

The photo on this page is a happy Mangal Singh. He can enjoy freedom from research laboratories that experimented on him and his friends for years, injected them with vaccines and drugs, housed them in dirty, cramped cages. A monkey shelter *Hanuman Vaatika* has been set up for them in Sultanpur, Gurgaon. The shelter is run by People For Animals (PFA) under the aegis of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment and funded by Internet service provider Network of World (NOW). *Vaatika* has rescued over 78 rhesus and bonnet monkeys.

Monkeys in *Vaatika* have been collected from various research laboratories where they had spent much of their lives in 1.75ft by 2ft cages. Most of them are old (about 20 years) and arthritic. They are now housed in large cages and get proper food and medical attention. Besides nine comfortable cages, the shelter boasts a cage that can decently house a colony of 50 monkeys. Fifteen new cages are being built. The shelter has an operation theatre, a veterinarian who lives on the premises, is available round the clock and does daily check-ups; a compounder who assists him, a driver with an ambulance, a cleaner, feeder, gardener and two security guards.

When the monkeys were initially brought in, the sight of any person would make them scurry to hide. Now they have made friends with the entire staff. It is said time heals all wounds. I knew that these monkeys were on the road to recovery when one of them triumphantly made off with a handkerchief from my pocket! One of the monkeys makes a game of opening knots in a jute rope, throwing the unknotted rope to *Vaatika* workers for them to tie knots again.

All the monkeys were brought in unwell, have crippled backs because

Hanuman Vaatika: A Shelter for Rehabilitating Laboratory Monkeys

○ Gautam Grover



of prolonged confinement. They had wounds on their fingers because of self-mutilation, an anxiety psychosis that lab animals develop because of poor caging, repeated painful experimentation and inadequate care, all of which are painful violations of the ethical codes that scientists are meant to follow while using animals for research.

Some monkeys were infected with tuberculosis for which they are now being treated. This indicates utter lack of veterinary care in the Animal Houses in reputed governmental institutes and medical colleges which used them. A few monkeys had hair loss because they had not been in the sun for years, having been kept in dark and humid rooms. What kind of data could scientists have obtained from experimenting on sick monkeys? Of what use to humankind could such data be?

Some monkeys have amputated arms and legs: the scientists refused to divulge why they cut off limbs. (See picture of AIIMS amputated monkey on page 32) In fact, the medical and experimental records of monkeys are not disclosed on grounds of secrecy! A few monkeys are blind, some have tumours and a few of them are paralysed. They are ill-equipped to be left in the wild. Most of the monkeys need to relearn how to forage for food. They had forgotten the taste of natural food as they were fed only a pelleted diet in the Animal Houses. The first time the monkeys were given fresh fruit, mangoes and watermelons, they would not touch them.

Animals by the thousands are confined and tortured for the sake of medicines for humans. The least we owe them is to keep them as comfortable as possible for what is left of their lives. *Hanuman Vaatika* is a small step in this direction. □