



**Your on the
Street Reporter**



Uyless Black

**America's Capital
An Evening with an Ambassador**

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August 12, 2006

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter. Tonight Your Reporter and Reporterette spent an evening at the home of the Indian Ambassador, Ronen Sen, a delightful man, whose stories and story I will relate shortly.

The Ambassador invited me to his home for dinner to seek my counsel on his country's ongoing problems with cashmere. Before we arrived at his residence in Washington, DC, I mulled over why the Ambassador would ask advice about cashmere from a sheep man. After all, cashmere comes from goats; wool comes from sheep.

On our ranch in New Mexico, we raised sheep for a living. Granted, we kept a few goats around so we would be certain to have goat cheese each evening, along with our goose liver pate and snails. But we did not trade in goat hair or cashmere.

Goat cheese, goose liver, snails: In a pig's eye. Actually, that is what we ate at our ranch: Pigs. And tons of cows, a point of discussion later in this report. Anyway, I assumed the Ambassador was looking for help in dealing with fabric made from animals and other critters. Therefore, I was a multifaceted advisor, as I knew about snakeskin, horsehair, and cowhide. But for alpaca, camel hair, fur, chenille, crepe de Chine, silk, and gabardine, he would have to seek-out other advisors.

Upon our arrival, we were greeted by the Ambassador and his wife, "Good evening Mr. and Mrs. Black. Welcome. I look forward to your views on Kashmir." Oops.

The Truth is Told

Anyway, we did spend this evening at the Indian Ambassador's home. Before I report to you about the party, I think it is my responsibility to make sure you understand that we were not at the home of the American Indian Ambassador, but the Indian Indian Ambassador.

We can't be too careful these days about using the word and name "Indian." The Washington Redskins are once again under assault for continuing to use the name Redskins. Most Native Americans care less about the topic, but the issue will not go away because a few people get their fifteen seconds of fame by keeping the subject in the headlines.

In addition to the cashmere/Kashmir put-on, I'm also pulling your leg about Ambassador Sen greeting me personally. We did shake hands and talked briefly about his home. His wife mentioned the house was situated on 25 acres, and most of it was in the backyard...all downhill. But we were there along with a group of people from the National Press Club, courtesy of the Ambassador and his wife, to enjoy a fine Indian meal and dance to the beat of Indian fusion music.

Fusion? Upon receiving the invitation, I thought, *I'm fond of Indian food, but I doubt I'll be very keen on the music.* I had preconceived notions of nuclear fusion reactions, and I knew India had

nuclear weapons. But thinking the Ambassador had something else in mind for the evening's entertainment, I looked up the definition of fusion music: *The combination of musical styles. The merge or the resulting blend of elements from more than one tradition, e.g. jazz and rock.* Fine by me. If I could dance the Texas Two Step to Indian Fusion Music, then break-out those sitars and get the music fusing!

More Confusing Words and Terms

I am not well-versed in India's culture and ways of living. I have studied the country's history and read about their society. I find the subjects interesting and complex. Take the matter of the high status of cows in the Hindu religion.

As a youngster, the son of a cattle (and sheep) rancher, and living in the middle of vaunted Quarterhorse country, I was confused about the term, "Sacred cow." I recall it was used sarcastically as in, "You can't say a thing against horses. They're sacred cows." You can see why a child could have been perplexed about the term.

There were a lot of sacred horses in New Mexico. But at our ranch, there was no such thing as a sacred cow. They all came under the butcher's knife. However, a bull was different from a cow. Some of our bulls were sacred because they---in conjunction with cows---produced a lot of little bulls and cows. I'll return to the sacred bull shortly. Permit me to segue back to India's reverence for the cow.

What exactly does "sacred cow" mean? I consulted the Microsoft EncartaTM Dictionary: " Sacred Cow: Any person, institution, or custom that is considered above criticism. The term comes from the Hindu belief that cows are sacred and must not be killed."

As a member of a beef-raising family, one that often ate steak twice a day, I find this concept, fittingly enough, foreign. At first glance, it seems a bit weird for people to deny themselves an easy source of fat and protein. I am told that in India's leaner years, many of the people became dangerously lean. While cattle grazed about the neighborhood, eating-up their grass, the starving folks were forbidden to eat the cattle. I don't know your take on this situation, but to me, it seems like a violation of the natural food chain cycle.

Yes...but, how many times did our family, or anyone in America's Southwest, consume horse meat? Eating a horse? Don't even think about it. It's Un-American. It's like a Hindu eating a cow, which is Un-Indian. Some of the taboos of other cultures seem weird, whereas our taboos seem part of the natural order of life.

Brahman Bull, Brahman Cosmic Power, and Brahman Priest

As a kid, my favorite rodeo event was the "Brahma" Bull riding contest. I lived in southwestern ignorance for many years thinking the spelling for this bull was "Brahma." Wrong. It's "Brahman." I bring this topic up in this report because it will probably be my only opportunity to correct thousands of rodeo posters and programs. Also, the Brahman Bull is from India, and this report is about Indian subjects.

The Brahman *Bull* is the sacred *cow* of India, and many Hindus will not eat it, permit its killing, or its sale to anyone. Thus, this critter really doesn't do much, the bovine equivalent of the human couch potato.

However, this sacred cow is not really a cow; it's a bull. Don't believe me? Take a look at Figure 1.¹ My friends, that animal is not a cow. Anyway, the primary dictionary definition of cow is, "An adult female grazing four-footed animal."



Figure 1. Bull or cow?

Let's look at other definitions of the word Brahman:

- Brahman: In the Vedic hymns, the cosmic power of the priestly utterance. (?)
- Brahman: Designates the impersonal principle and first cause of the universe. It is the goal of some Hindus to attain Brahman, by personal experience through direct revelation. (?)
- Brahman: The name of the highest class in the system of Hinduism. The class is said to have come from the mouth of the Hindu god Brahma, who is the god of knowledge and understanding. (?)
- (?): If you have any idea whatsoever what these definitions mean, please send me an email at Obscure_Thoughts.com.

What's My Beef?

OK, I should get to the point. The Brahman Bull is a sacred cow, and as you see, its name has several vague but profound meanings. Notwithstanding its status in India, the Brahman Bull is treated with anything but respect in America. Still, I have not seen any Asian Indians protesting the role of the Brahman Bull in rodeos. Also, they do not protest the fact that old Brahman Bulls don't fade-away. They are fed-away to hungry Americans.²

¹ "Cattle Breed," Photo, American Brahman Breeders Association, email: brahman@ionet.net, Yahoo.

² The stars of the rodeo are not put under the knife. Like their successful equine counterparts, they are put out to pasture, to bask in their glory and to spread their superior genes into the next generation.

Why don't masses of Asian Indians rise up in protest at the way their sacred cow is treated? Because they are too busy doing productive things like building a vibrant nation. I sometimes wish protesters in this country, those who complain about matters that really do not matter, would get a life. Protest starvation in Darfur, not the name of a mascot.³

Brief Talks

After dinner, Ambassador Sen spoke briefly about his work in Washington. I snapped the photo in Figure 2 during his talk. He told a few stories of his relationship with the press corps. He joked that the party was the result of his wife's planning, "She does all the planning. I do all the talking."



Figure 2. Ambassador Sen. A gracious host and a gracious man.

During this time in the evening, Myron Belkind, an international correspondent, spoke of joining the AP bureau in New Delhi in 1966. He talked of how India had progressed from a country that required massive food aid 40 years ago to a country, which is not only self-sufficient, but is now the world's largest democracy.

Times are Changing

During the party, I struck up a conversation with a young couple, both news people. The man covered metropolitan news for a radio station consortium. He had spent the past days at the local airports reporting on the congestion and confusion resulting from the exposure in Britain of terrorists' plans to blow-up several planes headed for the United States.

³ Am I being insensitive about this matter? Maybe, but I direct you to my survey about American Natives' view on this subject in my 2005 Report, "Santa Fe, New Mexico."

I asked if either were in print journalism. Neither was and replied if they entered print journalism it would be Internet-based, not traditional daily newspapers. They said, "Newspapers and news magazines are in trouble. They're losing subscribers. Young people are getting their news from the Net."

- Reporter, "That's what I've heard. I'm old guard; I still read the daily papers. But I also surf and print-out articles....Say, do you use the Help Desks of computer vendors and Internet providers."
- Couple, "Yes."
- "You know where most of those Web dialogues and telephone conversations go?"
- Couple, "Never thought about it."
- "India. I read where Americans are complaining about the loss of low-level factory jobs to foreign countries. These jobs of computer and communications technical assistance are not rocket science, but they do require a lot of skill to do well. They've gone to India."

We talked awhile about India's progress and parted company. The party was fun. The food was good. The fusion music was interesting.

Mopping Up After Dinner

Sorry about the cashmere/Kashmir joke. I couldn't resist. On a more serious level, India can become an even bigger technical and economic power if their budding capitalistic structure can overcome their stifling, inefficient government bureaucracy, and especially their massive corruption system.

They also need to improve their college-level educational system. It pales in comparison to ours. I get arguments on this issue. One of my friends tells me that all India needs to do is to keep sending their citizens to our MITs and take their diplomas back to their home country.

I find it revealing that when I call for technical assistance about an America On Line (AOL) problem, I end up speaking with a person located in India (IOL). Ahem...We talk via Voice over IP, the subject of one of my books. Let me tell you about *Voice over IP*. ...No, I promise: Never will I do that to you.

In closing, thank you, Ambassador and Mrs. Sen for a lovely evening. If I may be of further assistance in your cashmere disputes with Pakistan, just let me know.

America's Sacred Cows

The last task for this report: Let's compile a list of the current sacred cows in America's society. I'll start with a few and ask for your submittals. Then we will have a vote on the cow that is the most sacred in America, one to which you dare not utter a word of criticism:

Social Security.
 My books.
 Medicare.
 My essays.
 Horses.

My mother.
Members of the armed forces.
My wife.
Police and fire fighters.
My dog.
Muhammad Ali.
My wife's mother.
Native American Indians.
My dog's mother.
The Pope.
My sense of humor.
Billy Graham.
These reports.

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