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your muscles tighten
as you breathe into your centre
of gravity before it is exhaled
creating motion moving now
 here
because here steel wires press
up against ruffled feathers
and here
friends sweat in
the heat of suffocation
 here
a sibling stuffed in
the crate above needing
to defecate because there is
nowhere to go
not even in circles

because a lasered beak cannot open seeds

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Though the individual cages were in a single area, the bars of their cages prevented the calves from interacting with each other physically. It was difficult for me to see the calves in captivity and isolated. Some were jumping, like they wanted their freedom to frolic and couldn't understand why they had been caged. Or perhaps they knew their future through communication with the older cows that inhabited the areas close to them. Dr. Raj showed a particular closeness to the cattle, holding them, petting them, and calling them loving names, which the bovines seemed to reciprocate through their comfort with him. Something it haunted me, but I realised, care and violence often occur simultaneously. I am left with the need to reflect continuously, where is my care entwined with violence?

I went to pet the calves, my mind trying to come up with an apology for their state of life, a way of saying I want to be your friend even though I am complicit, I know my human presence may be uncomfortable. Of course some calves moved away as I placed my hand proximate enough that they could reach me if they chose to do so. But, some calves did choose to bring their faces close to my fist. I expected them to lick my hands like their elder peers did, but instead I found that each of the baby calves that approached my hand also suckled my hand. The feeling of their leathery tongue trying to grasp at my fist shocked my body. Their suckling created little spaces of vacuum, a means for them to ensure that milk reaches their mouth from their mother's udders. But I had no milk for them. Clearly the instinct could not be broken, there was tacit knowledge, even in the baby calves, that something was not right, that they could not enact the only action they knew within the moments they are born. When we asked whether the calves wanted to be with their mothers and exhibited that desire, the vet said nonchalantly, "no, not at all! See cows don't really care about their calves, they leave them anyway." But I was left questioning, do cattle leave their calves this early?

This zero hour separation process was only true for jersey and interbred cows but not for the desi gir cows. The desi calves are allowed to suckle on their mother's udders, but only for the first two days. This happens because desi cows are seen to be sacred, too intelligent to release her milk without the presence of her calf. Similarly, desi cows are not milked through a machine pump, but in fact hand milked in an area that directly faces the calves in the separate enclosure. Apparently, an indigenous cow won't give us her milk if she can't see her calf and will also not release milk into the machine.

All cows are sacred till they are not. Jersey cows are to be treated as sacred by hindus until only desi (indian) cows are worthy of love and only their milk can cure you of a disease. Yet, jersey cows will be treated as sacred to demean Muslim and Dalit farmers who must eat beef to survive.¹ Thus, the gift of the indian mother cow is conflated to all cows but selectively so, its sacredness used to justify and minoritise other beings.

¹ Govindrajan, Radhika. 2018. *Animal Intimacies: Interspecies Relatedness in India's Central Himalayas*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Pg. 75