Parents in India protest when they find their child “on drugs”. It is a road that every human being knows leads to severe brain and body damage and often to death. These same parents don’t seem so concerned about even more lethal drugs that their children eat every day as part of their normal food: drugs that contribute as frequently to severe brain and body damage and as often to death. Is that form of drug-induced death more socially acceptable than cocaine or smack?

Every time you drink milk or eat eggs, meat or chicken you are eating a cocktail of harmful drugs. Any animal that has been grown forcibly in container-like factory farms owes its existence not to Mother Nature but to chemistry. In the 1920s, the identification of Vitamins A and D made

it possible for the broiler industry to crowd a great number of chickens indoors. Then came Dr. Thomas Jukes’ discovery in the 1940s that antibiotics make chickens grow faster and so they became standard additives for poultry, cattle, calves and pigs.

In the 50s and 60s, animal scientists found that artificial hormones and hormone-like substitutes could alter growth and reproduction and now these are a staple in animal diet and medicine.

People talk of chemical fertilisers, pesticides and herbicides in our fruit and vegetables. We readily accept that our fruit and vegetables are contaminated with chemicals and assorted carcinogens – but milk, meat and eggs are thought to be “natural” with no chemical pollution or manipulation.

Nonsense; Food from animals is more altered by chemistry and invasive manipulation than any food from plants. In February 1989, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, (FDA) Director remarked: “The majority of pesticide-contaminated human food incidents of the last decade were the result of human exposure through consumption of contaminated animal products.” Industrial animal production use potent drugs and pesticides not even thought of in horticulture. For instance:

- Manipulation of chicken flavour through chemistry so that each “producer” has his own peculiar chicken taste. An article brought out in Broiler Industry in April 1975 says: “We’ve been

accused of selling a chicken with less flavour that the ‘old time’ chicken. Attempts are being made at overcoming the flavour problem by injection or marinating.” The yellow of your egg, for instance, is completely fake. Xanthophyll, zeaxanthin, marigold extract and caroteinic acid are some of the feed additives used to make egg yolks – which come out pale in all factory chickens, as natural sunlight and grass is needed for a yellow yolk.

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What is standard factory food? Cardboard, dried poultry manure, crop waste, spoiled grain not fit for human consumption, feather meal, synthetic vitamins, mineral supplements, antibiotics, wormers, growth stimulants. It tastes so bad that it has to be covered with a flavouring or “palatability agent” as the industry calls this artificial chemical. Gentian Violet, a known carcinogen, is used to prevent moulds in animal feeds.

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Obviously flies and other pests multiply in factory farms. They have to be eliminated. Some egg producers spray mists of insecticide through the cages and onto the birds. For cattle, organophosphate insecticides are applied as sprays, dust bags, back rubbers, pours-ons or feed additives. Some milk producers affix ear tags of pyrethroid insecticides to the animals. In factory dairies, the air is sprayed with a chemical that ha the highly toxic Dichlorvos, an organophosphate of the nerve gas family. Some farmers dip their animals in the hugely poisonous Lindane to get rid of lice and fleas. For fly control, a larvicide is added to the animal feed.

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Antibiotics are an essential part of the factory farm diet. Almost half the antibiotics produced every year in the world are fed to food-producing animals. Penicillin and tetracycline are the most commonly used. According to the National Research Council, about 90 per cent of antibiotics are given in the form of feed additives – and saturate the milk, eggs and meat that we eat. No wonder the human body is becoming immune to antibiotic therapy.

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In addition to antibiotics, these are some of the drugs used to control fowl cholera, mastitis, pneumonia, atrophic rhinitis, dysentery, enteritis, parasites and diseases caused by protozoa and bacteria:

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Sulphanamide (Sulfathiazole, Sulphamethazine, Sulfanitran, Sulfadimethoxine, Sulfaquinoxaline). Sulphamethazine (SMZ) is the most widely used, specially in dairy cattle. It

is popular because it has unusually long “staying power” which means that its medicinal effects last longer.

Unfortunately this drug stays, as residue in both milk and meat has been known to cause severe allergic reactions and anaemia. Extremely high levels of SMZ exist in milk. Upto 80 miligrams per kilolitre have been found – an amount that should be spread over 60,000 kilolitres. Nitrogen heterocyclics (Carbadox, Ipronidazole, Dimetridazole – all three of which have been since 1971 known to cause cancer and mutations). Nitrofurans (Furazolidone, Nitrofurazone) and benzimidazoles (Albendazole, Febendazole and Thiabendazole), a family of cancer causers. A class of ionophores, one of which is monesis sodium, is used to speed weight gain. Gentamycin, which is not allowed for use in dairy cattle in many countries, is used here for mastitis. Neomycin is another antibiotic residue that is frequently found in meat.

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Probiotics are used to aid the development of bacteria in the animal’s stomach. This is to improve digestion in the immovable animal.

- Hormones are used as growth promotants. Zeranol, Testosterone, Progesterone and Eastradiol are some of the growth accelerators used. These chemicals change metabolism, stimulate muscle growth and increase litters and, in the case of dairy cows, bring out more milk. Oxytocin is a commonly given injection in every Indian dairy to make the milk come out faster. It causes weak eyesight and cancer in humans.

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The egg industry adds antioxidants to chicken feed to lengthen hens’ egg laying cycles.

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Poultry and pig producers use arsenical compounds to speed growth, feed efficiency and boost egg production.

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Chloramphenicol has never been allowed for use in food producing animals, because of its toxicity to humans. It is linked to aplastic anaemia, gray syndrome in newborn infants and

various neurotoxic disorders. It is used widely.

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Oxytetracycline, Dexamethazone, Lincomycine Spectinomycine, amino acid solution, Phenylbutazone (for “stress”), Amoxicillin, Amprolium, Levamisole. Potassium penicillin, Tylosin, Trimethoprim… these are some of the drugs given in tablet, liquid or injection form and several of them are known carcinogens and have “severely restricted use” labels on them. 92 per cent of the food animal of the food animal drugs are sold over the counter which means that anyone can buy them without prescription or supervision – which means there is very little accountability in the meat, milk and egg business. And low accountability always leads to shortcuts and abuse.

The “modern” animal business, the factory farm, uses between twenty to thirty thousand drugs to control disease and boost productivity. Nine million pounds of antibiotics (weight, not money) were used in the world in 1978. It went up to 15 million pounds in 1988 and has again doubled by now. Recently Mac Donald’s gave a statement that they were going to “phase out” the antibiotics that they use on all the animals that are killed for their products.

The United States General Accounting Office made a review of the potentially harmful residues of animal drugs, pesticides and contaminants in meat and poultry. In a country like the United States protected by the strict laws of the Food and Drug Administration, they found 143 drugs and pesticide residues in meat and poultry. “42 are known to cause or are suspected of causing cancer; 20 of causing birth defects; and six of causing mutations.”

India is using every single one of these drugs and quite a few more – as the standards are even laxer. Most of the animal drugs on the market have not been properly tested and their long-term effects, as happened in the case of Thalidomide, are unknown. Even chemicals that are known to be dangerous and are banned all over the world like DDT or Phenol continues to be used in Indian animal factories. Most approved animal drugs were cleared for marketing years ago on the basis of safety evaluations now considered inadequate.

Factory farmers feeding drugs to animals are supposed to stop feeding them a specified number of days before killing them. The idea is that drugs should not be present in the animal’s flesh when it is killed. (This doesn’t apply to milk or eggs, as no withdrawal are possible from

the daily drug feed). Most farmers don't understand the withdrawal schedules so the drug is given till the end. Even if they stop it, the drug, which is usually given in food bins, continues to contaminate feed mixers, bins and waterlines. Then, animals that are found to be sick or deteriorating are killed immediately and sent to the market immediately, with drugs still coursing through their bodies.

Not scared enough? Let me add some more. A large number of animals – chickens, specially – die of cancer. About 15 million pounds of dead animal meat is cancer-ridden. What happens to these dead bodies? Are they thrown away? No way. This cancerous meat is processed into chicken feed and re-fed to factory animals. The result is a recycling of potential cancer substances repeatedly through the animal and human chain.

More? Animal bones, kidneys and livers often contain dangerous levels of heavy metals – cadmium, lead, arsenic, for instance – which build up in their bodies from the food they are fed. This issue has been repeatedly taken up by consumer bodies abroad. The answer from the animal industry is: "The toxic metals accumulate in the parts we don't eat." Nonsense. These parts of the animal body are again ground up and put back into animal feed – so the buildup of heavy metals is constant and on the increase.

Pesticides that you fear in your vegetables and fruit Of the 10 foods most likely to cause cancer from insecticide residues, chicken is number two, beef is number three and pork is number seven. Of the 10 foods most likely to cause cancer from herbicide residues, pork is number three.

You can campaign to remove the drugs that I have named but the industry will merely replace them with other equally toxic chemicals. The government can do nothing. (It banned Novalgin and Analgin years ago – following a worldwide ban on these two toxic medicines. Till today they are available on the Indian market). Inspectors go to these animal factories – their ability to find illegal or badly used drugs is limited by their knowledge. Also – and I quote from an American consumer magazine (you can draw your own conclusions) – "It has been reported that reasonable inspectors are often allowed to take home free meat and are offered liquor, money and other gifts. No inspector has been trained or educated or even prosecuted for this bribery and it is practically impossible to prevent. The net result is that corrupt animal factories turn out shoddy meat and poultry, much of which would have probably been condemned by uncorrupted inspectors."

Now, you will ask, if things are so bad why don't we see more death and disaster? Why doesn't the government take action to get animal drug abuse under control? Firstly, there is enough death and disaster. To the animals immediately – which any of you who wish to visit a factory farm can see at first glance? But, more than that, where do you think cancer and degenerative diseases come from? Where does immunity to penicillin and antibiotics come from? It is difficult to prove causation over a long period – for instance, a person drinking milk with Carbadox in it for years can end up with stomach cancer – but the law needs an immediate cause. (In the same way, thousands of people have died in the last five years from the effects of the Union Carbide blowup. But proving that they died of insidious toxic damage from the Methyl Isocyanate fumes is legally difficult to prove in a court that demands immediate death as proof). Such "causes" will take years of epidemiological studies in each case before what scientists know to be a fact can be "legally" established.

Another reason why people don't see more human health problems as a result of eating animal products from factories is simply that "they are not looking." You have headaches, stomachaches, diarrhoea, nausea, "flu", colds and other illnesses all the time – and no one thinks that they may be caused by animal-borne bacteria or animal drug residues. Salmonella is just one food-borne disease- but it took years before the government held meat responsible for cramps, nausea, vomitting and even death. Consumers are totally unfamiliar with the practices of meat production. Moreover they tend to resist acquiring such knowledge (knowing it will be unpleasant) preferring to regard meat, milk and eggs as "essential" to their well-being.

Secondly, why doesn't the government do something? Animal killing is part of the Agriculture Ministry. It is regarded as giving jobs, bringing in money from export, giving food and a traditional way of life. (Any data, for instance, on the ill effects of milk – while doctors will concede that it is true – will be challenged by the simple logic of: "Krishna drank it and he was a god.") Modern meat factories take advantage of this to manipulate the government into turning a blind eye.

Nothing therefore will be ever being done in India to stop the modern businessman/government from using harmful drugs in the animal industry. Drugs are portrayed by the industry as problem fixers, money savers and profit boosters. They probably are for the businessman – but they also cause hugely undesirable effects in people and animals. The victim of this is not only the animal – it is you. And the only way you can protect yourself is not to eat animal products. Either that or be a drug victim of the most dangerous traffickers in the world.

Maneka Gandhi