

## ALFA ROMEO

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Romeo has a very graceful gait. He is well groomed but his handsome features are marred by a deformity in one ear- one of his ears is half eaten, the result of a turf battle with a rival. He is extremely athletic and in fact, if he were to take part in a high jump or pole vault competition, he would win hands down over any opponent.

Romeo is a member of the genus *Semnopithecus*, sub-family *Colobinae*, family *Cercopithecidae*- more commonly known as the grey langur a group of Old World monkeys. Unlike most other members of this group, Romeo does not have to forage around highways, temples and forests for food. He is well taken care of by his caretaker.

Romeo is one of the langurs hired on contract by the University of Delhi. And thereby "hangs a tail"- The Main Campus of the University of Delhi is adjacent to the one remaining forest area of the metropolis- the historic Kamla Nehru Ridge Forest. The forest is alive with flora and fauna of all varieties and is a haven for morning walkers and couples looking for some privacy. Among the many animals prospering in the forest is the Rhesus Macaque or the ordinary monkey. This is great for ecologists, nature lovers and devotees of Lord Hanuman who feed them on Tuesdays. But it is a big problem for the University.

Troops of monkeys, unmindful of legalistic details like property rights, march into the university campus. They would then lounge around the buildings, jumping on parked cars, breaking windows, and being a nuisance. In one instance, mindful of the role of the university as the purveyor of learning, they went into the library of the Dept. of Physics, took out several volumes of *The Astrophysical Journal*, tore the pages and happily let the pages float outside the windows! They were also dangerous- when a faculty member tried to shoo them away, one of them attacked him and almost bit off his ear. The poor professor was petrified and had to have 8 stitches.

This was when the University authorities decided to act- the Engineering Dept brought out a "Notice Inviting Tender- No. UE/4804" for "Hiring of langurs to prevent monkey menace in the campus". The estimated cost of the work was Rs 199980/- and the time of completion was 6 months. Bids were received and the contract was awarded to Romeo's owner.

Now Romeo and 5 of his co-workers are given a room in the University. They stay there with their minders who are also hired by the contractor. Every day in the morning, large quantities of vegetables and fruits are bought by the minders from the sabzi mandi for them and after having a hearty repast, Romeo and his friends are taken around the campus. They strut around the campus, climbing buildings, moving around the corridors and parking lots. Apparently, the scent of the langur is enough to scare their Rhesus cousins and the campus is thus a safer place.

According to legend, the langur got his black face and hands when he got burnt while trying to rescue Sita from Ravana in Lanka. For us in the University, Romeo and his friends are performing a similar task of rescuing us (and our library books and other property) from their equally dangerous cousins, the Rhesus Macques.

