

May 25, 2022

Indian Street Dogs: A Feeder's view

By: Prakarsha

To say that street dogs should not be fed at all is a clear violation of animal and human rights. If the feeders are following rules, their action cannot be termed as misguided compassion. Rather, it is responsible compassion.

Quarrels between stray dog feeders and those who term them a ‘public nuisance’ have reached high courts. It is not surprising to come across news of hundreds of stray dogs killed or found dead in a particular area. It also is not surprising to know children and senior citizens attacked by dogs.

Why did man’s best friend become his arch nemesis?

In my seven years of feeding and caring for 10-15 street dogs, I have experienced almost every facet of this controversy – the dogs’ presumed aggression and territorial attitude, human-animal conflict, sterilisation and adoption. To feed or not to feed cannot be a one-word, black-and-white answer, for it could be the difference between life and death of the animals.

The law leaves no place for ambiguity about how stray dogs should be treated. [Killing](#) or [maiming](#) animals are offences under the Indian Penal Code (IPC). [Article 51A\(g\)](#) of the Constitution talks about compassion for living creatures. The Animal Welfare Board of India (AWBI) guidelines consider the welfare of street dogs, pet dogs and humans. Feeders are expected to feed dogs at a time and place that does not cause trouble to other residents. The AWBI also notes that feeders are being ill-treated by Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs). Abusing one’s power instead of finding a win-win solution is shocking and deplorable.

The first step towards ending the ‘stray dog menace’ as people would like to call it, is sterilisation. But sterilisation is not an easy process. Local bodies must have dog catchers and vehicles, veterinary facilities with enough doctors and caretakers, a place for these dogs to stay for post-operative care, and a system to return the dogs from where they are picked up.

It is this last part that irks many. Municipalities face stiff opposition from residents while releasing dogs back where they were picked. The AWBI guidelines do not allow relocating stray dogs. Relocation only increases dog fights and hostility, owing to their territorial nature.

The root of this debate is that instead of addressing what hinders humans from coexisting with dogs, we want to avoid it in short-term by demanding the relocation of dogs.

That brings us to the second step: awareness. If killing and relocation are illegal, we are left with two alternatives: sterilisation and adoption.

There are an [estimated 6.2 crore stray dogs](#) in India. Those who oppose feeding stray dog feeding say that instead of nurturing them on the roads, these dogs should be kept in animal shelters. NGOs do have animal shelters – brimming with injured, sick and ailing dogs which have absolutely no chance of surviving elsewhere. If we are talking about sheltering healthy dogs for a lifetime, the costs would be enormous. Increasing adoptions of stray dogs requires slow and gradual attitudinal change. The overwhelming idea of a pet dog is a cute puppy of a foreign breed. Indies aren’t adopted easily for reasons ranging from elitism to misinformation to hatred. NGOs and individual volunteers are working rigorously to burst the myths about indie dogs and get them adopted into loving homes.

Adoption does not end with sending the dog to someone’s home. [Abandonment of dogs](#) is a major issue and abandoned pets increase the number of strays. Animal shelters and volunteers complain about how the pets are thrown out with zero remorse because the families do not want the responsibility anymore. If this is the fate of pets which people brought home with their own liking, one can only imagine the plight of street dogs that were detested from birth.

The third part is controlling the cruelty. There are cases of neighbours and officials of residents’ societies harassing or even physically abusing stray dog feeders. The concern for welfare of people should not be allowed to justify this misdemeanour. If the feeders are abiding by the guidelines of AWBI, their action cannot be termed as misguided compassion. Rather, it is responsible compassion.

Courts have [ordered](#) to create feeding zones in communities so that the dogs can be fed there. The number of these zones should be decided based on the number of dogs (which would be known to the feeders). Gathering more dogs at one place may make feeding easy but breeds conflict among them. This should be considered while allotting the number and area of feeding zones. Along with feeding, vaccination and sterilisation of these dogs should be ensured. If each community individually takes up the responsibility for the dogs in their area, the expense and the effort will be divided among people. Tying up with government hospitals or NGOs which sterilise stray dogs at lesser cost is a good idea. When stray dogs are discussed in apartment and society meetings, it shouldn't be a fight between feeders and others but a discussion of each side's viewpoint. This should end with an ethical and reasonable plan of action.

While a country with zero stray dogs seems to be a far-fetched imagination, we should think of possible legal and ethical steps for Dog Population Management (DPM) within our limitations. Both people and dogs want the same thing – to go about their daily activities without threat or fear. Achieving it requires comprehensive understanding of both the sides. This can materialise if we engage in healthy discussions and try, for once, to look at street dogs as living beings.

Not everyone may be a dog lover. Some might be scared of dogs or even hate them. But this choice should not expand into creating special rules against feeding or caring for strays. To say that street dogs should not be fed at all is a clear violation of animal and human rights; feeding stray dogs is a legally protected activity. One cannot be restrained from pursuing a lawful desire to take care of dogs following all the rules and regulations. The right to life of dogs cannot be ignored.

Prakarsha is a chartered accountancy student from Hyderabad and a feeder and carer of street dogs.