

## **The Cat and the Mouse Story**

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My wife had many pets – one inside the house and the others outside. The one inside the house was a female dog, named ‘Lucy’. Outside the house, there was a female cat, named ‘mumu’, and several stray dogs, who had been given Bengali names, according to one of their features. Some examples are: ‘khoyeri ma’ (the brown mother), ‘kalo ma’ (the black mother), ‘roga kutti’ (the sick little one), ‘ghiey bhaja’ (fried in ghee, because it had no hair on its body) etc. The cat, in particular, was a favourite one of my wife, me and my two sons, Neel and Shubhlu.

Mumu used to come, as a matter of routine, four times a day, and ask for food – with soft miaos to start with, which gradually increased in intensity and length, till she was attended to. Initially, she used to be scared of Lucy, because Lucy used to bark loudly at the sight of mumu. Lucy apparently tried to admonish mumu for trying to get a share from her own quota of food. After sometime, however, Lucy gave up. Later, she ignored her alright, but did not allow mumu to come inside the house. Lucy was still highly jealous though, and, on days that she made a fuss over her food, threatening her that mumu would be served the food, if she did not take it, often worked in instantly increasing her appetite.

One evening, mumu came as usual, and started miaoing rather loudly and excitedly. Now that was rather unusual. After some time, she started miaoing at the top of her voice, so much so, that all of us inside the house guessed that something was wrong. My wife went out to investigate what the matter was, and called all of us outside, in as excited a tone as the cat’s. We found, to our great amusement, a freshly killed mouse neatly placed on the plate in which ‘mamma’ (my wife) gave her food. The cat started jumping and dancing, apparently in great joy and a sense of achievement. To further her demand for appreciation, she started playing with the dead mouse, throwing it in the air, and catching it again when it fell. She kept looking at my wife as if pleading her to do something which none of us understood. She then started rubbing her body against my wife’s feet. We still did not understand. We thought that she would eat the mouse, as cats usually do, but no, she did not. We went inside, thinking that perhaps she

wanted to have her mouse meal without us looking at her. But then she started her usual soft miao, which grew up in intensity and length as time progressed, which meant that she wanted food. Since her dinner plate was already filled up with the mouse, my wife served her food in another plate. Mew ate quickly, and with deep satisfaction, as was apparent from her soft and low growls. Apparently, she was very hungry, but we were hard put to explain why, despite her ravenous appetite, she did not eat the mouse. The only explanation I and my two sons could offer was that she killed the mouse and brought it as a dinner gift to ‘mamma’, in reciprocation of all the kindness mumu received from her. Needless to say, ‘mamma’ did not at all relish this explanation.

Apparently, cats have short memory – at least that is what mumu demonstrated when she repeated the same performance a few days later. This time, she confirmed our theory, because she, in her own way, tried much harder this time to persuade ‘mamma’ to accept the gift. Ultimately, ‘mamma’ ran inside the house, and Shubhlu had to serve food to mumu. Apparently, cats learn from a repeated experience – at least mumu did, because the cat and the mouse story did not repeat ever thereafter.

This episode took place many years ago, when we were residing at 13, West Avenue in the IIT Delhi campus. Neel and Shubhlu were both school going at that time.