SEPTEMBER 20, 2009 THESKEPTICARENA.COM

VICK PLAYS EARLY, GETS STANDING O IN PHILLY DEBUT

HE PLAYS QB, RECEIVER IN EAGLES OFFENSE; PROTESTS MUTED

THOUGH THERE WAS A SMATTERING OF PROTESTERS BOTH FOR AND AGAINST MICHAEL VICK, THE CONVICTED DOG-KILLER GOT A STANDING OVATION FROM THE PHILADELPHIA FANS WHEN HE MADE HIS EAGLES DEBUT ON THEIR FIRST OFFENSIVE SERIES OF TONIGHT’S EXHIBITION GAME, THE INQUIRER REPORTS. VICK LINED UP AT QUARTERBACK AND WIDE RECEIVER, COMPLETING A KEY PASS IN AN EARLY SCORING DRIVE.

ANIMAL-RIGHTS ACTIVISTS TOLD THE DAILY NEWS THAT SENTIMENT OUTSIDE LINCOLN FINANCIAL FIELD WAS HEAVILY IN VICK’S FAVOR, TOO. “90% OF THE PEOPLE WE’VE ENCOUNTERED ARE IN SUPPORT OF MICHAEL VICK,” SAID ONE OF A SMALL GROUP OF PROTESTERS; ANOTHER HELD UP A SIGN READING “ETHICS OVER ATHLETICS.” ABOUT A DOZEN MEMBERS OF THE LOCAL NAACP SHOWED UP TO SUPPORT VICK.

READER COMMENTS

CAT-LOVER

VICK CONTINUALLY SAYS HE MADE BAD CHOICES. THAT'S LUDICROUS! HE HAD FUN AND MADE MONEY IN A PSYCHOPATHIC ENDEAVOR THAT EVEN THE SIMPLEST MINDED MORON WOULD KNOW IS NOT ONLY A CRIME BUT AN ACT OF HORROR. HE CANNOT BE FORGIVEN.

IN A RELATED STORY ...

IN TAMING DOGS, HUMANS MAY HAVE SOUGHT A MEAL

THE DOG HAS SO MANY FINE QUALITIES IT IS HARD TO KNOW WHICH IT WAS PRIZED AND BRED FOR BY THE EARLY PEOPLE WHO FIRST DOMESTICATED ITS NOBLE ANCESTOR, THE WOLF. WAS IT THE DOG’S VALOR IN THE HUNT, PERHAPS, OR ITS ROLE AS NIGHT WATCHMAN, OR ITS STRENGTH IN PULLING A SLED, OR ITS COMPANIONABLE WARMTH ON COLD NIGHTS?

A NEW STUDY OF DOGS WORLDWIDE, THE LARGEST OF ITS KIND, SUGGESTS A DIFFERENT ANSWER, ONE THAT ANY DOG OWNER IS BOUND TO FIND REPULSIVE: WOLVES MAY HAVE FIRST BEEN DOMESTICATED FOR THEIR MEAT. THAT IS THE PROPOSAL OF A TEAM OF GENETICISTS LED BY PETER SAVOLAINEN OF THE ROYAL INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY IN STOCKHOLM.

SAMPLING THE MITOCHONDRIAL DNA OF DOGS WORLDWIDE, THE TEAM FOUND THAT IN EVERY REGION OF THE WORLD ALL DOGS SEEM TO BELONG TO ONE LINEAGE. THAT INDICATES A SINGLE DOMESTICATION EVENT. IF WOLVES HAD BEEN DOMESTICATED IN MANY PLACES, THERE WOULD BE MORE THAN ONE LINEAGE, EACH LEADING BACK TO A LOCAL POPULATION OF WOLVES.

THE SINGLE DOMESTICATION EVENT SEEMS TO HAVE OCCURRED IN SOUTHERN CHINA, WHERE THE DOGS HAVE GREATER GENETIC DIVERSITY THAN THOSE ELSEWHERE. THE REGION OF HIGHEST DIVERSITY IS USUALLY THE PLACE OF ORIGIN BECAUSE A SPECIES TENDS TO LOSE DIVERSITY AS IT SPREADS.

DR. SAVOLAINEN SAMPLED A PART OF THE DOG GENOME, THE MITOCHONDRIAL DNA, AND WAS ABLE TO ESTIMATE THE TIME OF THE DOMESTICATION — PROBABLY AROUND THE PERIOD THAT HUNTER-GATHERERS FIRST SETTLED DOWN IN FIXED COMMUNITIES IN CHINA, ABOUT 11,000 TO 14,000 YEARS AGO. THOSE PEOPLE WOULD HAVE HAD AN ORGANIZED CULTURE THAT ENABLED THEM TO MAKE MUZZLES, AND POSSIBLY CAGES, THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN NEEDED TO HANDLE WOLVES.

THERE IS A LONG TRADITION OF EATING DOGS IN SOUTHERN CHINA, WHERE DOG BONES WITH CUT MARKS ON THEM HAVE BEEN FOUND AT ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES.

DR. SAVOLAINEN SAID WOLVES PROBABLY DOMESTICATED THEMSELVES WHEN THEY BEGAN SCAVENGING AROUND THE GARBAGE DUMPS AT THE FIRST HUMAN SETTLEMENTS, A THEORY ADVOCATED BY RAY COPPINGER, A DOG BIOLOGIST AT HAMPSHIRE COLLEGE IN MASSACHUSETTS. AS THE WOLVES BECAME TAMER, THEY WOULD HAVE BEEN CAPTURED AND BRED. GIVEN LOCAL TRADITIONS, DR. SAVOLAINEN SUGGESTS, THE WOLVES MAY HAVE BEEN BRED FOR THE TABLE.

THUS, DOGS MAY HAVE THUS INSINUATED THEMSELVES INTO HUMAN LIFE BY MEANS OF GARBAGE AND DOG MEAT, BUT THEY QUICKLY ASSUMED LESS DEMEANING ROLES. ONCE DOMESTICATED, THEY RAPIDLY SPREAD WEST FROM THE EASTERN END OF THE EURASIAN CONTINENT.

MOST PEOPLE DO NOT EAT DOGS, SO THEY MUST HAVE SPREAD SO QUICKLY FOR OTHER REASONS, PERHAPS BECAUSE OF THEIR USE AS GUARD DOGS OR IN PULLING SLEDS, DR. SAVOLAINEN SAID.

HIS REPORT WAS WRITTEN WITH JUN-FENG PANG OF THE KUNMING INSTITUTE OF ZOOLOGY IN CHINA, WHO ANALYZED THE DNA OF THE MANY CHINESE DOGS IN THE STUDY. IT WAS PUBLISHED LAST WEEK IN THE JOURNAL MOLECULAR BIOLOGY AND EVOLUTION.

IN 2002, DR. SAVOLAINEN WROTE THAT DOGS HAD BEEN DOMESTICATED FROM WOLVES IN EAST ASIA, A CONCLUSION THAT WAS CHALLENGED LAST MONTH BY A TEAM AT CORNELL UNIVERSITY. THE CORNELL TEAM SAID GENETIC DIVERSITY WAS AS HIGH IN AFRICAN VILLAGE DOGS AS IN THOSE IN CHINA.

DR. SAVOLAINEN DISPUTED THE CORNELL CALCULATION IN HIS NEW REPORT, CONTENDING THAT DIVERSITY WAS, IN FACT, HIGHER IN CHINESE DOGS.

ADAM BOYKO, A MEMBER OF THE CORNELL TEAM, SAID THAT DR. SAVOLAINEN’S TEAM HAD NOW BUILT A PLAUSIBLE HYPOTHESIS FROM DETAILED GENETIC DATA BUT THAT OTHER EXPLANATIONS MIGHT STILL BE POSSIBLE, INCLUDING THAT DOGS HAD BEEN DOMESTICATED AT A SECOND SITE, OUTSIDE CHINA, AND HAD SPREAD EVERYWHERE BUT CHINA.

STEPHEN O’BRIEN, AN EXPERT ON THE GENETICS OF DOMESTICATION AT THE NATIONAL CANCER INSTITUTE, SAID DR. SAVOLAINEN’S ARGUMENT FOR A SINGLE DOMESTICATION EVENT IN SOUTHERN CHINA WAS “A PRETTY GOOD CONCLUSION” BUT ONE THAT COULD BE STRENGTHENED BY A MORE THOROUGH SAMPLING OF WOLVES THROUGHOUT THE WORLD.

A TEAM OF AMERICAN RESEARCHERS IS EXAMINING THE GENETICS OF DOGS AND WOLVES WITH A SO-CALLED DOG CHIP, A DEVICE THAT IS PROGRAMMED TO RECOGNIZE THOUSANDS OF DIFFERENT SITES ON THE DOG AND WOLF GENOME, NOT JUST THE MITOCHONDRIAL DNA STUDIED BY DR. SAVOLAINEN. THE DATA HAVE NOT YET BEEN PUBLISHED, BUT SOME OF IT “DOESN’T AGREE COMPLETELY” WITH AN EAST ASIAN ORIGIN OF DOGS, DR. O’BRIEN SAID.

THE DISPUTES ABOUT THE ORIGINS OF DOGS ARISE BECAUSE RESEARCHERS ARE JUST CUTTING THEIR TEETH ON WHAT DR. O’BRIEN CALLED “GENOMIC ARCHAEOLOGY.”

“IT’S A BRAND NEW FIELD,” HE SAID. “WE’RE JUST LEARNING HOW TO DO IT.”

DOMESTICATION OF THE DOG AND OTHER ANIMALS IS BOTH OF INTRINSIC INTEREST AND OF RELEVANCE TO THE HUMAN PAST. “DOMESTICATION WAS REALLY THE LEVER BY WHICH CIVILIZATION WAS ABLE TO ORGANIZE INTO COMMUNITIES LARGER THAN THOSE OF FORAGING FAMILIES,” DR. O’BRIEN SAID.

DOGS WERE EVIDENTLY SO USEFUL TO EARLY PEOPLE THAT THEY SPREAD LIKE WILDFIRE. ON THE BASIS OF CURRENT EVIDENCE, THEY WERE THE FIRST SPECIES TO BE DOMESTICATED.

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THE SCIENCE SEGMENT

FIRST REAL EVIDENCE FOR A ROCKY EXOPLANET

THERE’S FINALLY PROOF THAT EARTH-LIKE PLANETS CAN EXIST OUTSIDE OUR SOLAR SYSTEM: SCIENTISTS HAVE MANAGED TO MEASURE THE MASS OF EXOPLANET COROT-7B, REVEALING THAT IT’S THE FIRST EXOPLANET WITH A CONFIRMED DENSITY SIMILAR TO OUR OWN.

“THIS IS A DAY WE’VE BEEN WAITING FOR FOR A LONG TIME,” SAID EXOPLANET RESEARCHER SARA SEAGER OF THE MASSACHUSETTES INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY, WHO WAS NOT INVOLVED IN THE RESEARCH. “IT’S THE FIRST DEFINITIVE ROCKY WORLD BEYOND OUR SOLAR SYSTEM, AND IT’S OPENING A NEW GATE FOR OUR RESEARCH. WE’RE REALLY, REALLY EXCITED ABOUT IT.”

WHEN ASTRONOMERS DISCOVERED COROT-7B IN FEBRUARY, THEY COULDN’T DETERMINE ITS MASS BECAUSE THEY DIDN’T HAVE PRECISE ENOUGH MEASUREMENTS OF THE VELOCITY OF ITS STAR. NOW, USING 70 HOURS OF OBSERVATION DATA FROM THE HIGH ACCURACY RADIAL VELOCITY PLANET SEARCHER (HARPS) SPECTROGRAPH, SCIENTISTS FROM THE EUROPEAN SOUTHERN OBSERVATORY HAVE CALCULATED THAT THE EXOPLANET IS ONLY ABOUT FIVE TIMES MORE MASSIVE THAN EARTH.

COMBINED WITH THE PLANET’S KNOWN RADIUS, WHICH IS ALMOST TWICE THAT OF EARTH, THE NEW MASS MEASUREMENT MAKES COROT-7B THE FIRST EXOPLANET WITH A KNOWN DENSITY SIMILAR TO EARTH’S.

MOST EXOPLANETS ARE GASEOUS GIANTS THAT RESEMBLE JUPITER OR NEPTUNE. BUT IF EXTRATERRESTRIAL LIFE EXISTS IN THE UNIVERSE, SEAGER SAID WE’RE MOST LIKELY TO FIND IT ON A SMALL, ROCKY EXOPLANET WITH A DENSITY SIMILAR TO EARTH. “THE HOLY GRAIL IN EXOPLANETS, AND MAYBE IN ALL OF SCIENCE, IS TO FIND ANOTHER PLANET LIKE EARTH, A PLANET THAT HAS SIGNS OF LIFE ON IT,” SHE SAID.

UNFORTUNATELY, WITH DAYTIME TEMPERATURES ABOVE 2,000 DEGREES FAHRENHEIT AND NIGHTTIME TEMPS OF MINUS 200, THE ENVIRONMENT ON COROT-7B IS PROBABLY TOO EXTREME TO SUPPORT LIFE. “BUT IT’S HELPING TO TELL US THAT THESE THINGS MUST BE PRETTY COMMON,” SEAGER SAID.

INDEED, SCIENTISTS HAVE FOUND ABOUT A DOZEN SMALL EXOPLANETS THAT MIGHT BE EARTH-LIKE, INCLUDING A SISTER PLANET CALLED COROT-7C THAT THEY DISCOVERED WHILE STUDYING COROT-7B. “BUT COROT-7B IS THE ONLY ONE WITH A MEASUREMENT OF THE MASS,” ASTROPHYSICIST CLAIRE MOUTOU OF THE LABORATORY OF ASTROPHYSICS OF MARSEILLES IN FRANCE WROTE IN AN E-MAIL. MOUTOU AND HER COLLEAGUES PRESENTED THEIR RESULTS WEDNESDAY AT THE EUROPEAN PLANETARY SCIENCE CONGRESS IN GERMANY.

ALTHOUGH SCIENTISTS GUESSED COROT-7B MIGHT HAVE AN EARTH-LIKE DENSITY AS SOON AS THEY DETECTED THE SMALL PLANET, THE VARIABLE ACTIVITY OF THE PLANET’S STAR MADE IT HARD TO KNOW FOR SURE. THE COROT SATELLITE DETECTS EXOPLANETS BY MEASURING TINY CHANGES IN A STAR’S BRIGHTNESS AS A PLANET PASSES IN FRONT OF IT, BUT THE COROT-7 STAR IS ALMOST CONSTANTLY TWINKLING.

“THE STELLAR ACTIVITY (PRESENCE OF CHANGING STARSPOTS ON ITS SURFACE) GENERATES A STRONG SCATTERING OF THE MEASUREMENTS,” MOUTOU SAID. “IT WAS PRETTY HARD TO DISENTANGLE THE EFFECT OF STELLAR ACTIVITY FROM THE PLANET SIGNAL.”

IN ADDITION TO BEING THE FIRST ROCKY EXOPLANET, COROT-7B ALSO ORBITS CLOSER TO ITS HOST STAR THAN ANY OTHER KNOWN EXOPLANET. WHIPPING AROUND AT A RECORD-BREAKING SPEED OF 750,000 KILOMETERS PER HOUR, THE PLANET’S EXTREME ENVIRONMENT MAY INCLUDE LAVA OR BOILING OCEANS ON ITS SURFACE. BECAUSE THIS IS THE FIRST EXOPLANET OF ITS KIND, RESEARCHERS DON’T KNOW QUITE WHAT TO EXPECT.

JUST LAST WEEK, BEFORE THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF COROT-7B’S MASS, ASTRONOMER GREG LOUGHLIN OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SANTA CRUZ, TOLD WIRED HOW EXCITING IT WOULD BE TO FIND SUCH A PLANET. “WE HAVE NO IDEA WHAT A FIVE-EARTH-MASS PLANET IS LIKE,” LOUGHLIN SAID. “IT COULD BE AN OVERSIZED VERSION OF EARTH, IT COULD BE A SUPER-EARTH. OR ALTERNATELY, IT COULD BE A SUB-NEPTUNE OR A SUB-URANUS. IT REALLY IS THE LAST BASIC FUNDAMENTAL KIND OF PLANET THAT WE HAVE NOT HAD ANY KIND OF A LOOK AT.”

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ABROAD

INDIAN WOMEN FIND NEW PEACE IN RAIL COMMUTE

PALWAL, INDIA — AS THE MORNING COMMUTER TRAIN RATTLED DOWN THE TRACK, CHINU SHARMA, AN OFFICE WORKER, ENJOYED THE ABSENCE OF MEN. SOME OF THEM PINCH AND GROPE WOMEN ON TRAINS, OR SHOUT INSULTS AND CATCALLS, SHE SAID. HER FRIEND VANDANA ROHILE AGREED AND WIDENED HER EYES IN MOCK IMITATION.

UP AND DOWN THE JOSTLING TRAIN, WOMEN REPEATED THE SAME THEME: AS MILLIONS OF WOMEN HAVE POURED INTO THE INDIAN WORK FORCE OVER THE LAST DECADE, THEY HAVE MET WITH DIFFERENT OBSTACLES IN A TRADITION-BOUND, PATRIARCHAL CULTURE, BUT FEW ARE MORE ANNOYING THAN THE BASIC TASK OF GETTING TO WORK.

THE PROBLEMS OF TAUNTING AND HARASSMENT, KNOWN AS EVE TEASING, ARE SO PERSISTENT THAT IN RECENT MONTHS THE GOVERNMENT HAS DECIDED TO SIMPLY REMOVE MEN ALTOGETHER. IN A PILOT PROGRAM, EIGHT NEW COMMUTER TRAINS EXCLUSIVELY FOR FEMALE PASSENGERS HAVE BEEN INTRODUCED IN INDIA’S FOUR LARGEST CITIES: NEW DELHI, MUMBAI, CHENNAI AND CALCUTTA.

THE TRAINS ARE KNOWN AS LADIES SPECIALS, AND ON ONE RECENT ROUND TRIP IN WHICH A MALE REPORTER GOT PERMISSION TO BOARD, THE WOMEN COMMUTING BETWEEN THE INDUSTRIAL TOWN OF PALWAL AND NEW DELHI WERE VERY PLEASED.

“IT’S SO NICE HERE,” SAID A TEACHER, KIRAN KHAS, WHO HAS COMMUTED BY TRAIN FOR 17 YEARS. MS. KHAS SAID THE REGULAR TRAINS WERE THRONGED WITH VEGETABLE SELLERS, PICKPOCKETS, BEGGARS AND LOTS OF MEN. “HERE ON THIS TRAIN,” SHE SAID, AS IF DESCRIBING A MIRACLE, “YOU CAN BOARD ANYWHERE AND SIT FREELY.”

INDIA WOULD SEEM TO BE A COUNTRY WHERE WOMEN HAVE SHATTERED THE GLASS CEILING. THE COUNTRY’S MOST POWERFUL POLITICIAN, SONIA GANDHI, PRESIDENT OF THE CONGRESS PARTY, IS A WOMAN. THE COUNTRY’S CURRENT PRESIDENT, A SOMEWHAT CEREMONIAL POSITION, IS A WOMAN. SO ARE THE FOREIGN SECRETARY AND THE CHIEF MINISTER OF THE COUNTRY’S MOST POPULOUS STATE, UTTAR PRADESH, AND THE NEW MINISTER OF RAILWAYS. INDIA’S CONSTITUTION GUARANTEES EQUAL RIGHTS FOR WOMEN, WHILE INDIAN LAW STIPULATES EQUAL PAY AND PUNISHMENT FOR SEXUAL HARASSMENT.

BUT THE REALITY IS VERY DIFFERENT FOR THE AVERAGE WORKING WOMAN, MANY ANALYSTS SAY.

SINCE INDIA BEGAN ECONOMIC REFORMS IN THE EARLY 1990S, WOMEN HAVE ENTERED THE URBAN WORK FORCE, INITIALLY AS GOVERNMENT OFFICE WORKERS, BUT NOW INCREASINGLY AS EMPLOYEES IN THE BOOMING SERVICES SECTOR OR IN PROFESSIONAL JOBS. OVER ALL, THE NUMBER OF WORKING WOMEN HAS ROUGHLY DOUBLED IN 15 YEARS.

BUT VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN HAS ALSO INCREASED, ACCORDING TO NATIONAL STATISTICS. BETWEEN 2003 AND 2007, RAPE CASES ROSE BY MORE THAN 30 PERCENT, KIDNAPPING OR ABDUCTION CASES ROSE BY MORE THAN 50 PERCENT, WHILE TORTURE AND MOLESTATION ALSO JUMPED SHARPLY.

MALA BHANDARI, WHO RUNS AN ORGANIZATION FOCUSED ON WOMEN AND CHILDREN, SAID THE INFLUX OF WOMEN INTO THE WORKPLACE HAD ERODED THE TRADITIONAL SEPARATION BETWEEN PUBLIC SPACE (THE WORKPLACE) AND PRIVATE SPACE (THE HOME). “NOW THAT WOMEN HAVE STARTED OCCUPYING PUBLIC SPACES, ISSUES WILL ALWAYS ARISE,” SHE SAID. “AND THE FIRST ISSUE IS SECURITY.”

INDIA’S NEWSPAPERS ARE FILLED WITH ACCOUNTS OF THE FRICTIONS WROUGHT BY SO MUCH SOCIAL CHANGE.

LAST WEEK, A HUSBAND IN NOIDA WAS BROUGHT IN BY THE POLICE AND ACCUSED OF BEATING HIS WIFE BECAUSE SHE HAD CUT HER HAIR IN A WESTERN STYLE. IN JUNE, FOUR COLLEGES IN KANPUR TRIED TO BAR FEMALE STUDENTS FROM WEARING BLUE JEANS, SAYING THAT THEY WERE “INDECENT” AND THAT THEY CONTRIBUTED TO RISING CASES OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT. AFTER PROTESTS FROM FEMALE STUDENTS, STATE OFFICIALS ORDERED THE COLLEGES TO DROP THE RESTRICTION.

FOR MANY YEARS, WOMEN TRAVELING BY TRAIN SAT WITH MEN, UNTIL CROWDING AND SECURITY CONCERNS PROMPTED THE RAILROAD TO RESERVE TWO COMPARTMENTS PER TRAIN FOR WOMEN. BUT WITH TRAINS BADLY OVERCROWDED, MEN WOULD BREAK INTO CARS FOR WOMEN AND CLAIM SEATS. MUMBAI STARTED OPERATING TWO WOMEN-ONLY TRAINS IN 1992, YET THE PROGRAM WAS NEVER EXPANDED. THEN, WITH COMPLAINTS RISING FROM FEMALE PASSENGERS, MAMATA BANERJEE, THE NEW MINISTER OF RAILWAYS, ANNOUNCED THE EIGHT NEW LADIES SPECIALS TRAINS.

“IT SPEAKS OF THEIR COMING OF AGE AND ASSERTIVENESS,” SAID MUKESH NIGAM, A HIGH-RANKING RAILWAY OFFICIAL.

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FAMOUS QUOTES

KURT VONNEGUT, JR. (1922 –2007) 84 YEARS.

HE WAS AN AMERICAN NOVELIST KNOWN FOR WORKS BLENDING SATIRE, BLACK COMEDY, AND SCIENCE FICTION INCLUDING SLAUGHTERHOUSE-FIVE (1969), CAT'S CRADLE (1963), AND BREAKFAST OF CHAMPIONS (1973). HE WAS KNOWN FOR HIS HUMANIST BELIEFS AS WELL AS BEING HONORARY PRESIDENT OF THE AMERICAN HUMANIST ASSOCIATION.

"THOSE WHO BELIEVE IN TELEKINETICS, RAISE MY HAND."