utilitarianism and Tom Regan’s animal rights theory, offer abstract principles to guide ethical behavior, yet they often struggle to resonate with communities where moral values are strongly embedded in cultural and spiritual traditions. This disconnect is especially visible in Bangladesh, where religious teachings and cultural narratives particularly in principles of Buddhism and Hinduism strongly shape human-animal relationships¹.

In Bengali traditions, especially Hinduism and Buddhism, animals are not seen merely as passive beings but as sacred and symbolic. Within Hinduism, many are revered as divine companions and vehicles (vahanas) of deities². Although not every species carries this role, the wider principle of ahimsa (non-violence) emphasizes respect and care for all living beings³. Thus, ethical concern extends beyond sacred animals to animal life more broadly. Cows, for instance, symbolize nourishment and motherhood²; monkeys are linked with Hanuman’s loyalty and strength¹; and the goddess Durga rides a lion or tiger, symbolizing protection². These associations move beyond symbolism into practice, with ahimsa guiding moral behavior through vegetarianism and kindness toward animals.

In Buddhism, ahimsa is also central, tied to the Eightfold Path and the cultivation of compassion. By recognizing all sentient beings as capable of suffering, Buddhist ethics call for non-harm and empathy, often expressed in vegetarianism and practices of loving-kindness³. Both traditions thus link spirituality with everyday ethical practice.

This paper asks whether such culturally embedded frameworks are more effective in promoting animal ethics than abstract models like utilitarianism or animal rights theory. By comparing how participants engaged with Western theories and with Bengali teachings, I argue that spiritual and cultural narratives especially ahimsa offer a more accessible and emotionally resonant approach to ethical behavior. Western theories provide universal principles that apply equally to all species but often remain detached from lived practice.

Bengali traditions may emphasize certain sacred animals, yet their underlying principles of compassion extend ethical concern more broadly. This study does not dismiss Western paradigms, but shows how culturally grounded frameworks, particularly Hindu and Buddhist teachings, can provide a more practical and sustainable path for promoting animal ethics in Bangladesh.

Methodology: This study includes two main parts: a theoretical section and an empirical one. In the first part, I discussed the key principles on ethics and animal welfare in Hinduism and Buddhism to build a general understanding of how these traditions view human–animal relationships. I then discussed two modern ethical frameworks; Peter Singer’s utilitarianism and Tom Regan’s animal rights theory to draw a comparison between Western abstract reasoning and culturally grounded values. This helped me develop and clarify my central hypothesis.

In the second part, I conducted an exploratory qualitative study to see how people respond to these ideas in practice. Participants took part in two sessions, conducted by me, designed to clarify the ethical frameworks, after which they were encouraged to reflect on and apply these ideas in their daily lives. Based on their report, a thematic analysis was used to identify how modern theories and cultural and spiritual teachings influence moral reasoning and behavior toward animals.

Overview of the Cultural and Spiritual Aspects of Animal Ethics

Hinduism: Animals as Sacred and Symbolic Entities: In Hinduism, one of the predominant religions in Bengal, animals hold spiritual and symbolic significance. Across various sects and traditions, animals are often seen as sacred beings and as vehicles (vahanas) for deities², reflecting their role as intermediaries between the divine and the earthly realms². This sacred association is most clearly seen in the cow, which symbolizes nurturance, abundance, and purity. The cow is linked to Lakshmi, the goddess of fertility and wealth, and Krishna, who is often seen as a divine cowherd¹. In Hindu rituals, cows are treated with deep reverence, and their products, particularly milk, are considered purifying substances used in religious ceremonies⁴. Killing cows is prohibited in many Hindu communities, and they are often allowed to roam freely in rural areas, reflecting their status as protectors of life and prosperity².

Beyond the cow, other animals hold symbolic and religious importance within Hindu cosmology. The elephant is pictured through Ganesha, the deity associated with wisdom, prosperity, and the removal of obstacles. Ganesha's elephantine form symbolizes intellect and power, and his worship reflects a belief in the animal's sacred capacity to clear spiritual and worldly hurdle². Similarly, monkeys are venerated through Hanuman, the monkey-god celebrated for his loyalty, strength, and devotion. Hanuman's role in the Ramayana, where he aids Rama in rescuing Sita, injects these virtues and makes him a figure of courage and unwavering faith³.

Snakes hold a unique place in Bengali Hinduism, where they are closely associated with Shiva and the snake goddess Manasa². Manasa is worshiped for protection against snakebites and to ensure agricultural fertility, showing the dual perception of snakes as both dangerous and sacred¹. Rituals dedicated to Manasa, especially in rural Bengal, underscore the belief that maintaining a respectful relationship with these animals safeguards the community from natural dangers². The tiger, while feared for its dangerous nature, also carries sacred significance, particularly in the worship of Durga. Durga, one of the most worshiped deities in Bengal, is often portrayed riding a lion or tiger, symbolizing her protective power². This imagery not only emphasizes Durga's strength but also elevates the tiger to a spiritual guardian, embodying the balance between danger and divine protection.

These sacred associations position animals as moral exemplars and spiritual symbols, each representing specific divine attributes. This belief system seeks reverence and protection for animals, with their interconnectedness with human and cosmic orders¹. Within Hindu society, animals are not only seen as part of the natural world but as manifestations of divine qualities, deserving both respect and ethical consideration⁴.

Buddhist Views on Animals and Compassion: In Buddhist philosophy, animals are recognized as sentient beings who, like humans, are trapped in samsara, the endless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth³. This understanding denotes compassion toward all living beings, as harming animals is believed to generate negative karma, which affects one's spiritual progress⁵. For this reason, many Buddhists adopt a vegetarian lifestyle, believing that consuming animal flesh perpetuates suffering and delays spiritual liberation. Buddhism teaches that all beings,

whether human or animal, share the same fundamental desire to be free from pain³. Therefore, ethical conduct includes practicing ahimsa (non-violence) toward animals as a moral responsibility⁵. This belief is especially strong in Mahayana Buddhism, where showing kindness to animals is considered an expression of bodhisattva compassion; a commitment to reducing the suffering of all beings³.

Islamic and Christian Views on Animals and Compassion: In Islam, animals are considered part of God's creation (*khalq Allah*) and deserve compassion, fairness, and mercy. The Qur'an (6:38) asserts: "All living beings roaming the earth and winged birds soaring in the sky are communities like yourselves" that teaches every creature is a community like you, emphasizing moral kinship between humans and animals. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) repeatedly condemned cruelty and urged kindness, warning that both punishment and reward await humans based on how they treat animals. Similarly, Christianity views humans as stewards of God's creation. The Bible (Proverbs 12:10) states, "The righteous care for the needs of their animals," while Genesis 1:26–28 links dominion with responsibility, not exploitation. It clearly expresses to show more care for animals. Together, these perspectives affirm that compassion toward animals is a moral duty shared across major world religions.

Moral and Ethical Sides: Both Hinduism and Buddhism in Bengali spiritual traditions place a profound emphasis on respecting and protecting animals. Animals are not seen as inferior or disposable but as spiritual companions intertwined with human existence¹. The cultural and religious teachings promote non-violence, compassion, and moral responsibility toward animals, shaping the ethical behaviors of those who follow these traditions³. This spiritual framework contrasts with the more abstract moral reasoning found in modern ethical theories, offering a relational and intuitive approach that ties moral duties directly to everyday cultural practices and spiritual beliefs⁵. In my view, these teachings do more than prescribe rules; they cultivate an everyday sense of moral responsibility and emotional connection with animals. They shape compassion through shared rituals and stories, making kindness toward animals feel natural and culturally meaningful rather than purely rational.

Animals in Bengali Culture and Rituals:

Animals play a significant role in indigenous Bengali rituals and festivals, symbolizing both spiritual power and the interconnectedness of human and animal life. In Bonbibi Puja (*Bonobibi, as believed as forest goddess in local belief, performed by Hindu and Muslim communities in the Sundarbans, which honors the forest goddess protecting both humans and animals, showing an ethic of coexistence*), seen in the Sundarbans region, animals like tigers and crocodiles are viewed as both threats and sacred beings. People worship Bonbibi to seek protection from these creatures and ensure their safety. Among indigenous groups like the Chakma and Garo traditions, animals like tigers and eagles symbolize strength and spiritual guardianship. During Govardhan Puja in Hinduism, cows are venerated with baths, garlands, and offerings, emphasizing their sacred status as life-sustaining beings deserving of respect and gratitude.

The Concept of ahimsa in Hinduism and Buddhism: The concept of ahimsa, meaning non-violence, is a central ethical principle in both Hinduism and Buddhism, shaping moral attitudes toward all living beings¹. It extends beyond physical harm to include non-violence in thought, speech, and action². This philosophy is rooted in the belief that all life forms are interconnected, and harming others, whether human or animal, creates negative karmic consequences for both the victim and the person committing the harm⁶. Although both traditions uphold non-violence, their interpretations differ based on their unique theological and philosophical frameworks³.

In Hinduism, ahimsa is regarded as a spiritual and moral ideal, closely linked to the pursuit of moksha, or liberation from the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth¹. This belief stems from the idea that all living beings possess an atman, an eternal soul, connecting them to the divine². Consequently, harming any creature violates dharma (moral duty) and disrupts spiritual progress⁴. This respect for life manifests in cultural practices like vegetarianism, commonly adopted as a concrete expression of the principle of ahimsa⁶. Abstaining from consuming animal flesh is not merely a dietary choice but a moral commitment to preserving life and minimizing harm. Everyday ethical practices such as kindness to animals, avoiding exploitation, and honoring the sanctity of life through religious rituals reflect this principle¹. The law of karma, a core tenet of

Hinduism, enforces ahimsa by asserting that every action, positive or negative, has spiritual consequences⁴. Acts of violence produce bad karma, leading to future suffering, while compassion generates good karma, facilitating spiritual growth. Foundational texts such as the Bhagavad Gita and the Upanishads emphasize ahimsa as a universal virtue, encouraging non-violence toward all sentient beings¹.

In Buddhism, ahimsa is fundamental to ethical conduct, especially within the Eightfold Path, under the principles of Right Action and Right Livelihood³. While Buddhism does not recognize a permanent soul (as Hinduism does), it emphasizes the holiness of all beings and their shared capacity to experience suffering⁵. Compassion (karuna) and loving-kindness (metta) are central to Buddhist ethics, promoting the active reduction of suffering for all life forms. Ahimsa is therefore both an ethical obligation and a practical necessity for spiritual advancement toward nirvana, the liberation from samsara⁵. The doctrine of dependent origination in Buddhism further supports ahimsa by teaching that all beings are interconnected, and causing harm inevitably affects one's future experiences³. This belief encourages many Buddhists particularly in Mahayana Buddhism, to adopt vegetarianism as a reflection of their commitment to non-violence⁷. The bodhisattva ideal in Mahayana Buddhism emphasizes the ethical duty to prevent harm and assist all beings on the path to enlightenment³.

While Hinduism and Buddhism offer distinct metaphysical perspectives, both traditions share a profound commitment to ahimsa as an active moral responsibility. This principle not only shapes religious practices but also offers a holistic, relational approach to ethical living, in contrast to the abstract rationalism of Western ethical theories. Ahimsa in these traditions remains a dynamic ethical force that encourages compassion, respect for all life forms, and spiritual progress.

An Overview of the Modern Western Animal Ethics Theories

Utilitarianism and Animal Rights: The ethical treatment of animals has been a central concern in Western moral philosophy, particularly through the work of Peter Singer and Tom Regan. While both philosophers advocate for better treatment of animals, their approaches differ in fundamental ways. Singer's utilitarian framework focuses on minimizing suffering, whereas Regan's rights-

based approach emphasizes the intrinsic value of animals and their entitlement to moral consideration.

Peter Singer, in his seminal work *Animal Liberation* (1975)⁸, explains the utilitarian principle of minimizing harm to non-human animals. He argues that if animals are capable of feeling pain and distress, their suffering must be given the same moral consideration as human suffering⁸. Singer builds on Jeremy Bentham's original utilitarian stance, which asks, "*Can they suffer?*"⁹ as the primary criterion for moral concern. From this perspective, species membership is morally irrelevant; what matters is the ability to experience suffering⁸. Therefore, Singer opposes practices such as factory farming, animal testing, and other forms of animal exploitation, asserting that human actions should aim to minimize animal suffering wherever possible¹⁰. His preference utilitarianism suggests that the interests of animals should be supported equally with those of humans when calculating the greatest overall happiness. This means that causing animal suffering for trivial human benefits is morally indefensible.

In contrast, Tom Regan presents a deontological argument in favor of animal rights. In his influential book *The Case for Animal Rights*¹¹, Regan rejects the utilitarian notion that moral worth is based solely on the ability to suffer. Instead, he asserts that some animals with consciousness¹², like humans, are subjects-of-a-life; beings with inherent value, self-awareness, and the capacity for desires and beliefs¹³. This intrinsic worth means that animals should not be treated as resources or tools for human benefit. According to Regan, animals possess moral rights that demand their autonomy and well-being be respected, irrespective of any benefit to humans¹⁴. He argues for a categorical moral duty to protect animals from harm, which implies that practices such as animal experimentation and commercial animal agriculture are morally unjustifiable because they violate animals' right to life and freedom¹³.

While both Singer and Regan agree that animals deserve moral consideration, their ethical frameworks diverge in crucial ways. Singer's utilitarian approach is consequentialist, focusing on outcomes and arguing that reducing animal suffering increases overall well-being⁸. This framework allows for some animal use if it results in a greater net benefit, such as medical research that could save many lives. Regan's rights-

based position, however, is absolutist, he maintains that animals should never be treated as mere means to an end, regardless of the consequences¹⁴. For Regan, moral obligations to animals are non-negotiable, and any practice that disregards their inherent value is morally wrong.

These two approaches have significantly shaped modern discussions on animal ethics. Singer's utilitarianism emphasizes practical harm reduction, influencing public policies against animal cruelty, while Regan's moral rights framework underpins animal liberation movements seeking the abolition of practices that exploit animals. Both perspectives challenge the traditional anthropocentric view and call for a profound ethical reconsideration of how humans treat non-human animals.

Bengali Cultural and Spiritual Teachings in Hinduism and Buddhism for Promoting Animal Ethics: Western ethical theories, such as Peter Singer's utilitarianism and Tom Regan's animal rights theory, provide important philosophical foundations for animal ethics. However, these frameworks often rely on abstract reasoning that may feel distant from the everyday realities of people in culturally rich and spiritually rooted societies like Bangladesh. In contrast, Bengali cultural and spiritual teachings particularly those in Hinduism and Buddhism, offer a practical, emotionally resonant, and culturally embedded approach to animal ethics. These teachings are not confined to intellectual debates but are actively practiced through religious rituals, community values, and moral narratives, making them easier to adopt and sustain in daily life.

The following propositions, for me, explain why Bengali traditions, particularly the principle of ahimsa and other spiritual frameworks, provide a more effective and easy-to-adopt model for promoting animal ethics in these regions compared to the modern theories I mentioned.

The Pragmatic Ethics of Religious Teachings like ahimsa as a Middle Ground between Utilitarianism and Animal Rights Ethics: One of the key reasons the cultural and spiritual teachings of Hinduism and Buddhism in Bengal are more effective in promoting animal ethics is the principle of ahimsa, which offers a balanced ethical approach between Peter Singer's utilitarianism and Tom Regan's animal rights theory. Unlike these abstract Western frameworks, ahimsa is

a living ethical practice, embedded in daily life and cultural traditions, making it easier to understand and apply. Utilitarianism, while practical, allows for moral compromises by justifying animal harm if it leads to a greater good, such as in medical research. In contrast, Regan's rigid rights-based approach offers moral clarity but lacks the flexibility needed in complex cultural contexts.

Ahimsa, however, overlaps these extremes by combining moral absolutes with practical adaptability. It emphasizes non-violence while allowing ethical decisions to reflect real-world complexities, making it both accessible and sustainable. By being set into cultural practices, ahimsa promotes compassion and responsibility without requiring people to engage in abstract reasoning, making it a more effective ethical model in cultural practices like in the developing societies like Bangladesh, as well as in Bengali cultures.

Relational Ethics: Moving Beyond Anthropocentrism: Another reason why cultural and spiritual teachings can be more effective and easy in promoting animal ethics lies in their relational ethics, which emphasizes the interconnectedness of humans, animals, and the environment. This perspective challenges anthropocentrism; the belief that humans are the most important and morally significant beings¹⁵. Unlike Western ethical theories, which often focus on individual rights or outcomes, these Bengali traditions present a holistic worldview where humans and animals are seen as mutually dependent participants in a shared moral and ecological system. These philosophies holds relational ethics through its cultural, spiritual, and ecological values, encouraging a sense of coexistence and mutual respect between humans and non-human beings. This ethical framework does not position humans as masters of the natural world but instead acknowledges the inherent value of all living creatures. Such beliefs create a moral responsibility to protect and honor animals as part of a broader cosmic and environmental balance.

A clear example of this relational ethic is seen in Bonobibi Puja. The local people do not view these animals merely as dangers to be eliminated but as powerful beings who maintain the ecological balance of the jungle. Through prayers and rituals dedicated to

Bonobibi, the forest goddess, people seek protection from these animals while simultaneously recognizing their right to exist within the natural world. This practice reflects a reciprocal relationship between humans and animals, one that is grounded in respect rather than dominance.

By showing empathy and coexistence, relational ethics rooted in these Bengali traditions provides a practical and emotionally grounded framework that surpasses the human-centered focus of modern theories. This perspective resonates deeply with Hindu and Buddhist communities in the world, where human and animal lives are intertwined through shared landscapes and cultural narratives. Unlike the academic principles of utilitarianism or animal rights, this relational approach integrates ethical behavior into everyday life, making it a more effective tool for promoting compassion and responsible stewardship of the natural world.

Spirituality as an Ethical Framework: Bengali cultural and spiritual teachings of Hinduism and Buddhism are more effective and easy to apply in real life and engage in promoting animal ethics because spirituality emphasizes the interconnectedness of all life. Unlike the abstract theories I mentioned, spirituality promotes better motivation and emotional attachment, encouraging ethical behavior through a sense of shared existence with animals. In Hinduism and Buddhism, spirituality is a living force reflected in rituals, beliefs, and cultural practices that promote compassion and respect for animals. Practices like Bonobibi Puja, and depiction of different animals as deities in Hinduism, illustrate how spiritual traditions recognize animals as part of a sacred ecosystem, creating a sense of mutual care. This spiritual worldview motivates people to protect animals not through intellectual obligation but through emotional and moral, as well as ethical responsibility.

Because spiritual teachings are accessible and culturally embedded, religiously noted as the way of getting ultimate reward, and if denied, the indication of being punished afterlife, they are often easier to follow in daily life than Western ethical theories. This does not mean Hinduism and Buddhism lack abstract ideas, both have complex philosophies but their ethical practices like ahimsa and compassion are more directly lived through rituals and community life, which makes them more accessible. This holistic and practical

approach suggests that culturally embedded spiritual traditions, such as the Hindu and Buddhist teachings in Bengal, can provide more effective and sustainable ethical frameworks for promoting animal welfare in regions where these beliefs shape everyday life. But while spiritual ethics may seem limited to believers, in Bangladesh they function as shared cultural values that cut across formal religious lines, complementing rational arguments rather than replacing them.

Between Cultural and Spiritual Teachings and Western Ethical Theories

To test the hypothesis that cultural and spiritual teachings of Hinduism and Buddhism are more effective in promoting animal ethics in those societies than Singer's and Regan's theories, I conducted an exploratory study with 17 participants (10 Hindu, 7 Buddhist), aged 23–46. The study ran over 40 days in two phases and used semi-structured focus group discussions to capture how participants understood and applied these ethical frameworks in their daily lives.

Phase 1 (first 20 days): Participants joined a workshop where the author guided them through Singer's utilitarianism and Regan's animal rights theory, then asked to apply these principles in everyday situations involving animals.

Phase 2 (next 20 days): The same group was guided to Bengali cultural and spiritual principles, especially ahimsa and related teachings from their followed religion Hinduism and Buddhism. They were asked to integrate these values into their daily lives.

Findings: The study revealed clear differences in how participants engaged with Western theories compared to lived Bengali frameworks. In Phase 1, many found utilitarianism and rights theory intellectually demanding and detached from ordinary decision-making. One participant remarked, *"I understood the idea, it's smart, but it felt heavy and complicated to use every day."* Another explained, *"I could see the logic, but in real life I don't calculate things like a theory, I just act on what feels right."* *"It was difficult to measure benefits and harms all the time; it made me overthink simple decisions"*, another added. Others expressed frustration that utilitarianism was *"too hard to calculate,"* while rights theory felt *"too strict for real life."* These comments illustrate the difficulty of translating abstract theories into practical moral choices.

In Phase 2, participants described Bengali cultural and spiritual teachings as more intuitive and emotionally engaging. One explained, *"It felt natural to act kindly when it's a part of our culture and religion, not something I had to think through every time. Seemed like I am used to it."* Another said, *"I think I'll remember the teachings of ahimsa more than abstract theories, because it's what my family believes too."* Overall, participants emphasized that these teachings aligned with familiar traditions and were easier to sustain. Together, these reflections suggest that Bengali spiritual frameworks provided participants with a more practical, culturally resonant, and sustainable guide for animal ethics than these theories.

Conclusion: This study set out to explore whether Bengali cultural and spiritual teachings particularly from those of Hinduism and Buddhism are more effective in promoting animal ethics than Western ethical theories, particularly utilitarianism and animal rights theory. Through a comparative analysis of these frameworks and an empirical study, the findings suggest that culturally and spiritually embedded ethics offer a more accessible, emotionally resonant, and practical model for fostering ethical behavior toward animals. Modern ethical theories, while intellectually rigorous, often rely on abstract reasoning and rational calculation, making them difficult for many to apply consistently in everyday life. Utilitarianism requires complex harm-benefit analysis, which can justify harm under specific conditions, while animal rights theory imposes moral absolutes that lack the flexibility needed in real-world contexts. In contrast, cultural and spiritual teachings, particularly the principle of ahimsa, present an intuitive and adaptable ethical framework that is deeply integrated into cultural practices and spiritual beliefs.

The empirical study confirmed this distinction. Participants found those theories to be intellectually demanding and challenging to implement in daily scenarios. In contrast, cultural and spiritual frameworks were described as emotionally relatable and easier to apply as many of them asserted that they were already familiar with them, with most of the participants reporting that these teachings had a strong and lasting influence on their ethical behavior toward animals.

Three core propositions emerged from the analysis. First, religious teachings and indications like ahimsa offer a pragmatic middle ground between utilitarianism and animal rights, combining moral clarity with

practical adaptability. Second, relational ethics in Bengali Hindu and Buddhist traditions moves beyond anthropocentrism, meaning a worldview where humans, animals, and the environment are interconnected and worthy of mutual respect. Third, spirituality from those principles of Hinduism and Buddhism provide a holistic ethical framework that is accessible, emotionally compelling, and deeply rooted in community life, making it a more effective and enduring guide for ethical behavior.

Ultimately, this study argues that Bengali cultural and spiritual teachings of Hinduism and Buddhism provide a more effective, easy to follow, sustainable, and culturally resonant approach to promoting animal ethics than abstract theories. This perspective is particularly relevant for regions like Bangladesh, where ethical frameworks must be both practical and culturally meaningful to create lasting ethical transformation.

Limitations of the Study: This study was qualitative and based on a small sample of 17 participants, mainly from Hindu and Buddhist backgrounds, and therefore is not representative of the entire Bangladeshi population, which is predominantly Muslim. As such, the findings offer exploratory insights rather than generalizable conclusions. I suggest future research could address these limitations by including larger, more diverse samples and participants from different religious and socio-cultural contexts.

One may object that the difference in accessibility identified here reflects framing more than cultural context; abstract Western theories were compared with lived Bengali practices. If participants had engaged with other views like Christianity-inspired views or even with abstract Hindu and Buddhist theology, results might differ. This is a fair concern, but my study intentionally focused on lived practices, since these influence everyday moral decision-making. Even so, future research could test whether the same patterns hold across alternative comparative framings.

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