

A photograph of a brown rat with dark eyes and whiskers, peering out from a dark hole in a light-colored concrete wall. The ground in front of the hole is covered with dry leaves and twigs. The title 'I AM A ZOOLOGIST' is overlaid in large white letters on a black background.

# I AM A ZOOLOGIST

Monalisa Paul

Image credit: Pixabay

**T**ESSA was staying with her family in the wheat fields situated on the outskirts of the city. Her other relatives were city dwellers. They were house rodents too. They got access to household leftovers and food marts and other grocery shops whose advertising billboards could be seen on the big highways.

The ancestors of the city dwellers had access to dingy shops that used either earthen lamps or kerosene to light the darkness. Much had changed after electrification and urbanisation. Tessa had only heard these stories from her father as she never visited the city. She was quite happy to reside in the fields, in the burrows made by her kin. There was plenty to eat and enough to play around with. She was a happy mouse.

One day a few guests from the city arrived at her home. They seemed to be a little anxious. While they were talking to her family, she overheard them. “The situation is very bad in the city. We are being hunted down mercilessly,” said one of the guests. He looked very famished and tired. He was hungry too. Mother offered him wheat grains to satisfy his hunger. He showed gratitude. “The owls, snakes and lizards are already our enemies. Now humans too have joined the band,” murmured Mother.

“There are no more of them left in the cities now. Habitat fragmentation is marginalising them. Humans have already deprived them of their food and niche. They poison us by luring us to attractive baits and when these birds feed on us,

not only we meet our final fate, these birds too die soon,” explained the guest.

As the visitor finished his food, he continued. “Humans catch us ruthlessly and cage us in terrible conditions, forcing us to cannibalism as there is very little to eat. Fortunately, I escaped.”

“But what do they do with us?” asked mother anxiously.

“They DISSECT us,” said father gravely.

“Why so? And who are they?” asked my aunt.

“They are the undergraduate students of Zoology. They dissect us to study the different organ systems. Humans are mammals like we are. Both of us have external ear, mammary glands, body hair...,” father kept on mentioning all the mammalian characters he could list.

“But why do they do it?” asked mother again.

“They have it in their syllabus to dissect and study different organ systems. They are not medical students. The issue is that these dissections would not be used in their future endeavours unless they go for higher studies like research. Many of them leave Zoology after completion and opt for other careers like management, hospitality, civil services. Very few go for hardcore pure or applied sciences. Our life goes in vain,” clarified father.

My cousin interrupted by flashing her two sharp incisors and said, “Uncle! It is the sacrifice of our lives that makes learning possible for science students. Study of physiology would have been incomplete without it. Our sacrifice is



celebrated as the ‘Monument to the laboratory mouse’ in Russia where a mouse is portrayed as knitting the double-helical structure of DNA. It is our contribution towards science that enables the discovery of various genetic diseases and invention of many lifesaving drugs.”

Father heard and paused for a while. On a serious note, he said, “Look my child, I am proud of my race. We sacrifice ourselves so that humankind can survive. In fact, many of us are made nude mice by genetically mutating the thymus gland and suppressing the immune system. Similarly, Albino mice that are congenitally deficient in pigment are in special demand for innovative experiments. I know the kind of harsh treatments all the mice undergo but the question is whether it is required by these undergraduate students to dissect us when only handful of them pursue higher education in pure sciences.

“Similarly, many other lives like frogs for muscle twitch and heart perfusion, dogfish (*Scoliodon*), apple snail (*Pila*), cuttlefish (*Sepia*), and starfish are dissected. The Zoologists argue that without live dissection the study is incomplete. They say that simulation dissection cannot provide a similar experience and plastic models, or Internet programming can never match the level of live demonstration. I strongly condemn this as demonstration on a single animal by the supervisor or instructor is fair enough to understand the concept for rest of the class. Many give valid reasons for dissecting us as rodents are surplus in number or we are economically harming the crops or affecting the stored food

grains. I contradict this statement as humans too are surplus in number and there is enough evidence of destruction of our planet Earth by them. So, will they allow themselves to be used for human cloning or dangerous genomic studies? I am highly skeptical about it.”

There was pin-drop silence in the room. Tessa was wondering, if Zoology is the science of animals, then why don’t zoologists protect us? Suddenly, there was a loud thud. Humans had raided Tessa’s place and caught as many mice as they could.

She could sense a stampede around and her eyelids started drooping as she was drugged and captured. When she regained consciousness, she could hear some distant chattering around. She found herself on a dissecting tray. A scalpel around the tray explained everything to her.

Suddenly, the voice of a young boy astounded her. He was refusing to dissect her. He was repeating all the valid logical arguments to his instructor which Tessa’s father had been justifying to her family hours ago. The entire undergraduate batch was taken aback. The boy left the class, leaving Tessa to run away quickly from the Zoology lab.

As Tessa safely clambered over the boundary wall, she remembered the last words of the boy, “I have to be practical...I have to show mercy as I AM A ZOOLOGIST.”

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