

TITAN

P C K PREM

(IAS retd)

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I genuinely tried to join little fragments of life of a known being, a pet, now an identity later called Titan, who lived for a cause I thought.

“Titan heard chirpings of sparrows up in the roof, looked up a bit fidgety, and for a moment stayed silent. He wandered in the large un-tiled first floor and around the entire floor of the building. If he heard a sound from somewhere, he barked in concealed anger, ran hurriedly, crossed the hall, went to the back of house, and surveyed the lot. No monkey, cat, mongoose, eagle, crow or stray dog ever came near the house, Titan lived and guarded.” He had told me about the puppy brought a year back.

Nostalgic moments he nursed about the tall, slim, healthy and agile dark-coloured Titan, a dog of mixed breed with shinning hair, long legs, soft large ears, big dark eyes, sharp teeth and big mouth. Titan often sat on the jute mattress filled with rags in one of the corners of the large terrace. Titan had four-five sitting seats placed at different places where he often sat and watched garden and the movements of everyone he told.

“At times, resting long and stout legs on the concrete balustrade, he looked out and barked -a signal that I should get up and see.” He thoughtfully said, “Titan, I did not call him a dog. It hurt me if someone called. I thought Titan as if a person -not an animal. My wife and family members loved Titan silently and agreed to what I said. I regret I did not train Titan well but he understood signals. When he penetrated into the eyes, I knew what Titan’s eyes spoke. If Titan saw me amused, he wagged tail, climbed up to lick me and hopped around and if I was angry, he silently stood and looked at me and then, sat on hunch a few steps away and waited for me to cool down as if. If anyone called Titan a dog I was annoyed.” He fortified his assertion, was intense and genuine, and without butting in, I heard and I measured his implicit angst.

“When Titan did not find me in the courtyard or thought I was not at home, he was restive and jumpy. I would come out with the newspaper, drag a chair, sit in the open and look into the paper. I knew what headlines carried, but anyway I must wait for the breakfast. Often, I looked up and found Titan consistently watching, and trying to convey something through soft and at times little loud growls. Groaning sounds and swirling tongue suggested what he wanted. Titan wanted to come down to the ground floor after the natural morning free time around the garden and then have a few rounds of the tiny garden again or sit in the verandah of the central door. He warily looked at each plant, flower, tree and the little fields.”

He was weakly forlorn, “Animals look at you, listen to intently and then, wait. I just tell. I would get up, take a biscuit or a crunch and would go up. He would eat, dance around and then, I would free him. He would happily jump, demonstrate love, lick hands and arms and then would come down with me.”

Depth of inner anguish reflected in strained smile cautioned. As a human being, he considered animals as souls he shared, but astonishingly, I did not argue. Those who care for the animals, birds and beasts carry tacit love and compassion for beings that cannot speak but look on, and appear to fathom the nature of man through voice and eyes. If animals understand the loudness and gruffness of voice, they fear and retreat if they can or else look on and seek love. If anyone of us was out, he waited for the arrival, sat in the corner with eyes fixed on the gate. I heard him and just computed the depth of eyes that spoke more.

After a pause, he said, “I often felt sad, cursed myself whenever I was angry with Titan and thrashed him. He howled, barked, shrieked or lamented and sulked. Sometime, he ran away and stood in a narrow passage in the balcony that was an obstacle. I regretted what I did, sat down silently in penitence, and experienced within, a beast. I recovered soon, cajoled and tried to please with pedigree and biscuit but Titan refused. I said words of love as if he were a child. He looked at steadily, wagged tail and then if I were sitting, jumped and sat in the lap and licked hands, arms, cheeks, neck and head and then only he took biscuits etc, and relished. Rude conduct gave anxious moments throughout the day. It was immoral, unethical and sinful to beat up a pet animal...a helpless being.” He looked at me, heaved a sigh, smiled and turned head towards the horizon.

“Am I a real man, who boasts of love and compassion? Question kept me on tenterhooks and agonizing times lingered on. Madam never approved this act. Stupid it was but then, after a few days, it happened. After a few months I felt I should correct ... to be cruel to animals is a sin.”

Now, silence overwhelmed. I was lost in hazy speculations. A real humanitarian I had seen - a bit impulsive, immensely considerate, and empathetic, and still an angry man, whom trivial freaks exasperated.

That day, I had enough time. I knew he loved to talk of Titan ... possibly, I wanted to apologize for the voiceless coarse and atrocious instinct I had exhibited to animals at times, and never divulged, I did not know. It affected me I thought...for now whenever I saw stray animals, monkeys or dogs on the street or road, I felt pity and feelings of repugnance, aversion and fear did not matter. I kept bread or a chunk of chapatti, biscuits or grams in the car and ...offered to them...he had changed my attitude I told him.

“Yes, I do ...it gives satisfaction, some indescribable joy!” He was delighted.

“...” I had given a grateful nod.

“Help a man... he thanks as if a formality, forgets and you just mope about in thoughts but animals, birds...never do it. They have a time sense...you give grain to the birds and see...at the right time, appear from somewhere and enjoy the feast and if you keep water in an earthen pot or an improvised container, birds take water, hop about and enjoy bathing in the pot and thank perhaps. They fly away and you get silent contentment, and enjoy good sleep...”

I observed the courtyard carefully, noticed water bowls near the flower plants in shaded area and scattered grains on the cemented floor along the flowerbed and found birds picking up grains and at times, dipping beaks in the water.

“Many love animals and birds...quite good. If one observes over- enthusiastic sympathizers of animals and birds, it creates bitterness or fear. Just an aberration it looks and if camouflaged, it is

worse and false it is. A true being loves...” I listened to a distressed man I thought. He was right, yes, he was idealistic...he was true to what he said and did. I had seen Titan on every visit ...overlooking from the railing and yapping and when I called up, Titan was quiet.

Titan had begun to recognize me.

“He as usual scared away unknown visitors with angry bawls and yelps. If I was not here, he without restraint moved around the house and the garden. He looked frightening but never hurt anyone. He jumped up and held a person strongly with long legs as if arms and then pierced teeth softly but never hurt. On call, he released the tight hold. Titan understood...”

I heard him, “He showed rare understanding...and surprised, in anger, he was fear provoking and formidable.” Witty but real portrayal it was I thought. Like a wise devotee, Titan carried out duties. That reminded me of an incident when I just paid a courtesy call when he was unwell. He was outside in the courtyard with his son, granddaughter, wife and other members of the family. Titan was digging earth while his granddaughter stood close to the pet.

“Titan, dig more ...” His son had asked Titan a couple of times. He hollowed out earth with paws quickly and when he found it sufficient mud on the paved ground, he left it and stood at a distance and the little child had fun. It astonished me.

He said, “She plays with Titan daily. Once, perhaps my son asked him to dig earth for her and demonstrated... and so he learnt it and afterwards pleased the little child...”

He offered me a chair, dragged another and sat next to me, “Baby is very fond of him. He took biscuit and crunch from her and even if she put hand and fingers into the mouth, he was meticulous not to hurt her in any manner... Titan is wise...animals understand language of love. I tell you love is similar in all created beings and this quality makes him special.” At that time, all all played and so, madam had joined us over tea.

“Titan has come with a specific noble objective. I feel it is god’s will. You look after him well and treat Titan like...god has assigned special duty, I realize now.” I told him rather philosophically but within I was really enamoured of love Titan had exhibited to the little girl as if he were a human being.” After a moment, I added, “Madam is right, Titan is majestic when he walks ...wags long tail...and yes, looks grand.”

When he moved between past and present, it was quizzing. He was sad. He fixed eyes on my face and was a little emotional. Still, he threw a smile, read facial expression and said, “You are right. He looked impressive as he moved about outside ...You know the uncultivated fields, now mere grassland. In the morning or evening, I released him and permitted running about...it was irregular. He was very naughty and clever...read my face... and then, suddenly took a long leap... a daring jump of about ten-fifteen feet and at times, took a long leap and crossed the wall. Had I given training to Titan, he had been amazing...I feel sorry, I did not do ...he went to the grassland, to the paddy fields, to the villages around ...and the area he covered was roughly a circle of two to three kilometers. Incredulous... he met dogs on the way, just looked at them and went ahead and hardly ever played, I was happy, for I feared...stray dogs carry incurable diseases.” I was quietly listening and thought it inappropriate to disturb. He was fanatical when he talked of Titan.

“He played with cows quite often and when I called him, he ran away ...and it was clear he did not wish to return soon. After one or two hours, he came back, took water and after a few rounds of the house, smelt plants, flowers, basil, mango tree ... looked at me, wagged tail, and sat down in the portico and waited before going up. At times, he played hide and seek with my wife, who

he knew, could not catch hold of him and then, would just stare at her, and she would take Titan in her lap and love him as if a little child. I had understood what he wanted, so said “Titan wait...you want biscuit?” and thereafter Titan had gone up.

One day, a friend told me of the death of Titan just casually. I heard, enquired but he did not know much. I thought I should visit him. Now, I felt, I had some affinity with the dog and regretted my words when I had told that he had a purpose to fulfill. It must have hurt him. I was uncharitable.

That day, after the sunset I went to him. When he opened the door, I said, “I am sorry... Titan is ...”

“Yes, he is gone...” For a few minutes, we sat quietly. After some time, madam served coffee. He handed over a cup to me, thought for a while, looked at me and said in stumpy low voice, “In the evening Titan was very busy. At seven or seven thirty in the evening, I would take food...boiled chicken with a pinch of salt mixed with a bowl of cooked rice and chapatti –made of wheat and barley flour. He took food in my presence or else, he would not touch. It was difficult to feed Titan when I was out. Non-vegetarian food he refused to touch. Other food...of course but he enjoyed milk...everything suited his body’s requirement. If I shouted at times, he refused to eat anything and just left the big bowl and settled on the Dunlop mattress laid on the hard bed ...and thus, showed annoyance. It was after great efforts...that he agreed to take food... was again the same Titan...jumping on me, licking and running about, and then, would take the ball...and as usual, I played with him. It was a regular practice.” He looked out and appeared blank, exhausted and depressed. Those moments of silence were excruciating. I miss him. A tiny babe Titan was, barely three and a half years...but looked a fully grown...every dog feared him...none ever thought to confront.” I observed a thin film of water in his eyes.

He was working hard to emerge out of the anguish he suffered but had never shared, “It is difficult to forget a pet. Initially, you do not love but gradually, you develop feelings of love. Titan was different...when I took a stick, hit him a few times... he sat and felt the pain...and then, quietly went to sit on the bed or in the corner of the verandah or...”

“I told you, I was remorseful and apologetic. I would go to Titan and talk to him...and I do not know I often saw a thin layer of water in the eyes... gave enough shock. After a few months I learnt it was water in the eyes whenever I was angry and then, I never took a stick and so...I found Titan still loyal and dedicated.”

To measure the intensity of pain he had was impossible but apparently, a faded smile appeared on the lips when he spoke of Titan and it drove me to serious deliberations on relations between human beings and animals.

“I did not irritate you...” He disturbed me. I turned to him and gave a forced smile. For a while, he was silent but then he looked at the shelf of books and said, “He had a time sense... I visited the first flour four times a day. Before noon I went up and gave a biscuit and filled water bowl, then at 3 O clock again to spend ten to fifteen minutes with him and then in the evening...free time in the garden, and dinner at seven or seven thirty. If I forgot, he barked or gave a huge lament and reminded me and that is how...”

I realized his throat had choked.

“During the last three and half year...I was with him and every time I said goodbye to him or bid farewell and went out to the town or to the study...he watched and stared, continued to wag tail...when I opened the gate and looked back, I saw him watching me. I waved hand and went...and I knew he gazed at me until I was out of sight. He wanted to come with and enjoy

freedom...I thought. Conjectures proved inconvenient, it was over when I returned, and I found Titan waiting... If any member of the family went out, he waited eagerly...I told..." He had heaved a deep sigh.

After half an hour, I had returned home and thought of Titan.

I sat motionless and stared blankly, perhaps a little frightened.

I could not really experience the depth of agony on Titan's death. He considered dog had an identity and a name, and never appreciated anyone calling pet a dog. That was the limit of one's sentiments. Human beings live in regions of emotions of love and compassion, hatred and jealousy and it is an effort to reconcile to contrasting thought currents. If I thought, he was queer and sickeningly sentimental in behaviour towards the pet, it was natural. he brought Titan when he was hardly a month old and later, his son and daughter after long talk gave little black puppy a name –Titan and yes, he proved it.

I learnt that Titan died of snakebite despite efforts. He took him to the hospital a little late under the impression that it was an ignorable bite. He did not know that it was a deadly snake. I knew the intensity of love he had towards Titan and so, I thought to visit and console but I had felt sympathy was decayed, and frequently repeated philosophic thoughts on the inevitable death crowded were stupid. Lost in thoughts, I intently noticed gloomy eyes but said nothing. He was reading a book and as usual with a smile, he greeted me and took me to the sitting room –a glassy room where he often settled down with a book or newspaper. Madam had gone to the market and he was alone.

He happily received me, prepared tea and sat comfortably in front of me with a cup of tea.

"It is nice tea. How is everything?"

"Thanks. It is after many days..."

"I am sorry...Titan is no more." I said and felt bad.

"Yes, look...he pointed out...it was goodbye. I buried Titan...lived a short life...perhaps I failed to provide timely treatment...I planted those two plants on the grave. Doctors told that I was late but...they tried hard. A guide, a sentinel of the family... is no more. It was my son's gift, who insisted that I should have a pet." He was distraught. Wavering and choking voice made him inconvenient and embarrassing. He got up and brought biscuits. I understood the hint, took a biscuit, dipped it in the tea, and put it on the tongue without ritual.

"I was uneasy when I heard...Titan was ..."

"..." He was quiet and looked deep into the unknown distance and horizon.

"How it happened? You had told he never killed even a fly, an insect or a mouse...only growled frantically."

"Up in the first flour, insects must live Titan thought...he only scared away. Sparrows, parrots, pigeons, crows and eagles flew above at times but he looked on...sparrows perched on the pointed railing and Titan just barked but never tried to kill. That day, I do not know how he gathered courage and pounced upon a lethally poisonous snake and threw it at a distance and then caught hold of it. The deadly snake retaliated, and the struggle continued until he crushed the head of snake with his terrible sharp teeth..."

"..." I had tried to gauge the intensity of feelings. He made strenuous efforts to convey the gist of what had happened that day.

He slowly sipped tea. I did not interrupt but was uncomfortable. Post-mortem of a situation not very significant it was I thought, but it was definitely important for him, for he considered Titan a member of the family.

“It was Monday’s evening. My children were playing outside. He had dug mud for the little girl and after playing for some time with the mud, scattered leaves and flowers they, my son, daughter, wife and the tiny baby moved on to the edge of the large courtyard. They were probably talking of varied matters, looking at the large sized lemon plants, mango trees, and deodars, and talking about the little beds of coriander, cucumbers, tomatoes, peas, reddish, carrot, beans etc. and much more. I was at the back of the house, collecting clothes wife had put for drying up. Suddenly, I heard loud calls of my daughter.”

It was a prolonged pause. After a few minutes, he said, “I heard her and hurriedly reached where they stood. I saw Titan was holding the snake in the mouth and immediately, I shouted at him. He left the snake and straightway ran to the verandah. On the spot, I found snake’s head totally crushed, and with a stick, I picked it up, threw outside the wall of the garden, and rushed to the verandah. I was mistaken as I ignored the bite he had on the inner part of jaw that appeared swollen. I touched lovingly and spoke softly, gave water but soon I found Titan was uncomfortable. Within fifteen minutes he vomited blood with tiny chunks of flesh...it alerted me. In another five minutes, he vomited again. ...”

“During this time, he looked at me...obviously it was intensity of agony, and he appeared to tell everyone that something had happened and wanted us to take care. Titan’s deep dark eyes prayed as if. I took him in a car to the hospital. Doctors were not there but scholars living in the hostel came forward, administered medicine as a precautionary measure, and asked for medicines etc. It was a long wait and took an hour or so to reach back hospital. The young scholars were quick. Titan looked sadly at me all the time. I kept one hand on Titan’s head. Not for a second, he closed his eyes and I thought not to move. Those were frustrating moments for me. I wanted Titan to live long...the very thought of death caused darkness. When I asked the doctors, why there was water in the eyes...they did not give a reasonable answer... Titan was stable after an hour. They injected some life saving medicine and told, “If he survives a few hours more...next morning, he will live... the next seven-eight hours are crucial because the poison has partially damaged liver and kidneys and had affected blood. We brought him home. However, doctors had confided with my son that survival chances were just five to ten percent.”

“It was crucial time for Titan. He was fighting against death. He felt the intensity of pain. He was unable to move. When I went at midnight, he looked at me or perhaps waited for me I guessed. He made efforts to wag his tale...tried to get up but failed and fell on the ground tired, passive and lethargic. I had visualized Titan’s pain. I sat before him, said a few words of love...but he looked on and it distressed me. I went a few times more as I failed to have a sound sleep. I felt guilty that I failed to provide appropriate help. He was very young...it was a painful experience to see him dying before me...I was helpless. I felt he wanted to share his agony but was not able to speak...an animal’s limitation. They say you pay for *karmas* of previous life...*yonis* of an animal is...the result of past acts...one is inclined to believe despite the fact that one may not believe.”

He was silent and noticed a thin coat of water somewhere in the corners of his eyes. He gathered strength as if. He got up and went to the kitchen, “I will bring another cup of tea...wait.”

I knew what he wanted to convey, a ruse to hide palpable hints of suffering, “My children stood on the edge of the retaining wall hardly two to three feet high along with Titan. A snake

was crawling below the wall but no one noticed. However, Titan observed and pounced upon and...perhaps to save children he jumped on it they say...you said he came to fulfill a definite purpose...true. The words still haunt.” He had closed eyes, kept sitting for another two minutes, then got up, looked out and moved to the kitchen.

After five minutes, we were sipping tea in silence. Now, he appeared to have enough power to say what he wanted to avoid earlier. He abruptly said, “Next morning, we took him to the hospital. The senior doctor had come...again injections and...for three four hours he did not show signs of improvement. In the afternoon, they took him to ICU...for three hours Titan fought and fought and looked on blankly...and then suddenly...”

He wanted to wet his dried up lips as if and so wrenched the lips, took a few sips swiftly. After a pause, he said in low voice, “Titan stretched his legs with tremendous power it looked and appeared to squeeze his body, and also tried to lift his head a bit. Then...in hope, I called loudly - Titan...Titan you get up...no, he just tried to look up and then, the eyeballs were still and motionless and ... it was all over exactly after twenty four hours...Tuesday was an unfortunate day for...I still see Titan’s luminous eyes and then...”

I was crestfallen, totally disconsolate and disheartened. Wretched I was. I got up. Looked at him and ushered out as I realized death so close and yet very far away...
