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Bulls Roam on Oriental Roads and Bazaars

Aju Mukhopadhyay

once a friend-
out of sight out of mind
I don't know that I eat him

We all know that cattle and other animals like cats and dogs were roaming in oriental bazaars and roads, eating from waste bins and sleeping on roads during night. During our childhood and early youth, we found cows and bulls freely moving and sitting on roads, freely urinating or excreting anywhere. Moving with them side by side as in villages was our second habit. And there was a reason for that. Indian farmers and householders who utilized animal labour in the fields and milked the cows had a symbiotic relationship with them, a feeling of oneness in nature, kind of love for the animals. That's how dogs and cats, even not being pets survive on the roads. Our literature has plenty of stories depicting this human sympathy and intimate attachment for the animals; human-animal relationship. In some pilgrim centres of India, even other than such centres, large numbers of monkeys live with humans. National Geographic often make a show of them. For that the animals needed not to be pets. Pet enjoys personal attachment of its owner, owner feels kind of obsession and pride for his pet; kind of selfishness. The time was not so commercial, ungrateful and brutal like the present one.

Gradually with the spread of the idea of cleanliness, comfort and convenience, introduction of Swachhha Bharat or clean India project, the animals are gradually pushed to the background in India; sometimes dogs and cats are killed and sterilized. Roaming of cattle on roads has been minimised with some exceptions here and there. Indian roads are more or less free from animals. Citizens are happy but animals are not.

Couple of months ago, I found a big bull walking majestically on a road near the railway station in Lucknow. It was stepping rhythmically with dignity without looking on either side. Scared people were avoiding its way. Even a single lash of its tail might injure an average person. I too avoided it as I was none but an average man.

Recently I visited Benares or Banaras (Varanasi), the oldest extant city, ancient pilgrimage centre of the world. The flowing Ganga and large numbers of temples dotting its lanes and streets with their lore have made it most attractive. Indians of all ages felt like visiting it at least once in their lifetime. It too has become modern with the march of time but one of its oldest traditions is still maintained. Cows and bulls roam freely in the city; sitting or standing, eating or excreting oblivious of humans and vehicles. Dogs are usually found in Indian towns and cities in more of less numbers and there are organizations which try to protect them. In Banaras they move freely, others have to take care of them. The city is not quite clean, in spite of the Swachhha Bharat movement. It is in the Hindu heartland. Here some worship cows. It is the land of Lord Shiva. Temple of Baba Viswanath (Shiva) is the central attraction of the city. And Lord Shiva's riding animal or Vahana is bull. So it may be that religiously they are given free license to live and move here. I found large numbers of Westerners moving through

the roads, careful about the presence of animals nearing or standing near them but that has not stopped their flow; coming and staying for days together.

Aarati or greeting the idols with incense sticks, burning lamps, decorated hand fans of various kinds and modern gadgets illuminate the Ganga Ghats in the evening with large gathering around including crowded boats in water. Charmed visitors sit around in cool air enjoying entertainments offered.

While reminiscing about the Banaras bulls suddenly I remembered a scene that is etched somewhere in my heart without an apparent reason. Years back, it was perhaps on the 34th Street, a major cross town street in New York City, where I stayed for a month, I saw a gigantic bull in iron cage being carried in a vehicle like low trolley car. The gargantuan bull silently standing without any movement in cage created an image of captivity in my mind. It knew that its enormous physical strength would be of no use before men who possess the capacity to captivate such helpless innocent animals to dominate and consume them; utilize other's life for their own benefit.

I know all the tricks
to reduce its pain of being killed-
painless I kill to befriend it

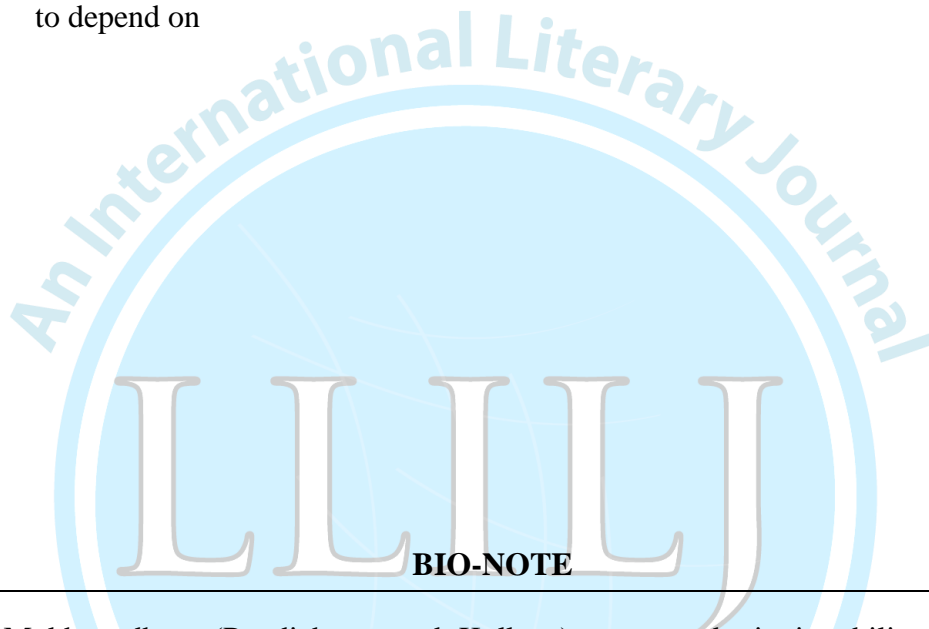
It reminds me that United States is the largest producer and consumer of beef in the world. Brazil and India are the two largest exporters of it. While per capita consumption of red meat is 222 pounds and beef more than 57 pounds in the US there is no bovine animal that moves in American cities. No one finds any cruel joy of killing an animal there but most of the people are fond of, avid eater of beef served to them through shop windows like sheets of paper or cloth rolled. It may be that the majority of the people who consume huge quantity of beef daily do not know the intricacies of its production. Ranches and industries are away from them. They live in a peaceful environment without a sense of killing. They have devised a highly sophisticated way of killing said to be humane way which gives the animals a painless death; an excuse to cover up the guilt or console the conscience.

Livestock are restrained in a chute that limits physical movements. Once restrained, the animal is stunned to ensure a humane end with no pain. Stunning (firing bullet like bolt or electric wire in the brain or choking with carbon dioxide) results, it is said, in decreased stress and superior meat quality. Meat quality may be superior but be it noted that the animal entirely undergoes the fear of death and sudden shock of stunning though of shorter duration. Who knows other than the animal how much time it exactly takes or if an animal dies at the beginning of killing physically, as maybe in halal! The body is then hung suspended by a hind limb and a knife is inserted into the thoracic cavity severing the carotid artery and jugular vein that kills them finally. Who can assert that they didn't have consciousness left in them before being finally knifed? Processed animals become like clean sheets of paper or cloth rolled and packed to be sold. Sophisticated buyers take their food full of antibiotic remains free from stains of blood, smears, skins and hairs. They may not even have ever seen the animal as they may never have roamed on the clean and neatly maintained streets of a highly civilized modern city on foot.

Not only in United States and Europe, consumption of meat has become synonymous with modern civilization. People world over are becoming more gluttonous, with obsession for flesh not only of cows, bulls and buffaloes but of pigs, chicken and sometimes camels and even dogs, birds and crows. Animals are no longer aplenty in forests; man has already finished them so there are restrictions galore to kill more of them. Hence man has learnt animal husbandry; growing more animals mechanically, unnaturally and killing them at will.

Cattle are deprived of natural grass. All gluttonous cruelties are covered up. If man eats more grains and less meat their lives would be safe and perhaps more healthy, while many innocent lives would be saved. But might is right; no chance for logic to enter here; that the weak is not fit is a great benchmark of civilized society.

if flesh resists to grow more
I shall have my own flesh
to depend on



Aju Mukhopadhyay (Pondicherry and Kolkata), an award-winning bilingual poet, author and critic, has authored 34 books including ten books of poems in English and received several poetry awards from India and USA besides other honours. He is a regular contributor to various magazines and e-zines in India and abroad. He is in the editorial and advisory board of some important literary journals. His poems and short stories have been widely anthologised and translated. A member of many national literary and environmental institutions, he is also published as writer on animals, wildlife, Nature and Environment. He has published essays in more than 60 scholarly books besides in a large numbers of journals and e-zines on literature and environment including critique on large numbers of contemporary poets. He has participated in several national and international conferences and festivals on poetry, literature and environment.

www.ajumukhopadhyay.com

Email: ajum24@gmail.com