**Abstract**

India is home to a unique nomadic culture that puts the welfare of their animals above its own: The Raika camel breeding caste regarded their camels – and other livestock – “as if they were their children” and treated them accordingly with love and great care. Their utilization of the camel was governed by strict rules, prohibiting the use for meat as well as the sale of milk, wool and female animals.

But can such an ethical “animal culture” survive into the modern age? It seems not, as India’s camel population, once the third largest in the world, has been plummeting precipitously in recent decades, leading the Rajasthan government to declare it state animal in 2014 and the Legislative Assembly  to pass **THE RAJASTHAN CAMEL (PROHIBITION OF SLAUGHTER AND REGULATION OF TEMPORARY MIGRATION OR EXPORT) BILL, in 2015.** So far this law that caters to India’s strong animal welfare movement seems to have had the opposite effect. Currently, Raika herders are abandoning their herds in droves, their age old culture and traditional knowledge have almost completely unravelled, and camels are suffering.  By contrast, in other Asian countries where camels are used for meat or as dairy animals, camel pastoralists remain in business and numbers are rising steeply. Similar trends obtain in East and West Africa where the camel is expanding its range and pushing out dairy cattle due to its better adaptation in times of global warming.

This lecture will place India’s camel culture into a global context and suggest the way forward to conserve Rajasthan’s camels and keep the Raika camel culture alive. It will focus on on-going efforts to efforts to develop a range of innovative and environment friendly products from living camels that cater to the needs of an increasingly urbanized India. For instance camel milk is not only helpful in treating autism and diabetes, but can also be processed into cheese and chocolate.

**About the Author**  
Ilse is a native of Germany but has been partly based in Rajasthan (India) since she met the Raika camel pastoralists during a research fellowship on camel socioeconomics and management systems in 1990/1991. Her academic background is in veterinary medicine and anthropology and her research has been supported by the German Research Foundation, National Geographic Society, Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, and the American Institute of Indian Studies. She has more than 100 scientific publications in journals spanning various disciplines and published a number of monographs. In 1998, she was awarded the degree of “Habilitation” from the LMU University in Munich which is equivalent to professorial status in Germany. Her work was recognised with a Rolex Associate Award for Enterprise in 2002, and the [Trophèe des femmes](http://www.yves-rocher-fondation.org/de/de/trophee_de_femmes/die_preistragerinnen/details/4317/) of the Fondation Yves Rocher in Germany in 2009.