

Conceptualizing Cruelty-Hate Crimes against Street Dogs in India

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**Praveen Rai** 

Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, India

Abstract

The human-stray dog conflict in India is in the global spotlight because of the exponential rise of cruelty and abuse against the canine population inhabiting streets and public spaces. The motivations for hate crimes against non-pet dogs and anti-canine vigilantism are due to the deepening of animal insensitivity and “show off” syndrome of urban citizens. The state ownership of stray dogs and abandoned foreign breeds could be an efficacious public policy to curb human cruelty against them. The protection laws should include compulsory community service in animal shelters, as it will inculcate compassion and companionship among the neo-community of dog haters.

Keywords

human–animal conflict, human-stray dog conflict, Indian stray dogs, animal cruelty, cruelty against street dogs, dog abuse

Introduction

The Indian media seems to have forgotten or not heard one of the most inspiring quotes about journalism, “When a dog bites a man it is not news, because it happens so often. But if a man bites a dog, that is news.” A deep scan of journalistic writings reveals anti-animal bias, as stories in media tend to amplify the news of dog bites, but downplay the rising menace of crimes against street dogs (“*street dogs*,” “*community dogs*,” “*unowned dogs*,” and “*free-roaming dogs*” are used as synonyms of “*stray dogs*”). The native dog in India popularly known as “Pariah dog” received its name after the Pariah tribe of Madras Presidency during British rule. It is called “Desi Kutta” (Hindi word for native), “Indi-dog” or, in the words of famous novelist Rudyard Kipling, “Yellow Pariah Dog.” The cave paintings in the Indian subcontinent and archaeological excavations from the Mohenjo-Daro site (2500 BCE) provide evidence that it was one of the oldest canine dog breeds in the world. It finds a place in the Hindu epic Mahabharata, as Yudhisthira, the eldest of the five Pandava brothers, reached the doors of heaven, followed by a loyal dog. Lord Indra invited him to paradise, provided he abandoned the dog. Yudhisthira replied, “Great king of the gods, it is difficult for a noble person to do a dishonorable deed and I do not wish for glory by

Corresponding author:

Praveen Rai, Political Analyst, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, 29, Rajpur Road, Delhi 110054, India.

Email: praveenrai@csds.in

abandoning one who is devoted to me” (University of Edinburgh, 2016). The dog revealed his true self as god Dharma, praised him for intelligence, morality, and compassion, and admitted him to heaven.

The soulmatism of humans and dogs has existed since time immemorial, but their congeniality and peaceful coexistence turned conflictive and mutually hostile in 21st-century India. Urbanization led to human–animal conflicts as both species turned against each other with heightened aggression and violence. The population of street dogs increased, and its collateral damage was a surge in dog bites and deaths due to rabies, which led to the diminishment of companionship with humans. Despite legislative-judicial safeguards, several states in India violate animal welfare laws and resort to gruesome mass culling of stray dogs, reminiscent of barbaric methods used by the Britishers in the 19th century for controlling *free-roaming dogs* by shooting, poisoning, or electrocution. Apart from animal insensitivity by the government, atrocious behavior against street dogs and pets in homes by urban citizens, show off and abandonment of foreign breeds by neo-middle class continue to rise in “New India.” It thus becomes pertinent to visit the academic discourse of human–animal conflict to contextualize the reasons for the increase in violence against non-pet dogs and the efficacy of laws in mediation and resolution.

This article will deep dive into increasing episodes of cruelty and insensitivity toward street dogs in India, motivational aspects for abusing them, reluctance by the state to own and protect them, inherent deficiencies in animal rights laws and judicial inconsistencies, and the way forward to conserve them. It consists of three parts. The *first* section will delve into animal rights discourse to ascertain the definitions and denotative meaning of animal cruelty and abuse. It will decipher the overall insensitivity toward animals and find out key reasons that led to the astronomical rise of pre-meditated violence and crimes against stray dogs. The *second* section will delineate the global classification of dogs, various types of proprietary rights and ownership conundrums, and the psychosocial human motives for the abuse of dogs. It will elucidate country-specific motivations behind hate crimes against stray dogs and rising trends of anti-canine vigilante violence in India. The *third* section will review the legal provisions for safeguarding street dogs, a lacuna in animal rights architecture, and judicial incoherencies that make it difficult to implement the law and prosecute the offenders. It will statistically enumerate the population estimates of stray dogs, the magnanimity of dog bites, human health hazards, and the rampancy of violence against canines. The *final* section will quantify and map the profile of dog-hating residents, insensitive citizens, and caregivers in the case study location in Noida. It will analyze the patterns of displacement of street dogs from their place of birth and death due to the bursting of firecrackers during festivals and local weddings, and suggest solutions to minimize and mitigate this neo-urban violent syndrome.

Animal cruelty and insensitivity toward street dogs

The primary basis of this article is direct observation and deep engagement with street dogs in a particular sector in Noida, Uttar Pradesh, between 2014 and 2024. The participatory research involved collecting information during various canine caregiving activities: arrangement of food and water, interventions during medical sickness and injuries, coordination for vaccination, sterilization, and overseeing the well-being of community dogs. It hypothesizes the primacy of human beings in man-dog conflicts and ascribes the exponential growth of cruelty against stray canines *due to* a lack of political will and societal insensitivity. The thesis is on a case study of a colony she-dog, Mentu, who bore the brunt of first strike attacks by selective residents between 2020 and 2024. The repetitive acts of unprovoked cruelty against her resulted in multiple fractures (amputation) of her tail, a physical assault in full public view, and being mowed down by a car by the Resident Welfare Association (RWA) president, which led to her premature death. It will delineate

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Author biography

Praveen Rai is a Political Analyst at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi. His key areas of interest include politics, electoral competitions and opinion polling in India.