“Sacred” “Purity” “Aditi” (Mother of Gods) are significant words used while describing cows (Gau Mata) in India by the Hindus. However, the reality is contrary to the above statement and when you will walk around in the streets or on the roads you can easily see the limping cows eating garbage.

Though the Indian cow milk is considered at par with mother’s milk and after mother’s milk, it is only cow’s milk which gives energy, provides full protection and easily digestible. A Cow is an innocent animal which is very useful for common people as it provides milk and dung manure besides calves which will be cow and ox which are to be used by the poor farmer for their livelihood and farming. These animals (cows) are an incredibly important part of our global nutritional needs.
For the first time, I became aware of the pathetic condition of the cows was during the festival of Holi. Some mischievous kids were spray painting on a stray cow and wrote abusive words. At that time I wondered if they could speak then maybe there would be a different scenario. It was a situation I overcame with and there are still many cows who are suffering the inhumane behavior. Kindness doesn’t mean anything if we keep torturing other animals and show our superiority just to have fun.

Since then I started visiting cow sheds in my city on weekends with my mom and feed them jaggery and fodder and I felt very happy and satisfied by serving the animals. Initially, I was scared to feed them because of their large horns but then I
tried to overcome the fear and I realized how innocent and gentle this animal is and if we love them then they love us back.

- As there is a saying that “charity begins at home”. In a similar way, I learned from my grandmother that the first roti (chapatti) of our family is always kept for the cow and 2nd for the dogs and 3rd for the birds. It is a way of giving respect to the holy cows in the Hindus. One of my favorite cows, Parvati had a very painful death she died due to
blockage in her stomach from polytene bag.
In 2016 I and my friends created a club “Gayatri Club for Stray Cows” since then on weekends I and my friends visit here to volunteer. In the local cow shelter, there are 7 volunteers who take care of them on weekdays. In this growing civilization, we care only about ourselves and forgot about these animals and left them behind for sufferings. A 2012 livestock census found there are more than five million stray cows in India. Cows hold up city traffic and are always on risk of being hit by speeding vehicles or killed by grazing on poisonous waste. India’s stray cows are largely ignored. There are only 1,821 shelters that are registered across India with Animal welfare board of India, while there are an estimated 5000 shelters across the country according to a survey by the Federation of Indian Animal Protection Organizations.
Many bulls and cows are turned out of dairy farms because they do not produce milk and are of no use for them. We humans are so much selfish that when we need them then only we feed them and when it seems that they are now old and useless then abandon them to be starved and killed. Some farmers sell them to slaughterhouses also. According to a report in Delhi only out of 49,000 cows kept in shelter 46,000 died in three years due to lack of funding or oversight.

The weekly visit gives me a nice feeling by looking after sick cows. Acc. to a survey conducted by me, I find out there were 6200 cows in my city. Every day there 2-3 cows are brought to the shelter. In my district, there are 15 cow shelters. Most of the cows in these shelters are either injured due to road accident or ill due to eating toxic material they found in
garbage’s and are old and weak. However veterinary surgeon is visiting to treat the sick animals in the shelter and advise the caretaker staff as per the requirement.

In my area, a few cow shelters are being supported by the State Government but most of them are being managed by local villagers selected committees. Although there is not much support from the government. We convert cow dung into manure and by selling the milk we get the money for their food and other requirements.
During the pandemic these innocent animals are most affected because their food and other necessities are dependent on us. So during this hard time we have to think about them too. I paid weekly visit during this time and took responsibility of their health checkups with the help of my uncle who is a veteran. Money and fodder are donated open heartedly by villagers in and around the cow shelters. I along with my brother visited in our own village to persuade the villagers to
donate whatever possible for them for cow caretaking shelters and somehow the response was satisfactory. There is a very good custom & system in my area that on any marriage or birth ceremony people donate money for cow shelter. I have motivated my friends, neighbors, and classmates to follow the same system of donation as being done by villagers for the protection of cows.
We should devote some time and money for the welfare of the cow being our revered and sacred animal. Every individual effort can be a great help to save them from being neglected. Let’s be the voice they wish they had and give them the love and care they deserve.
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Sacred but Neglected
Shruti Dhaka


*Note: All pictures are personal photos.