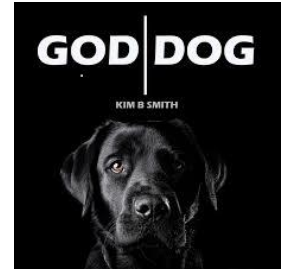


Mythology of Dog and Anatomy of Dog Haters

Recalling Chetan Bhagat's Vision of Dog Free Streets



In a WhatsApp chat, one resident of our so-called elite colony shared a clipping of Chetan Bhagat's article in the newspaper about his perception of dog. The unique Canine has been presented as fiend (not friend) and he nicely dreams of a dog free street ecosystem in India. His suggestion that the stray dogs should not be allowed on streets, sounds good, but certainly utopian like 'Ram Rajya' of Gandhi, where only people like Rama will exist and societies like Ravana will vanish. *Ram Rajya* is a term that was popularized by Mahatma Gandhi, as an ideal society that he envisioned, based on the rule of Lord Rama. The concept of Ram Rajya reflects the idea of an ideal society where everyone is equal, and justice prevails. *From Ram Rajya, there is a beautiful story in the Ramayan about "Rama and Dog's Justice". Rama was known to be a very just and caring king. He sat in his court every day trying to solve his people's problems. On a particular day, he had finished dealing with the day's problems and was about to wind up the court's activities. He told his brother Lakshmana, who was deeply dedicated to Rama, to go out and see if there was anyone else waiting in the yard. Lakshmana went out, looked around. He noticed a dog sitting there with a very sad face. It had a wound on its head. He asked the dog, "Are you waiting for something?" The dog spoke, "Yes, I want justice from Rama." Lakshmana said, "Why don't you come in," and took him into the court. The dog bowed down to Rama and said, "Oh Rama, I want justice. For no reason, an act of violence has been committed upon me. I was just sitting by myself when a man named Sarvarthasiddha came and hit me on my head with a stick for no reason at all. I want justice." Immediately, Rama sent for Sarvarthasiddha, a beggar. Rama asked, "What is your side of the story? This dog says you hit him without any reason." Sarvarthasiddha said, "Yes, I am guilty of the crime the dog is accusing me of. I was overtaken by hunger, I was angry, I was frustrated. This dog was sitting in my way, so for no reason, out of my frustration and anger, I hit this dog on its head. Please give me whatever punishment you want." Rama put this forth to his ministers and courtiers. "What is the punishment for this beggar?" They thought about it and said, "This is a very complicated case where a human being and a dog are involved. So, all the laws we normally have are not applicable. Being the king, it is your prerogative to come up with a judgment." Rama asked the dog, "What do you say? Do you have any suggestion?" The dog said "Yes, I have an appropriate punishment for this man. Make him the chief monk of Kalinjar Monastery." Kalinjar monastery was a very celebrated monastery in the northern part of India at that time. Rama said,*

“So be it,” and the beggar was appointed as the chief of the monastery. Rama gave him an elephant. The beggar climbed the elephant, very pleased with the punishment. With great joy he rode off to the monastery. The courtiers asked him, “What kind of judgment is this? Is this a punishment? The man is very happy.” Rama asked the dog, “Why don’t you explain?” The dog said, “In my previous life, I was the chief monk of the Kalinjar monastery. Initially, I had joined the monastery because I was truly dedicated to my spiritual wellbeing and also to the monastery, which was instrumental in imparting spiritual wellbeing to many people. I went there with a commitment to offer this to myself and to everyone, and I strived, I did my best. But as days passed, slowly, other impressions in my mind overtook me. I mostly remained steadfast to my purpose, but here and there it overtook me. The name and fame that came along with being the chief monk affected me. Many times, my ego performed, not me. Many times, I started enjoying the people’s recognition of who I was. People started treating me like a holy man. Within myself, I knew I was not, but I started behaving like one, started demanding the things that should normally belong to a holy person. I did not commit myself to my total transformation, but started pretending like a holy man and people supported me in this. Slowly, my commitment to my spiritual wellbeing and that of the people around me receded. Many moments, I tried to bring myself back, but with the overwhelming recognition around me, somewhere, I lost myself. This beggar, Sarvarthasiddha, has anger and ego in him. He is capable of frustration, so I know he will punish himself as I did. So, this is the best punishment for him. Let him be the chief monk of Kalinjar monastery.”

Dogs have played a substantial role **in the religion, myths, tales,** and legends of many cultures. They hold diverse and multifaceted roles in various religious traditions around the globe. These interpretations often revolve around the faithful and loyal nature of dogs, paralleling human devotion to higher powers. Dogs were closely associated with Hecate in the Classical world. Dogs were sacred to Artemis and Ares. Cerberus is a three-headed, dragon-tailed watchdog who guards the gates of Hades. Laelaps was a dog in Greek mythology. In mythology, dogs often serve as pets or as watchdogs. Stories of dogs guarding the gates of the underworld recur throughout Indo-European mythologies and may originate from Proto-Indo-European religion. Historian Julien d'Huy has suggested three narrative lines related to dogs in mythology. D'Huy found three core story lines for the earliest myths related to dogs: The first links dogs with the afterlife, the second relates to the union of humans and dogs, and the third associates a dog with the star Sirius. Versions of these stories are found in many cultural regions around the world. King of

Dogs Caucasian Shepherd, the Caucasian Mountain Dog is a very large, muscular, powerful dog. Many ancient Egyptians, because of this dog-god Anubis, had a spiritual and reverent association with their dogs. It is well known that many Egyptians buried some of their dogs at Saqqara in the catacombs at Anubieion. It was common for Egyptians to consider dogs to be highly sacred animals.

Hindu mythology believes dogs are sacred animals that guard the doors of heaven and hell and may represent our past life and affinities once we're reincarnated. Gods may also appear to humans disguised as dogs. Hindus believe that dogs are messengers that help guide the spirits of the deceased across the River of Death, Hindus convey an appreciation for dogs on Kukar Tihar by decorating them with tika and powdered dye, and giving them flower garlands and good meals. “Symbolically, they may also personify Yama, the lord of death, and Yami, his sister. There are various instances in Hindu mythology too, which support this sacred belief that dogs are an integral part of our lives. Centuries-old wall carvings, statues and imagery of Hindu gods have feature canines – some of the revered deities being Dattatreya, Kal Bhairav, and Indra. Khandoba, a deity, is associated with a dog on which he rides. The female dog of Indra, a Vedic god, is named Sarama, and it is mentioned in the Rigveda. Its offspring became the watchdogs of Yama, Sharvara and Shyama.

One of the most well-known examples of the role of dogs in Hindu culture is the story of the god Shiva and his dog, Bhairava. According to legend, Shiva adopted Bhairava, a fierce and powerful dog, as his protector and companion. Bhairava was so loyal to Shiva that he was willing to give up his own life to save him. Kal Bhairav, a deity worshipped by Hindus, is believed to be the manifestation of Lord Shiva. Bhairav's *vahan* (vehicle) is *Shvan* (dog) who stands guard at the entrance of Kashi, protecting the heavenly abode from external dangers. According to mythology, they are the gatekeepers of heaven as well as hell. Another interpretation says that Bhairav, along with his dog as a weapon, protects the world from demons and his devotees from their “inner demons” such as greed, lust, fear and so on.

The Hindu god of dogs, Bhairava (also known as Shiva) is worshipped in Tantra and sometimes is shown with a dog face. He also rides a dog. Temple Stray dogs are fed at temples and statues of dogs also adorn some temples, like the Kali Bhairava temple. Shiva, in his aspect as Bhairava, has a dog as a vahana (vehicle) (mentioned in the Mahabharata Bhairava has a dog (Shwan) as his divine vahana (vehicle). Bhairavi is a fierce and terrifying aspect of the Devi who is virtually indistinguishable

from Kali, with the exception of her particular identification as the consort of Bhairava. In Hinduism, dogs are considered as the mount of lord Bhairava. According to some old beliefs, black dogs are also considered as the reincarnation of the fearsome god, Bhairava. It is not prohibited to keep a dog in Hinduism. Bhairava and Shiva: In some Hindu traditions, dogs are associated with Bhairava, a fierce manifestation of Lord Shiva. Bhairava is often depicted with a dog as his companion, symbolizing loyalty, protection, and vigilance. As a result, dogs are considered sacred and pure in these contexts.

According to **ancient scriptures**, the dogs of Kal Bhairav transform into four docile puppies embodying the Vedas who are sent to accompany Dattatreya. Dattatreya is associated with four dogs, considered to symbolise the four Vedas. The Devipujak Vaghri community of Gujarat and Rajasthan worshipped their own goddess, Hadkai Mata, who rides a dog and protects people from measles. Further south, in Maharashtra and Telangana, the dog is associated with the warrior gods Khandoba and Mallanna, respectively, and with Revanta, the god of the hunt, in central India. Dattatreya is venerated as a Hindu God and is believed to be an avatar of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. He is worshipped for His simple way of life, preaching kindness to all and sharing knowledge about the meaning of life with His disciples. Though his iconography varies across India, a painting by Raja Ravi Varma made in 1910 popularised the image of Dattatreya surrounded by a cow – the mother who nourishes all living beings – and four dogs who represent the four Vedas. Dogs have been referred to as *Shvaan* in many Vedic verses and have a deep meaning in Hindu mythology. Right from being worshipped in parts of Sikkim and North Bengal, dogs have been the mounts of fearsome gods like, Kalabhairava. In the early Vedic tradition, the death god Yama kept two dogs, Syama the Black and Sabala the Spotted, to bring and hold souls in the Purgatory-like afterlife called Naraka.

Mahabharata starts and ends with canines. Other holy texts such as the Mahabharata also mention the presence of a dog. One of the earlier episodes narrates the story of a *yagna* (ritual worship in front of a fire) being conducted by Janamejaya, the grandson of Abhimanyu. Outside the area where the ritual was being conducted, a small puppy who believed he was protecting any evil elements from entering the sacred place of worship was playing outside. However, some attendees of the *yagna* mercilessly beat the puppy complaining of its “dirty presence”. The puppy ran to Sarama (his mother, a celestial female dog) and complained of this cruelty. She approached Janamejaya to ask about this cruelty, which raised the question that after all, the puppy was harmless

so why did the attendees unnecessarily inflict pain on this poor creature? It is also for us to reflect on the current society about how people treat living beings as either equal to, lesser than or greater than us in power. How we engage with them is a true reflection of our character. The ending of the Mahabharata also features a dog, who accompanied Yudhishtira to his final resting place. After a treacherous journey, the faithful companion arrives with the king at the gates of heaven where they are stopped by Lord Indra. While he agrees to permit Yudhishtira into heaven, he denies entry to the “old, dirty and skinny” dog. “The dog must come with me,” Yudhishtira insisted, again to be met by denial. In that case, he too refused to enter heaven leaving behind the loyal companion who walked by him every step of the way. Touched by his virtues, Indra revealed that the dog was indeed *dharma*, which the king upheld even during his last moments. The dog transforms into the God of Dharma and blesses Yudhishtira for sticking to righteousness in all circumstances, thus making way for the king to enter heaven on Indra’s chariot. And indeed, the dog had transformed into the God of Dharma and blessed Yudhishtira for his complete lack of selfishness and dedication to righteousness in all circumstances. And thus rose Yudhishtira to heaven in the chariot of Indra. Yudhishtira, in Mahabharata, requested that the dog that followed them throughout their penance, be given a place in heaven.

There is an interesting mention of dog in a section in the **Mahabharata** known as *aapad dharma*, the *dharma* in the time of calamities. When Bhishma lay down on his bed of arrows and instructed Yudhishtira, this is a story he told Yudhishtira, about Vishvamitra and a Chandala. A Chandala is different from a Shvapacha. A Shvapacha is a person who keeps dogs and also eats dogs. However, the two words are often used interchangeably. In the intervening period between Treta Yuga and Dvapara Yuga, there was a terrible drought for 12 years. It did not rain. Agriculture and animal husbandry were destroyed. Shops and markets disappeared. There were no assemblies of people. Most of the cities were emptied. All the mortals were hungry and ate each other. The rishis abandoned their rituals. **Maharshi Vishvamitra** was afflicted by hunger and wandered around. He came upon the houses of Shvapachas, who killed animals and ate their flesh. The place was strewn with broken pots and the hides of dogs. There were iron bells and the place was surrounded by packs of dogs. Afflicted by hunger, the great rishi, Gadhi’s son, entered. He made efforts to search for some food there. The sage then saw some dog meat hung out on a rope in a Chandala’s house, from an animal that had just been killed. He thought, ‘I must steal this now’. Other than this, there is no other means for me to remain alive. I do not see any sin in this theft. Having decided this, Vishvamitra, the great sage, went to sleep at

the spot where he had fallen down. When he saw that it was night and everyone in the Chandala hamlet was asleep, the illustrious one arose and gently entered the hut. The Chandala was asleep, but he woke up. I am awake. I am not asleep. I am terrible and I will kill you.' Vishvamitra replied, 'I am Vishvamitra.' The Chandala heard these words and was terrified. He leapt up from his supine position. Tears flowed from his eyes. He joined his hands in salutation, showed a great deal of honour and told Koushika, 'O, Brahmana! What do you wish to do here in the night?' Vishvamitra assured Matanga, the Chandala, and replied, 'I am hungry and have almost lost my life. Hunger destroys *dharma*. I will steal the dog's haunch.' The Chandala replied, 'O Maharshi! Listen to my words. Having heard me, act accordingly, so that *dharma* is not made to decay. The learned say that dogs are the worst among animals. The worst part of the body is said to be the thighs and the haunches. You should not abandon *dharma*.' Vishvamitra, afflicted by hunger, again replied. 'One can follow *dharma* only if one remains alive. In my desire to remain alive, I will also eat what should not be eaten. Grant me permission. I am following the *dharma* of remaining alive and will cleanse all the impurities through my knowledge and austerities, like stellar bodies dispelling great darkness.' The Shvapacha said, 'Beg for something else. Do not set your mind on begging for, and eating, dogs. Dogs should not be eaten by Brahmanas.' Vishvamitra replied, 'O Shvapacha! At a time of famine, no other meat is easily available, or rice. I am afflicted by hunger and have lost all hope of even being able to move.' The Shvapacha said, 'O Brahmana! Brahmanas and Kshatriyas should only eat animals that have five claws. Do not pointlessly have a desire to eat what should not be eaten. However, since you so wish, take the dog's haunch. There are men who give up their lives, instead of eating what should not be eaten. Since you are afflicted by hunger, do what appeals to you.'

Chapter 5 Verse 18 of the **Bhagavad Gita** says that a *Brahman* (a priest who conducts worship ceremonies), a cow, an elephant, a dog and a person who engages in physical labour are one and the same.

विद्याविनयसम्पन्ने ब्राह्मणे गवि हस्तिनि | शुनि चैव श्वाके च पण्डिताः समदर्शिनः

From the physical perspective, these species are contrasting. However, a truly learned person endowed with spiritual knowledge sees and treats them all as equal souls.

The story of Shirdi Sai Baba and dogs is revered by millions of Indians in the Sai Satcharita, a biography based on the life of Shirdi Sai Baba. Chapter 9, *Leela* 5 of this book is about a devotee who was residing at her home in Shirdi. Out of nowhere, a dog appears outside her house one afternoon and begins crying out of hunger. She gives it some food, which

the dog relishes and eats immediately. A few hours later, she goes to a *masjid* where Sai Baba was and He says, “Mother, you have fed Me sumptuously up to My throat, My afflicted *pranas* (life forces) have been satisfied. Always act like this, and this will stand you in good stead. Sitting in this *masjid* I shall never, never speak untruth. Take pity on Me like this. First, give bread to the hungry, and then eat yourself. Note this well”. Puzzled at this statement she asks Him how she could have fed Him when she herself is dependent on others for meals. He reveals that the dog whom she fed earlier was indeed Sai Baba! He says, “The dog which you saw before meals and to which you gave the piece of bread is one with Me, so also other creatures (cats, pigs, flies, cows etc.) are one with Me. I am roaming in their forms. He who sees Me in all these creatures is My beloved.” Other devotees have also shared accounts of Sai Baba appearing before them in the form of a black dog when they needed support during the darkest times of their lives. Dogs even according to astrology are considered auspicious – people suffering from the negative effects of the planets *Rahu and Shani* might find some respite when they feed stray dogs.

Vastu recommends caring for dogs. Vastu Shastra also suggests getting a dog into our home. Dogs have a special reference in Vastu Shastra because they can alter the energy in the house. Dogs not only keep us engaged but also attract good vibes. Dogs represent loyalty, protection and good fortune. Dogs are considered to enhance positivity and good fortune around us, besides giving out protective positive vibes. The Chinese often place a pair of dog statues, called Fu, at the entrance of their homes for protection and safety. Black dog as a pet is considered very lucky as per Vastu Shastra for animals. Vastu considers a black dog as a trusted friend who stick with you through your hardest times in life. **Vedic astrology recommends fostering a black stray dog**, or at least feeding a black stray often, if you face a *griha dosha* (affliction) in *Shani* (Saturn), *Rahu* or *Ketu* (north and south nodes on the moon).

Many literatures reveal the links of dog in 84 lakh yonis / births and Vedic astrology. According to **Modern Science**, about **1 crore 4 lakh** species have been told in the journey from amoeba to human. But in Ancient times, sages and sages had come to know without any technology that there are about 84 lakh species. According to the scriptures in Sanatan Dharma, a soul gets human birth only after wandering in 84,00,000 births. According to the scriptures, out of 84 Lakh Yoni, the human form has been described as the best because there is a system of rebirth according to deeds. A person who does good deeds gets a human life, but there are many creatures who get a human body only after wandering in 84 Lakh Yoni

births. **The meaning of the verse is that 9 lakhs of aquatic animals, 20 lakhs of plants and animals, 11 lakhs of insects, 10 lakhs of birds and 30 lakhs of land animals and remaining 4 lakhs of human race. In this way the total number of yonis has been told as 84 lakhs.** It is not necessary that there should be only 84 lakh species because over time many creatures are extinct and many new creatures are also born. A fascinating link has been unveiled between dogs and Rahu / Ketu in astrology. In Vedic astrology, every living being is influenced by the positions of celestial bodies, and dogs are no exception. Dogs are believed to be ruled by the influence of Ketu, the south node of the moon. In the intricate tapestry of astrology, the link between dogs and Rahu/Ketu adds yet another layer of depth and understanding. Dogs, influenced by Ketu, bring spirituality and detachment, while those influenced by Rahu offer curiosity and adventure. Embracing these cosmic influences can deepen your connection with your canine companions and enrich your life in unexpected ways.

Inspired by the belvederes of Chetan enunciated in the article, one imaginative resident of the colony conjectures the bleak and unsafe future of the colony residents because of the stray dogs roaming around inside the colony. The porous boundary wall and weak security system at the entry gates of the colony facilitate the entry of the stray dogs inside, who now have acclimatized and consider themselves as the protectors of the colony. There are three categories of residents: few are dog haters, including one resident who cannot even withstand the sight of dog, few are dog lovers and rest are dog neutral. But the dog haters are dominating, proactive and the other two groups prefer to be silent and pretend to be on both sides. Such people are more harmful for any system.

The Indian government has taken various steps to address the issue of stray dogs in the country. India has laws in place that make it illegal to remove a dog from the streets. Moreover, the dogs cannot be driven away. So once a dog is on the streets, it has a “**right**” to stay there unless adopted. The only thing that can happen is for the dog to be sterilized and vaccinated. **The welfare and management of the stray dogs in India are very well addressed in the Legal Facts and Provisions:**

- *Article 21 of the Constitution of India protects all forms of life, including animal life. In addition, Article 51A(g) imposes on all citizens a fundamental duty to have compassion for living creatures. The Supreme Court of India has interpreted Articles 21 and 51A(g) to mean that animals have a right to lead a life with intrinsic worth, dignity and security.*

- *The Central Government has enacted a law specifically with regard to animals, namely, the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960. Under the Act, the Animal Birth Control (Dogs) Rules, 2001 ('ABC Rules') have been framed and prescribe comprehensive rules relating to stray dogs. Under the ABC Rules, stray dogs are to be sterilised, vaccinated and subsequently released into the same area, from where they were captured, as a means of stabilising / reducing stray dog populations. The Rules also provide that dogs who are sick are to be treated, prior to their sterilisation and vaccination. The rules prohibit the relocation of stray dogs, i.e. throwing, or driving them out of one area, into another. In compliance with Animal Birth Control rules, 2001, stray dogs may not be killed, only sterilized.*
- *The Constitution of India gives precedence to the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960 and the Animal Birth Control Rules, 2001 over state and local laws, such as the Kerala State Municipality Act, 1994, under which Section 438 permits the Secretary to order the "seizure and destruction" of stray dogs in a municipal area. In a recent development, Rule 13 of the ABC Rules provides that "in case of any conflict between the Rules and local laws, the provision that is less irksome to the animal shall prevail."*
- *As per IPC Section 429, punishment for killing, poisoning, maiming or rendering useless any animal, could lead to a fine or imprisonment for up to five years, or both, says the AWBI advisory. Animal Welfare Board of India was established in 1962 under Section 4 of the PCA Act which elaborates its members, functions, and roles. Section 38 of the Act helps to protect stray dogs as it grants the power to the Central Government to make rules for preventing cruelty to animals.*
- ***As per the historic judgment of Punjab and Haryana High Court Verdict on JUNE 8, 2019 and also as highlighted in The Better India, it would be the duty of the citizens, to ensure that: Animals are healthy and comfortable; Well-nourished and in a safe environment; Express innate behaviour without pain, fear and distress; Be entitled to justice, and; Safe from being treated as objects or property.***

Chetan has shared his bad experience of the morning walk with dogs around in the parks of Mumbai and Delhi. But there are always people enjoying Lodhi Garden; families with picnics, yoga enthusiasts, boys playing soccer and cricket, and plenty of dog walkers. The accompanying canine will love the open lawns and quiet walking paths in Delhi's most beautiful park. *Christine sharing her experience on "hanging out with the dogs in Lodhi Gardens", in the Delhi Diary (<https://christinepemberton.me/?p=30212>) beautifully narrates,*

“This morning I went for a 14 km walk round the Lodhi Gardens with my running / walking partner-in-crime Ripu. In between catching up on January’s news, we also stopped and petted and fussed over the many stray dogs that live in the Lodhi Gardens”. It’s clear that these critters are loved and fed, as they are all nice and even – if the truth be told! – a tad portly. Many had the coats that so many Delhi dogs wear in the winter – some brand new, some clearly hand-me-downs. These dear creatures are super friendly and clearly expect love/cuddles/food from everyone. The Delhi’s first Pet Dog Park by DSA is Rajinder Nagar, New Delhi. Other pet friendly / neutral parks include Nehru Park, Chanakyapuri, Siri Fort Park, Sanjay Van, Hauz Khas District Park, Sunder Nursery, Swarna Jayanti Park. Most pet-friendly parks in Delhi require dogs to be on a leash at all times. However, some parks have designated areas where pets can be off-leash and play freely. In contrast, my wife looks for the dogs at all public places, and she finds something missing if does not see dogs around. In Vasant Kunj sector where I lived for few years, I was amazed to see that plenty of dogs would roam around, all the residents behaving dog lovers, providing food, coats and above all love and care. I saw one person (probably execute / professional) would enter the colony at around 8.30 every night (during my evening walk), stop the car, will be surrounded by few dogs, will provide them food specially purchased for them, spend some time with them, call them by names and leave. My salutations to such silent dog caretakers. Chetan’s inference of the huge expenditures on the Parks going waste because of the stray dogs seems to be overstretching and hyperbole.

I am quoting luminaries to express myself for dogs: Charlie Chaplin said, *“He who feeds a hungry dog feeds his own soul”*. Mahatma Gandhi said, *‘The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated’*. He said ‘I hold that the more helpless a creature, the more entitled it is to protection by man from the cruelty of man,’ and ‘I abhor vivisection with my whole soul. Not just stray dogs but no category of animals is violent and dangerous by nature’. Erich Fromm writes in his seminal work, *Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*, *“Man is the only mammal who is a large-scale killer and a sadist.”* He further states that indulgence in destruction and cruelty can always cause a man to feel “intense satisfaction.” Animals, he states, “do not enjoy inflicting pain or suffering on other animals. Sometimes an animal seems to display sadistic behaviour — for instance a cat playing with a mouse; but it is an anthropomorphic interpretation that the cat enjoys the suffering of the mouse; any fast-moving object can serve as a plaything, whether a mouse or a ball of wool.” I would love to be considered as a stupid member of the dog lovers’ minority community (of ~ 25 million persons), which believes

in the saying that “Those who do not love dogs, cannot love human beings”. Bill Murray said, “– ***I am suspicious of the people who do not like dogs, but I trust a dog when it does not like a person***” –.

It's difficult to understand why some people just don't care for animals, dogs specifically; we just can't relate. Nor can we imagine a life without the love of a pet. The human and animal bond has been a powerful and mutually gratifying relationship since the beginning of time (well, almost). My dog is the sunshine of my life! He brings a smile to my face just thinking of him. And I swear my last dog was my soulmate. It just seems that loving a pet is a very natural and beautiful part of being human. **How we treat dogs reflects our character.** In a country like India where religion, beliefs, tradition and cultures criss-cross, innocent animals like dogs often get trapped in warped imagery that is often incorrectly depicted. Many consider them dirty, inauspicious, or unwanted creatures. However, when we begin to explore ancient scriptures and holy texts, we realise that our assumptions might be polluted. Every book on the divine or the saints teaches us that all creatures must be treated as equals – be it a human, dog, cow or wild animal. It is up to us to imbibe the best of these beliefs and practise tolerance, kindness, equality and respect for all living beings.

The psychology of Dog Haters cannot be rationalised. One could never attempt to vindicate the hating of any animal. Speaking of those non-pet-lovers who are not bad people, they're just “indifferent” towards animals. By the goodness in their hearts, these people would never be cruel to an animal nor deny it its basic necessities. They may tolerate pets to a certain extent. And they may even acknowledge another person's affection for one, but they really don't understand. In trying to better grasp why these people feel the way they do, six reasons have been identified for people to shy away from a dog. **1: Lack of association with dogs:** Sometimes people think they don't like animals simply because they have not been exposed to how wonderful pet ownership is. Perhaps their household was too busy to have a pet as they were growing up – Mom & Dad both working, kids running every which way... it makes sense. **2: The belief that dogs are dirty and should be left outside:** Some people think that pets in the home are dirty and that dogs should be limited to living outside. It's easy to understand how a person could not develop any kind of an attachment to a pet if they have no life associations with them. **3: Dogs smell:** Many people just don't like the way a dog smells. Many happen to like the way a well-cared for pet smells. Check this out! Can we believe the extent to which these people loathe the way a dog smells! i.e., “Dog smell has always made me gag. It's pretty putrid and rotten smelling.” I guess humans would smell bad too if we only got a bath

once a month (or less!). 4: **Bad past experience:** Sometimes the reason that someone is not warm and fuzzy about animals is because of a bad experience in the past. It may even be a suppressed memory that they cannot pinpoint, but the apprehension remains. Sometimes a fear of animals is “handed-down” from their mom or dad. For example, if Mom was severely bitten by a dog as a child, she would be hyper vigilant at protecting her own children from them. The child then naturally assumes that dogs are bad and that you should stay away from them. The fear of dogs can run pretty deep. 5: **Dogs are misbehaved:** Dogs that are left to their own devices can be terribly annoying. These are the ones that ... are free to run the neighbourhood and dig up your flowers and track mud up on your porch, ...bark incessantly, ...always jump up on your clean clothes with their dirty feet, ... are constantly in your face licking your skin off, ... hump your leg and everyone else’s legs, ... bring dead vermin and carcasses to your front door, ... promptly jump up and sniff your “privates” as if you’re another dog, and, of course, the mean ones. One guy online says, “Dogs often remind me of hoodlum-like misbehaved, miscreant, delinquent children or adults for that matter”. It’s unfortunate, really, because all dogs can be trained to adhere to society’s rules and behave in a civilized manner. This type of bad behaviour is not the dog’s fault, it is the owner’s fault. Without good dog training, a dog does not know what is expected of him. Not knowing makes him even more anxious and obnoxious to deal with as he does only what he knows to do and is confused by our disapproval. 6: **Genetics:** Recent research has suggested that our love for animals has a genetic basis. Some people, regardless of their upbringing, seem predisposed to seek out the company of animals, others less so. The same study also examined how environmental factors, such as having been raised with pets in the home, were efficacious in determining our love for animals. In the end, it was conclusive that environmental factors had less of an impact as did genetics.

Raj Kantak (in Times of India, January 24, 2023) also voices for Stray free India: A revolution that can give every pet a new lease on life. There are approximately 6.2 crore stray dogs and 91 lakh street cats in India, with 77% of the country’s population reporting seeing a stray dog at least once a week. The problem of stray animals in India is not only a humanitarian issue but also a public health concern. Stray animals can carry diseases such as rabies, which can be passed on to humans. In addition, such animals can also cause traffic accidents, and property damage, and can be a problem for local communities. Fortunately, there is a solution to this problem – adoption. Here are four reasons why animal adoption can assist India in becoming a stray-free nation while also benefiting animals.

1. **Giving animals the life they deserve - a life filled with love and care**

- Adopting a stray animal can provide a loving home that would otherwise be left to fend for itself on the streets. It not only gives a new life to the pet but also helps in reducing the number of strays on the streets. Stray animals are often neglected and abused, and it is our responsibility to take care of them. Adopting a stray pet can be a rewarding experience. It gives the pet a chance to live a happy and healthy life. It also gives the pet a sense of security and stability. The pet will no longer have to worry about food, shelter, and medical care.

2. **Eases the strain on animal shelters**

- Adopting a stray pet helps to reduce the burden on animal shelters. These shelters are often overcrowded and underfunded. By adopting a pet, you are freeing up space in the shelter and giving the pet a chance to find a loving home.

3. **Resolving the issue of animal euthanasia**

- Adopting a stray pet can also help to reduce the number of animals euthanized in India. Each year, millions of animals are euthanized due to a lack of space in animal shelters. By adopting a pet, you are giving the pet a chance to find a loving home and reducing the number of animals euthanized.

4. **Elimination of the pet trade**

- Adopting a stray pet can also help to reduce the number of animals in the pet trade. The pet trade is an inhumane industry that exploits animals for profit. By adopting a pet, you are helping to reduce the demand for animals in the pet trade and giving the pet a chance to live a better life.

Chetan, with his brand charisma and public image, can make his dream of “stray dogs free roads in developed India” as the dream of Modi and flagship program of the PM, under Swachh Bharat Abhiyan; “*Modi hai to mumkin hai*”. Chetan can become brand ambassador and pursue PMO and Niti Aayog to initiate this innovative reverie project, both for the welfare of the dogs and the human population, fearless of the dogs. Gadkari’s highways program can also be beneficially integrated with this dream of “stray dogs free highways”. This vision will directly and immensely benefit the Gadkari’s Ministry. According to a case study in India, as many as 69% of road traffic accidents were caused by stray dogs. A recent report on road crashes across six mega cities published by a general Insurance Company (ACKO), the data show that out of the 1,376 claims made for accidents caused due to animal, 804 (58%) involved dogs and 350 involved cattle. Therefore, the “stray dogs free highways” program can be included in the DPR and mandate of the Concessionaires, with dedicated and institutionalised funding mechanism. All stray dogs along highways can be rehabilitated in specially established dog rehabilitation centres, near tolls and habitations. This will reduce the road accidents considerably (approximately 69%) on highways.

The **civic society organisations (CSOs)** in India are contributing significantly towards the cause of stray dogs' issues. An animal CSO can help improve the lives of stray animals, particularly dogs and cats. These animals often lead a life of hardship, suffering from accidents, abuse and a lack of food, water, and medical care. Fortunately, animal CSOs in India are known to work tirelessly to improve the condition of these animals and ensure their well-being. Five ways have been identified in which an animal CSO can make a real difference in the lives of India's stray animals. These CSOs tend to inspire common people, especially the dog haters, to contribute to these noble causes, providing support to the CSOs that tirelessly work to end the suffering of stray animals.

1. Salvage and recuperation: One of the primary functions of an animal CSO is the rescue and rehabilitation of stray animals. These organizations play a crucial role in responding to distress calls, picking up injured or abandoned animals and providing them with immediate medical attention. Stray animals often find themselves in dire situations, from being hit by vehicles to suffering from severe illnesses or injuries. Without the intervention of an animal CSO, many of these animals would endure immense suffering or even lose their lives. Rescue efforts extend to various species, including dogs. An animal CSO maintains rescue teams that are available around the clock to respond to emergency situations. Once rescued, the animals are provided with necessary medical care, shelter and rehabilitation. This includes treatments, vaccinations and sterilization to control the stray animal population. Rehabilitation programs aim to restore the health and vitality of these animals, giving them a second chance at life.

2. Sterilization and population control: One of the most effective long-term strategies for reducing the stray animal population is sterilization. An animal CSO often runs mass sterilization programs in collaboration with local authorities. These programs focus on spaying and neutering stray dogs, which not only prevents unwanted pregnancies but also reduces the aggression and territorial behaviour often associated with unaltered animals. Sterilization is a humane way to control the stray animal population without resorting to euthanasia, which has ethical and practical limitations. An animal CSO can conduct sterilization camps in various areas, making a significant impact on the overall population growth. These initiatives are vital for maintaining a balance between the well-being of stray animals and the concerns of local communities.

3. Adoption and rehoming: In addition to rescuing and rehabilitating stray animals, an animal CSO actively works to find forever homes for these animals. Adoption and rehoming programs aim to place rescued animals into loving households where they can live safe and fulfilling lives. This not only provides the animals with a better quality of life but also reduces the strain on shelter facilities. An animal CSO

organizes adoption drives, creates online platforms to connect potential adopters with animals in need and provides support for the adoption process. By encouraging adoption, these organizations play a vital role in changing societal attitudes towards stray animals. They help people understand that many of these animals are loving, intelligent and loyal pets just waiting for a chance to be a part of a family. **4. Education and awareness:** An animal CSO is not just about immediate intervention and rescue; they also work to bring about long-lasting change in society's treatment of stray animals. Education and awareness campaigns are essential components of their mission. CSOs conduct workshops, seminars and awareness programs in schools, colleges and local communities to educate people about the importance of compassion towards animals. These programs cover topics such as responsible pet ownership, the importance of vaccination and sterilization, and how to report animal abuse or neglect. By spreading awareness, an animal CSO aims to create a more animal-friendly culture, where the rights and welfare of animals are respected and protected. This cultural shift is crucial for the long-term well-being of stray animals and all animals across the country. **5. Advocacy and policy change:** An animal CSO can play a pivotal role in advocating for the rights of stray animals and influencing policy changes. They work closely with government bodies, local authorities and other stakeholders to ensure that animal welfare laws are enforced and strengthened. These organizations help draft legislation, propose amendments and offer expert advice on issues related to animal welfare. Advocacy also extends to raising public awareness about the need for better animal protection laws and regulations. By rallying public support, an animal CSO can exert pressure on policymakers to make positive changes in favour of stray animals. Their efforts often lead to improved conditions for stray animals, including the allocation of funds for shelters, rescue teams, sterilization programs, and other welfare initiatives.

'Voice of Stray Dogs' (VOSD) is proclaimed to be India's largest CSO for dogs. VOSD Sanctuary, was founded on the principle that no dog will ever be euthanised because of lack of space, money or resources. Over 20,000 dogs have reportedly been rescued over a decade and 300-400 dogs are admitted to the VOSD Sanctuary and Hospital annually. VOSD claims to provide the most sophisticated and expensive medical care & rehabilitation services at no cost to stray dogs and abandoned pet dogs.

The **role of media** needs to be more positive to educate people about the behaviour of dogs: how to respond (not react) to dogs, feeding protocols, facilitating population control, not to spread panic, adoption of stray dogs

and many more related issues for better management of stray dogs. Normally media spread the unconfirmed human version of the episodes, and the dogs' versions are unsurprisingly unheard. Back in August 2023, when stories about attacks by stray dogs were beginning to resurface in Kerala, the well-known newspaper *Malayala Manorama* published what they called a photograph of a woman being attacked by stray dogs in Palakkad. According to the *News Minute*, the photograph's caption said the woman had been attacked by strays, and was helped by locals who heard her screams. The *News Minute*, which seems to be the only website to have reported this, said that the photograph itself was not actually of the incident, but had been taken a year earlier. The man who realised this (because he knew the woman in the photo) complained that the woman hadn't even been attacked by the strays, and *Malayala Manorama* then ran a clarification two days later. Sreekumar, who called out this mistake, said the photograph had been manipulated to suit the "trends", perhaps referring to the many newspapers that have been running story after story of people who have been attacked and 'mauled' by stray dogs in Kerala. The 'stray dog menace', as it is being called, began to be covered extensively by the media when a 65-year-old woman succumbed to the injuries she sustained after she was bitten by a pack of strays at Pulluvila beach. Rumours spread that the Kerala government had decided to cull strays, and Supreme Court (SC) lawyer Prashant Bhushan said he would go to court if the government did this. Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan immediately clarified that the government's decision was to implement a sterilisation programme. Since then, businessmen and politicians encouraged people to kill strays, Maneka Gandhi saying that sterilisation is the way forward, and the SC passing an order that dogs were not to be culled. As of October 20, the SC slammed the Kerala government for its inaction.

Has the stray dog crisis in Kerala been manufactured by the media?

This is not to say that these attacks have not happened, or that this isn't an issue that needs to be addressed. There have been terrifying cases and reports of attacks on women and children. According to news reports, over one lakh cases of stray dog bites have been recorded in Kerala in the last year, and according to the then Health Minister KK Shailaja, a total of 31,114 people have been bitten by strays in the three months alone. However, Sally Kannan, who is the Honorary Animal Welfare Officer of the Animal Welfare Board of India and also works with Humane Society International, points out, that these data are inconclusive: these are alarmist numbers that have fed the growing hysteria — "None of the health records have any demarcation between bites caused by stray dogs, and the bites by pet dogs, and so there's no proof for any of these numbers,"

she says. Appallingly, people like industrialist Kochouseph Chittilappilly and social worker Jose Maveli (who runs an orphanage and a group called Stray Dogs Eradication Group), have been sharing these reports and call for the culling of strays — in various Facebook posts, Chittilappilly has offered Rs 50,000 to those who kill 10 strays. Everything seems to be just a reaction based on a lack of awareness — thoughtless reporting has aggravated people. What is the media not reporting on enough and how complicated is this issue? To Kannan, the media has been a major part of creating the hysteria around stray dogs over the last year. “People realised this news was selling faster than any other story, so a range of pieces on stray dog attacks that wouldn’t otherwise have been written started to get published,” she says.

Media houses have hardly stopped to consider that one of the contributing factors is a severe lack of proper waste management systems. The media should also play a crucial role in this by highlighting the issue and promoting responsible pet ownership.

As a solution to the stray dogs’ subject, raising awareness about stray animals is important. The need to raise awareness about stray dogs is urgent. Even though it is difficult to prevent every crime against animals, the least that can be done is to educate people about the laws prohibiting animal abuse. Stray dogs are protected, for instance, by the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, which specifies rules for feeding and caring for them. Furthermore, animal welfare organisations are always on the lookout for volunteers who can help them tell compelling stories and raise money through writing, advertising on social media, photography, and other methods. It’s not necessary to go out of your way to look for lost animals to help and shelter to volunteer. There are numerous other methods to help these stray animals. All this can be done with the help of raising awareness through social media and events. The objective of making India stray-free can easily be accomplished with a little assistance from everyone.

As a future course of action, some of the successfully proven remedial measures include: **1. Implementing a thoughtful & safe Sterilization drive:** Municipal bodies across the country need to control the population of stray dogs by implementing sterilization programs. Sterilization drives by the Government have been successful only in a limited way so far because of various reasons. For instance, these drives need to be sensitively handled which means stray dogs must be picked up with kindness, they should be sterilized by experts and there should be proper monitoring of the same by respective panels. These panels must strictly include members from animal welfare societies, resident welfare

associations, animal care takers and technical staff. 2. **Respect towards feeders/volunteers:** One needs to understand that by feeding stray dogs indirectly helps with sterilization drives. The feeders or volunteers are able to win the dogs' trust, making it easier for them to get the dogs vaccinated/sterilized. People should, therefore, not try to create hurdles for well-meaning volunteers who feed and look after them, even if they lack compassion towards these creatures. In the ultimate analysis, this gesture which in turn leads to sterilization of dogs and therefore lessening of their numbers helps the society. And of course, more importantly, new born puppies do not have to face the brunt of living on the street without food and water and ultimately getting run over by a vehicle. 3. **Cruelty to animals is not done:** Let's not create bad karma for ourselves by being cruel to these voiceless, helpless animals. Hitting or beating them may turn them aggressive in self-defence, resulting in more attacking or biting. Treat them with love and kindness and notice how they will reciprocate the same emotion will be reciprocated unconditionally. 4. **Do not violate Animal Rights:** Stray dogs of India have co-existed with humans since the Vedic ages. The localities, in which we live, belong to them, as much as to us. In fact, they had been residing in some areas long before human settlements there. Cribbing about the issue, hating dogs, beating them up or dislocating them does not help anyone or resolve the issue in any which manner. 5. **Report abuse:** It is unacceptable to remain a mute spectator to animal abuse. In such cases of possible animal abuse, one shouldn't hesitate to step in, object and report to higher concerned authorities like the police. Since animals are voiceless, we as evolved species need to step forward and protect them to the best of our capabilities. 6. **Allow them to sit or rest in public space around your home:** If possible, allow stray dogs to sit in spaces close to your home, if not within your premises. It is indeed unfair when people extend their boundaries illegally by grabbing public land and then prohibit the strays to sit in that space! 7. **Adopt a Stray:** Instead of going for fancy and costly breed of dogs, try adopting a stray. They are low maintenance and are as good and dedicated to their family members who adopt them. The best place to adopt a stray is from either a shelter home or just a roadside. They deserve that chance. It would be a noble deed as well. However, after adopting them, do not give up or abandon them ever that would be emotionally traumatic for them, leaving them forlorn and disheartened for the rest of their lives. 8. **Practise Empathy:** While strays certainly don't have the luxury of a cushy life that house pets fortunately have been blessed with, the former is still adaptable to humans and they too respond to human empathy. Surely a little empathy and respect for another species can reduce a lot of conflict and make the world a happier place. So, let's try and make Mother Earth, a peaceful place for all creatures big and small, with shared thoughts of kindness.