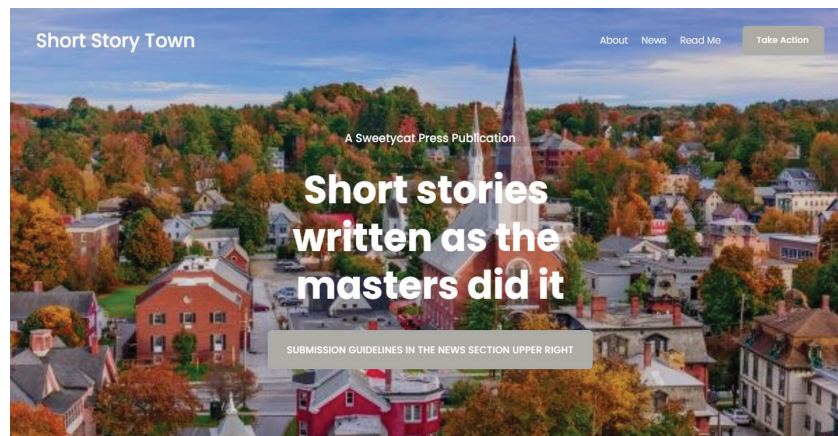


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Shashi Kadapa “The ‘Dead’ Ox Scam” moved into town on 4/9/2021

THE ‘DEAD’ OX SCAM

by

Shashi Kadapa

Bhimya, the paunchy peon, 4thgrade, hurried from a government farm. Stumbling, distraught and palpitating with distress, he collapsed in front of his senior, Lingraj Baswanna, farm supervisor, 3rdgrade, thrice suspended for corruption.

“Sahib,” he stammered, ‘the ox is dead!’”

“What!” caterwauled Lingya. “How? Have you told anyone?”

“It must have eaten something. I haven’t told anyone.”

“Keep quiet. Let me see what to do?”

Lingraj, or Lingya, as he was called by the seniors was very innovatively corrupt, pilferer, fence of anything, animate, inanimate, living, growing, dead, walking, breathing, swimming, and flying entities. He saw opportunities or rather made them in any possible or improbable situation. After he ‘settled’ his third suspension, his boss had warned him, “Le Lingya. This is the last time I will help. The next time you will be dismissed.”

Lingya justified his avarice with, “What to do? I have two insatiable wives, an edacious and avaricious concubine, and seven esurient children.”

He pulled out a memo, jerked the fountain pen to make the ink flow, and wrote to the superintendent.

“Respected Sir.

The Oxen in our farm is felled sickh. Two tempy labrers needed for workings and carings of oxen. One quintal wheat is wanted for feedings of subject sick oxen. Plze given us parmishon to hoire workers and buying grain. If not given parmishon oxen dying.

Sd/Your Obedient servant.”

He asked a peon to rush on his cycle and hand the letter to the superintendent.

Then he ordered Bhimya, “Go and stand in front of the ox shed. Do not let anyone inside. If anyone asks, tell him the ox is calving.”

“Calving? But Sahib, it is an ox not a cow!”

“So what? It is a hybrid ox.”

Clearly, logic, rationality, had no place in their debauchery.

#

Superintendent of the farm Somesh Patil, was choleric. The annual audit was due and he was perturbed about the large amount of cotton he had illicitly sold. Yes, he had used time-tested, innovative, duplicitous methods.

First, he had reported that a bumper crop was due and had requisitioned fertilizers, which were sold off. Then he reported a pestilence, and raised an indent for pesticide. When tins of pesticide arrived, imagine his anger when they were opened and he found them filled with water! Gone was the money he expected from selling the chemicals. “Bah! The store people had replaced the chemical with water. No one could be trusted!”

Then he sold off the cotton to wholesale traders, at less than the market price. Official sale would give higher prices, but it would become official, and the money would have to be paid to the treasury. So cursing the traders for their lack of ethics and vulture pricing, he sold the stuff at whatever price they gave.

He was not afraid of the auditors. Rather, he was worried about the ‘cut’ they would demand. The auditors appeared to have a third sense, they could estimate the exact paisa misappropriated, and demand a righteous share.

He would often fume, “Dirty scoundrels! Auditors are expected to be honest. But look at these fellows.”

Somesh read the letter from Lingya and had a fit. He muttered, “this Lingya is a greedy fellow. I think he has already sold the ox, now this rascal wants to hire laborers that will be on paper only, and buy grain to sell. The whole system is rotten. I should get something from this.”

Then he had an idea. Calling the steno, he dictated a letter to the director of farms.

“Respected Sir,

I wish to bring to your kind notice that our farm animals are stricken by the foot-and-mouth disease. 10 oxen, five cows, and 10 goats have died. I request you to sanction Rs 1 lakh/ to buy more animals and continue operations.

Sd/ Your most obedient servant.”

#

The director Byre Gowda was in a jovial mood. His plans to buy 15 new tractors had been approved and funds were granted. The crafty director had already ‘arranged’ for repairs of old decrepit tractors, their dents filled with lambi or putty, painted, headlights, horns and other stuff fitted, so that they could be shown as new machines.

Well, they could pass for new tractors; if someone did not start them. He was ready to dispatch them, after paying off the committee members.

Now this letter, about an epidemic! His plans would come astray since people would question the wisdom of buying new tractors when farm animals were dying.

He peered out, watching for pesky news reporters, who always slunk about and tried to unearth scandals and put him in a spot.

He called up the agriculture minister Sidda Gowdar in far off Bengluru. This Sidda was earlier the minister of Public Works Department and had earned the dubious moniker of “Foundation Stone Sidda.”

This name came about after the minister laid foundation stones recklessly to announce a number of non-existent and illogical schemes. Dams were

announced in regions without rivers, bridges were launched in the on plains where there was no need, and so on. After announcing such schemes, he would ask for funds to begin works, 'select' contractors through rigged and cartel bidding, disburse funds, pocket the money, and move on. They said that the number of projects he launched far exceeded the projects announced by the central government!

Perhaps the 'rest house' scam was the most daring and audacious. It went like this. Sidda and a few forest, revenue officers announced a scheme to construct a rest house for government officers and ministers in a forest. Land was purchased, huge funds taken, the structure built, all on paper.

Then he organized a 'protest' march by tribals who objected to the building on their land. Heeding their protests, the structure was razed at great cost, and the money shared among other ministers. The press came to know about this scam through a dissatisfied whistleblower that was not given his cut.

However, the furor died after new scams came to light. These examples are given to highlight his illustrious capabilities.

The Chief Manager was angry, frustrated, and thoroughly embarrassed at Sidda's misdeeds. Other ministers were worried that their own scams would now be highlighted. They were angry that the tight fisted Sidda did not share, and they wanted him fired. Caste politics, vote banks prevented him from firing Sidda. Therefore, the CM had transferred him to the animal husbandry department, assuming that nothing could be eaten there. He was wrong.

Byre Gowda called up Sidda Gowdar, reassured him that the ministers share of loot from illicit sales was safe, he blurted out the problem of the animal epidemic.

Sidda started shouting. "Useless fellow! I got you promoted over your seniors. You never repatriated the scammed funds, and now you come up with an animal epidemic?"

"Sahib" said the director in a mollifying voice. "We can make a lot of money."

"What! How?"

“Please call a press conference and announce the epidemic. Say that we are introducing aid packages for farmers. The government veterinarian is my friend and for a commission he will declare an epidemic.”

“Then?”

“We will collect animals from the farms of one region and say that they are being sent for treatment. These will be sent to another region as replacement animals. Animals from these regions will be ‘purchased’ on paper and distributed in the first region. Purchase bills can be arranged, as the printing press owner is my nephew. Please send a letter to the Delhi government requesting emergency funds for farmer’s aid. It is election year and they will agree.” He continued “We already have a list of nonexistent farmers for whom we claimed that we distributed funds in the last drought. We will arrange a public program, and you hand over cheques to selected farmers. We will get 60 percent commission. All of us will make money out of this.”

“Ha. That’s a good idea.”

So a press conference was called and the minister began addressing. “Alas, a tragedy has befallen our poor farmers.” He started sobbing and wiping tears.

He continued. “An epidemic has struck the farm animals in our district. We have arranged for immediate purchase of animals from the neighboring states. We will replace the diseased animals for free and give money to all needy farmers.”

A pesky reporter asked “Why did you delay this announcement? How much is the budget and how many animals are diseased.”

“We delayed as we did not want to create panic. Our veterinarians are collecting diseased animals and sequestering them for observation and treatment. The initial budget is for Rs 500 million. This will be increased if required.”

Another pesky reporter queried, “How much will you make?”

Sidda broke down and howled, “I feel like crying when you talk of corruption when our farmers are dying.” He sobbed, sniffed, and wiped his tears.

The meeting broke up and the officials departed with the minister squabbling over their cuts.

#

Back at the farm, Bhimya ran back to his supervisor's office.

“Sahib, Sahib. The ox is alive, it is walking!”

“What! How? Have you told anyone?”

“No.”

“Quiet. I will think of a way to make money.”

The End

Based in Pune, India, **Shashi Kadapa** is the managing editor of ActiveMuse, a journal of literature. Thrice nominated for Pushcart Prize, he is a two-time award winner of the IHRAF, NY short story competition. http://www.activemuse.org/Shashi/Shashi_Pubs.html