

PETA INDIA'S INVESTIGATION INTO AJANTA CIRCUS

KOLKATA, WEST BENGAL

23 JANUARY 2022



Table of Contents

I.	Details of the Investigation	3
II.	Executive Summary	4
III.	Observations and Findings	6
IV.	Apparent Legal Violations	21
V.	Conclusions and Recommendations	22

I. Details of the Investigation

Date: 23 January 2022

Shows attended: 4 pm and 7 pm shows

Location: Ajanta Circus, Sinthi More Mela Ground, Nainan Para, Baranagar, Kolkata
700036

Objectives

- To determine whether animals are exhibited or used for performances in Ajanta Circus
- To check for any violations of animal protection laws

II. Executive Summary

An eyewitness investigation into Ajanta Circus (camped at Sinthi More Mela Ground in the Baranagar area of Kolkata, West Bengal) on 23 January 2022 revealed that the circus is forcing animals to perform acts which are not registered and is using animals who are not registered as per the Performing Animals Registration Certificate (PARC) issued by the Animal Welfare Board of India (AWBI).

As per the PARC (**Annexure 1**) issued to M/s Ajanta Circus on 5 March 2009 by the AWBI, four elephants, five horses, nine dogs, seven cockatoos, and two macaws are registered for performances. However, the AWBI issued a show cause notice (**Annexure 2**) to the circus on 1 December 2021 for breach of condition of registration under the Performing Animals (Registration) Rules (PARR), 2001. It seems the circus never gave a comprehensive explanation to AWBI on the notice issued. PETA India's investigator found that despite the legal action initiated by the AWBI against the circus, it is using four dogs, one horse, six cockatoos, and three macaws for performances.

As per the PARC, the registered dog acts include (a) up balancing (b) walking with an umbrella and a bag as a "school girl," (c) rolling around the ring, and (d) counting numbers and finding the numbers from the ring (a duration of 15 minutes). However, the dogs were filmed and photographed sitting on plastic chairs, walking crisscross between a man's legs, being forced to walk on their forelegs, jumping zig-zag across each other, and climbing up and sliding down a slide multiple times – acts which are not registered in the PARC.

As per the PARC, the registered horse acts include a parade of four horses along with circus artists (10 minutes in a show), one horse with a female artist showing balances (10 minutes in a show), and four horses group item (10 minutes in a show). However, only one horse was filmed and photographed being forced to run around the ring in circles, and in another act, a male performer gets on and off the horse's back repeatedly and performs balancing tricks while the horse is running around in the ring – acts which are not fully or partially registered in the PARC.

As per the PARC, the registered cockatoo acts include six cockatoos riding a miniature giant wheel (a duration of three minutes), one cockatoo hoisting the national flag (a duration of two minutes in a show), and seven cockatoos sitting in a merry-go-round swings (a duration of three minutes in a show). The only registered macaw act is two macaws cycling on a table (a duration of three minutes in a show). However, birds were filmed and photographed jumping from one bar to another on a prop, walking backwards on top of a basketball, balancing on a miniature seesaw, moving side to side on the miniature seesaw, sitting on a miniature giant wheel, walking on a cylindrical attachment which seemed to speed up the giant wheel, hoisting a flag, and firing a miniature cannon – acts which are not fully or partially registered in the PARC.

Using unregistered animals and forcing animals to perform unregistered acts are gross violations of The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (PCA) Act, 1960, and the PARR. The eyewitness recorded ample photographic video evidence documenting the use of four dogs, one horse, six cockatoos, and three macaws.

The dogs were not collared and leashed but rather handled using what looked like a thin rope which was tied and untied as and when each of their acts were ongoing. The dogs were reluctant to perform the acts and kept trying to get away from the human performer, and

throughout the act, the human performer can be seen dragging, pushing, and prodding them to perform. During the first act, wherein a dog was being forced to walk on his hind legs, he kept stopping again and again, so much so that the human performer stopped the act midway (which indicates that the animal is either in pain, aged, or exhausted or has not been well cared for).

The cockatoos and macaws were handled very harshly. In one act wherein a macaw was forced to fire a miniature cannon, the resulting boom of the cannon was deafening and the birds were heard screeching in fright. During all the bird acts, the human performer can be seen nudging and prodding the birds with a stick to force them to perform. The circus staff was seen handling the birds carelessly.

The horse was forced to run around the ring while the human performer held a whip in his hand and used it twice in the air to scare the animal into performing.

Causing animals unnecessary pain and suffering is an apparent violation of Section 3 of the PCA Act and is a punishable offence under Section 11(1)(a).

III. Observations and Findings

Dogs in the circus were filmed being forced to perform the following acts:

- Sitting on stools
- Walking crisscross between a man's legs
- Walking on their forelegs (as the human performer held the hind legs up in the air)
- Jumping zig-zag across each other
- Climbing up and sliding down a slide multiple times
- Walking on their hind legs

The first five acts are not fully or partially registered as per the PARC.

One horse was filmed being forced to perform in the following acts:

- Running around the ring in circles
- Running around the ring as a human performer got on and off the horse's back and performed balancing tricks (like kneeling and headstands)

Both acts are not fully or partially registered as per the PARC.

Six cockatoos and three macaws were filmed being forced to perform the following acts:

- Jumping from one bar to another on a prop (twice)
- Walking backwards on a basketball
- Balancing on a miniature seesaw
- Hoisting a flag
- Moving side to side on the miniature seesaw
- Walking on a cylindrical attachment
- Firing a cannon
- Sitting on a miniature giant wheel as it moved

The first seven acts are not fully or partially registered as per the PARC.

Dog Shows

- In these shows, dogs are made to sit on plastic chairs. They were not collared and leashed – instead, thin ropes were used to handle them throughout the show.
- Circus staff was handling the animals very harshly, and the eyewitness investigator documented cruelty between the acts: a dog was pushed from one chair to another, dogs were pulled and dragged by the rope around their necks, and a dog fell from a chair when the human performer pushed him or her using force, for example.
- Dogs were forced to perform tricks which are unnatural to their species, such as walking on their hind legs, climbing and sliding down a slide, jumping across each other's backs, walking crisscross between a man's legs, and walking on their front legs.



Photo 1: Dogs are made to sit on plastic stools, an act not registered with the AWBI.



Photo 2: A dog is pushed from one chair to another by a human performer.



Photo 3: An exhausted dog stops mid-act while being pulled up using a rope tied to his neck.



Photo 4: A human performer moves a chair with force, causing the dog who was sitting on it to fall down.



Photo 5: A dog tries to get away from a handler/human performer.



Photo 6: A dog walks crisscross between a man's legs, an act not registered with the AWBI.



Photo 7: A dog is forced to walk on his forelegs on the edge of the ring as a human performer holds his hind legs in the air, an act not registered with the AWBI.



Photo 8: Dogs are made to jump zig-zag across each other, an act not registered with the AWBI.



Photo 9: Dogs are forced to climb up and slide down a slide, an act not registered with the AWBI.



Photo 10: A human performer forces a visibly reluctant dog to climb up a slide.

Horse Shows

- In both circus shows, a horse was forced to perform unnatural tricks such as running around the ring in circles and running around the ring while a human performer performed balancing acts (like kneeling and headstands) on top of the horse.
- The human performer was wielding a whip, which he occasionally used to scare the horse.



Photo 11: A horse runs in the ring as a human performer wields a whip to scare the animal, an act not registered with the AWBI.



Photo 12: A male performer jumps on and off a horse's back, an act not registered with the AWBI.



Photo 13: A male performer kneels on top of a horse's back while the horse is forced to run around the ring in circles, an act not registered with the AWBI.



Photo 14: A male performer does a headstand on top of a horse while the horse is being made to run in the ring, an act not registered with the AWBI.

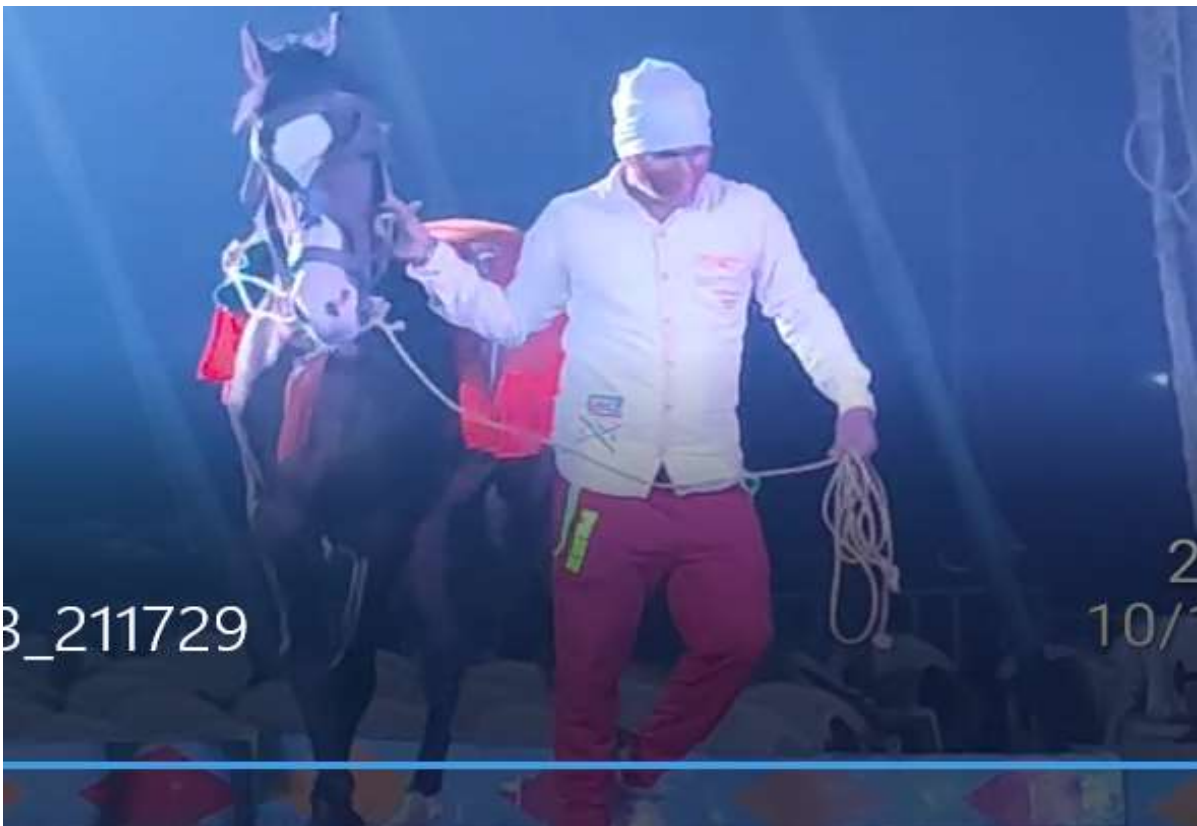


Photo 15: Circus staff drags a horse backstage after the show.

Bird Shows

- In both shows, cockatoos and macaws were forced to perform unnatural tricks such as hoisting a flag, walking backwards on a basketball, jumping on bars in a prop, balancing on a seesaw, moving side to side on a seesaw, sitting on a miniature giant wheel, running on a cylindrical attachment, and firing a cannon.
- The birds were handled harshly and carelessly by the circus staff.
- Throughout the acts, a handler/human performer can be seen jabbing and prodding the birds with a stick.
- Before and after the show, the birds could be heard screeching backstage, which could indicate that they were being handled roughly.



Photo 16: A human performer carries a bird in a careless manner



Photo 17: A macaw is made to hoist a flag, an act not registered with the AWBI.



Photo 18: A cockatoo is made to jump on bars on a prop, an act not registered with the AWBI.



Photo 19: A macaw is made to walk backwards on a basketball, an act not registered with the AWBI.



Photo 20: Two cockatoos are made to balance on a seesaw while a macaw moves side to side on it, an act not registered with the AWBI.



Photo 21: Four cockatoos are made to balance on a miniature giant wheel while a macaw walks on a cylindrical attachment, an act not fully registered with the AWBI.



Photo 22: A macaw is made to fire a cannon, an act not registered with the AWBI.

Additional Photos



Photo 23: A ticket from the 4 pm show attended by the eyewitness investigator



Photo 24: A ticket from the 7 pm show attended by the eyewitness investigator

Copies of photographs and videos from the eyewitness investigation are on the pen drive enclosed as Annexure 3.

IV. Apparent Legal Violations

There were rampant violations of the PCA Act and the PARR by Ajanta Circus, including the following:

- Five dogs, two macaws, four horses, and four elephants are not used by the circus, although they are registered with the AWBI for performances. Their whereabouts are unknown, as mentioned in the show cause notice issued by the AWBI on 1 December 2020, a potential violation of Rule 5 of the PARR.
- One macaw not registered with the AWBI was used for performances, an apparent violation of Section 3 of the PCA Act and Rule 5 of the PARR.
- Animals were forced to perform tricks in apparent violation of Sections 3 and 11(1)(a) of the PCA Act and Rule 5 of the PARR.
 - Dogs were forced to jump zig-zag across each other.
 - A dog was forced to walk crisscross between a man's legs.
 - Dogs were forced to sit on stools.
 - Dogs were forced to climb up and slide down a slide multiple times.
 - A dog was made to walk on his forelegs.
 - A horse was forced to run in circles around the ring.
 - A macaw was forced to hoist a flag.
 - A macaw was forced to walk backwards on a basketball.
 - Two cockatoos were forced to balance on a miniature seesaw.
 - A macaw was forced to walk side to side on a miniature seesaw.
 - A macaw was forced to walk on a cylindrical attachment.
 - A macaw was forced to fire a cannon.
- In addition, dogs were forced to walk on their hind legs like humans and one dog was even forced to walk on his forelegs. Forcing animals to perform tricks that go against their basic natural instincts apparently violates Rule 8 of the PARR.

V. Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of the eyewitness investigation reveal rampant violations of the PCA Act and the PARR.

In light of the cruelty to animals documented at the circus as well as the gross violations of animal protection laws, the breach of conditions for registration, the disparity in the number and species of animals being used by the circus, and the unregistered animal acts, we recommend that the AWBI take immediate action by conducting an immediate inspection and seize and rehabilitate the animals used by the circus with the help of animal protection organisations recognised by the AWBI.