

Simply must quote myself: a civilized society is primarily defined by its public transport system and by what it does that it does not absolutely have to do, like realizing that animals deserve a decent life as much as we do, and acting upon that realization. We are not bound to take care of our parents when they are old. Some of us do, out of love, and some, out of compulsion, either of a dutiful mind or of a fear of scandal. Animals have not been so fortunate. A dog burned alive is fun. Puppies crushed under vehicles are nuisance to be shoved aside, with a 'tsk tsk' if they are lucky, and disposed of when they die after hours of agony. Pouring boiling water over strays is fun too. The recent procession by some persons of note including actress Debasree Roy and Prof. Nabanita Deb Sen in protest against cruelty to animals goes to show how far we are away from being civilized.

Cruelty to animals is not a novelty: we had the Colosseum, and we still have the Bull Fights. The difference between the Roman Games and the Bull Fights, and burning a dog alive is that the former are still a game where both sides are at risk. And no, this is not a subversive way to condone the killing of bulls by prodding them with several pointed objects first to damage the central nervous system and then heroically spearing them to death. I just wish to point out the difference between the idea of sport however perverted it might be, and the idea of fun.

A very close friend of mine confessed that he used to tie pieces of brick to frogs' legs and watch them drown when he was a kid. He recounted this with guilt and shame, and explained that he had no idea that the frog would feel pain. For him, it was just an amusing experiment. Coming as he does from an area where there are, on an average, about two murders each month, he did not get to learn much about frogs from whatever was around him.

Something curious: there was this man, carrying his daughter, both watching the complete process of killing, skinning and quartering of chicken, the man all the while holding a conversation with the seller. If this little girl grows up to become someone not affected by the real nature of food that we find on our plate while still caring about animals in general, so much the better.

Some people actually do not realize that strays feel pain as much as we do - or that they need medical attention when sick or injured. When you request them to do something like covering up open tanks after work, they sometimes oblige. I am referring to construction workers. However, I still could not convince a long time neighbour to cover his tank while he was promoting his own land. I bought four panels made of

Games that we play with our furry friends



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slit bamboo and did his job for him. I still had to go every night to put them in place. Sometimes I would find them missing: the workers had been using them. I finally got back three of them after the construction was over. He was not sure what had happened to the fourth one.

Then there are the sadists. A dumb unprotected animal is easy prey. The solution is simple as far as these people are concerned. Before anything else you must put the fear of God into them, or, in this case, the fear of the Law. As it stands, the Prevention of Cruelty Act is, well, laughable. Unless that is amended, no amount of work by lonely crusaders will bear fruit. I would like to think that not a lot of people thought of this before. Those that did somehow did not manage to see it through, as I have not. I am currently working on an alternative version of the Act to present it for review. If you think this might be a worthwhile idea, please do contact me.

There is another category. These people go for breeds. Pets are not family to them, but possessions. Once the pet grows old, IT is set free, in remote and almost uninhabited areas where the poor thing so far provided for dies slowly, without food, fighting off

packs of strays.

There are quite a few animal lovers out there. I am talking about those eccentric individuals who somehow seem to have time to spare to feed the street-dogs or shelter lost kitties in cardboard boxes. They ought to collaborate to make better use of time and resources.

At the same time, the legal aspects must be taken care of, with a formal request to the Chief Minister - even the President if necessary so that the issue of amendment may be taken seriously. I am not referring to endless virtual signatures in online campaigns. We do not need superior numbers to demand something that is only fair. Even one person is enough. Five are probably better. Fifty applications / requests from fifty different local unofficial outfits are likely to draw slightly more attention. I repeat: amendments are necessary. People are mostly not saints, and they very often have to be coaxed and forced at the same time. In addition to that, the Police must be instructed to take the Animal Rights Laws seriously. My experience with the Police says this will be more difficult than getting the amendment done, so we can cross that bridge when we come to it.

In Germany, they have fishing competitions. The hooks are made in such a way as not to hurt the fish. The fish, when caught, is placed in a container that has water in it and the hook taken out. After it has been weighed (in order to decide the winner), it is released back into its habitat. If you are caught manhandling fish that you have caught and are taking home to consume, you will be penalized. Now compare the scene in our fish markets where live fish are kept for sale, gasping for breath, proving to the happy customer that they are indeed fresh. If the seller is benign, he will kill the fish before cutting off the fins. If the seller is not inclined to waste his time, then the live fish is scaled, its fins chopped off, the gills ripped out and finally a slit is made where the head joins the body and the guts pulled out. It is not always this gruesome, however. So that the fingers do not get nicked if the fish struggles too much, the seller will sometimes kill it first to protect himself.

I say let us have our chicken and our fish and what not, let us wear leather jackets and shoes and perhaps even wear fur.

Let us kill them all for food or comfort, but please, not torture them for fun. And when we do live up to the dictum of survival of the fittest (read the most cunning and ruthless), let us kill with kindness. Amen to that.

The writer is a lecturer and animal rights activist and may be contacted via www.kapush.net

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