Animal rights and Human lives

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When I asked a top official entrusted with tiger conservation about the killing of Avni – the tigress, the first response was that she was a man-eater responsible for 13 deaths. ‘Man-eater’ a term given to us by our colonial masters haunted me for some time. Was the tigress really a man-eater or was she a victim of a manly hunt to overpower?

It seems she had killed thirteen people in the vicinity of where she roamed. The relatives of those who died are apparently rejoicing at her death. The question that creeps up is- Why did she kill? Isn’t the answer crystal clear- to feed herself? She was not killing for fun. Even if we take the argument that she was responsible for killing 13 people didn’t she deserve a fair trial? Even a murderer is given the opportunity to a fair trial. She was a tigress, after all. Did everyone who heard her story of ‘killing’ entitle her to a fair trial? Or is it that in this country of ours ‘fairness’ is only for the rich and powerful. And the powerful killed a tigress.

Avni could not have killed humans for anything but for food and food alone. And when she did so, who is to be blamed? Are we not answerable as to why we could not provide the legitimate share of food to her and her cubs for whom she may have hunted down human beings? Who is to remain at the top of the food chain, the intelligent human species or the instinctive tigress? Killing Avni proves that humanity may have moved away from hunting to easier means of survival but not from the animal instinct. A cultured and civilized nation of the 21st century should not be forgiven for killing a tigress under the pretext of safeguarding her citizens.

Apart from the argument that the killing of wild animals is illegal, we owe it to ourselves and to the future generations to preserve the dwindling animal world from this planet. Many have become extinguished before our own eyes. How I miss the red colour insect ‘Madhav bohu’ literally meaning wife of the merchant in its red velvety attire slowly moving on the green grass under the drizzle during the rainy season in my native village of Odisha!

Ours is a nation blessed with nature’s bounty with the season one side, deserts and meadows encircled by mighty mountains on the other. Home to all kinds of flora and fauna, this land has a rich tradition of respect for nature, both plant and animal. Cow protection is a perfect example of that spirit. The blatant killing of Avni, a tigress, a mother who had the potential to propagate her species seems to have proved otherwise.

The decree of the apex court is the excuse given for killing Avni by people who were entrusted with protecting her. The verdict was followed – the answer clear and simple. And then there are the ones who hammer at procedural negligence, the inquiry committee and the so-called alibis and defences. The crux of the matter is a six-year-old hapless tigress is killed. The person who killed her could be the hangman carrying out the orders. The action
may have been the prompted by the aggrieved people who took revenge for the murder of their dear ones. However, killing the tigress can neither be the solace nor the solution. She was an animal and the people who were responsible for killing her were supposed to be sensitive and rational human beings.

Sensitivity to human emotions, be it in the entry to temples or killing of animals is what a cultured nation demands from the wings of governance especially from the judiciary as it is the ultimate destination where justice can be meted out or denied.