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IS CULLING OF INNOCENT DOGS THE ONLY SOLUTION TO CHECK STRAY DOG MENACE? – A CRITICAL REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Earlier isolated cases of a single dog biting or scratching used to come up but now we hear of pack of dogs targeting humans in the State of Kerala. While the Kerala government claims its response to the stray dog menace in the state is a mix of sterilisation and culling of stray dogs who are deemed 'dangerous', activists allege that stray dogs are being killed indiscriminately. While the essential anti-rabies drugs are not available in government hospitals, the committee said private hospitals were charging excessively for anti-rabies treatment. Lack of enough veterinary surgeons, trained dog handlers and poor infrastructure at hospitals are crippling the ABC (Animal Birth Control) programme in Kerala. Majority of local bodies are yet to switch over from traditional sterilization method to keyhole surgery, a standard procedure followed globally. The sterilization of dogs would reduce aggressiveness or ferocity in dogs. Moreover, a balance has to be struck and while the life of human beings should have precedence over stray dogs but stray dogs cannot be treated with indignity. The stray dogs too have a right to live and only violent dogs could be eliminated only if they became a menace to the society. There has to be a balanced approach on the issue. Compassion should be shown towards stray dogs but at the same time, these animals could not be allowed to become a menace to the society

INTRODUCTION

Continuous incidents of attacks on humans by stray dogs are not helping calm fears in the state of Kerala. Doctors tending to victims of dog attacks in Kerala confirmed that earlier isolated cases of a single dog biting or scratching used to come up but now we hear of pack of dogs targeting humans. While the Kerala government claims its response to the stray dog menace in the state is a mix of sterilisation and culling of stray dogs who are deemed 'dangerous', activists allege that stray dogs are being killed indiscriminately. While the essential anti-rabies drugs are not available in government hospitals, the committee said private hospitals were charging excessively for anti-rabies treatment. The Justice Jagan committee, appointed by the Supreme Court said it had so far received 60 claims for compensation from dog bite victims but had not been able to process them because of Kerala government's lethargy in providing the apex court-appointed panel with appropriate infrastructure facilities.

Lack of enough veterinary surgeons, trained dog handlers and poor infrastructure at hospitals are crippling the ABC (Animal Birth Control) programme in Kerala. Majority of local bodies are yet to switch over from traditional sterilization method to keyhole surgery, a standard procedure followed globally. There is an urgent need of employing ABC (Animal Birth Control) Rules to contain population of stray dogs. The sterilization of dogs would reduce aggressiveness or ferocity in dogs. In fact the stray dogs too have a right to live and said these could be eliminated only if they became a menace to the society. There has to be a balanced approach on the issue. Compassion should be shown towards stray dogs but at the same time, these animals could not be allowed to become a menace to the society. A balance has to be struck and while the life of human beings should have precedence over stray dogs but stray dogs cannot be treated with indignity.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

1. Sneha Mary Koshy (2016)

While the Kerala government claims its response to the stray dog menace in the state is a mix of sterilisation and culling of stray dogs who are deemed 'dangerous', activists allege that stray dogs are being killed indiscriminately.

Continuous incidents of attacks on humans by stray dogs are not helping calm fears in the state of Kerala. Three children were reportedly mauled by stray dogs in Thrissur on Friday. On Thursday, a 4-year-old boy was badly injured after a pack of dogs set upon him. The victims are not always children. A 52-year-old woman almost died when a pack of stray dogs attacked her on a public beach in Thiruvananthapuram last week. Her daughter, Ms Patricia Thomas is angry."My mother still can't sleep at night out of fear. There is hardly any flesh left on

International Journal OF Engineering Sciences & Management Research

her arm. It is a miracle that she is even alive. These dogs need to be killed." Doctors tending to victims of dog attacks in Kerala are also concerned. "Earlier isolated cases of a single dog biting or scratching used to come up. It was largely an accident. Now we hear of pack of dogs targeting humans," said Dr Rose Thomas Rose who works at a primary health centre near Thiruvananthapuram. On Monday, senior lawyer and activist Prashant Bhushan is likely to move the Supreme Court seeking an order to stop alleged culling of dogs in Kerala.

2. Sneha Mary Koshy (2016)

With at least five dead dogs hung by their legs on a pole, more than a dozen members of the youth wing of Kerala Congress (M) marched down the roads in Kerala's Kottayam district on Monday in what they called a protest. They had killed the stray dogs to protest against the increasing number of canines on the streets and incidents of dog bites across the state, members of the party said. After their march, they left the dead dogs in a pile outside the post office facing the offices of the municipal body. The protest appeared to be an open challenge to Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, who had earlier through his Facebook page, said that there won't be any illegal killing of stray dogs permitted in Kerala. No police was registered against those claimed to have killed the dogs.

3. J. Venkatesan (2016)

Taking a serious view of the brutal killings of stray dogs in several parts of Kerala, the Supreme Court on Tuesday directed the chief secretary to make sure that such killings do not happen in the future.

"We do not intend to comment at these photos" but the chief secretary must ensure that stray dogs are killed only in accordance with the procedure contemplated under the law.

On behalf of advocate Prashant Bhushan, an application was filed for directions regarding the barbaric killings of stray dogs in Kerala by private individuals and the court took on record this application and sought Kerala's reply to it. The court had already directed the state governments and local bodies to strictly follow the laws governing stray dogs, including those suffering from rabies and terminal illnesses or creating nuisance by biting people, and stay away from any innovative methods till the disposal of the petitions. The Animal Welfare Board of India, which is the petitioner in several cases, submitted that stray dogs should not be killed indiscriminately as man has been using the canine specie in a variety of ways for centuries. It submitted a copy of the model law to be followed by all concerned. The bench asked the centre to respond and posted the matter for further hearing on November 17.

4. Dhananjay Mahapatra (2016)

A Supreme Court-appointed committee has slammed the Kerala government for inaction leading to huge increase in the stray dog population, which posed grave threat to humans and livestock and forced people to defiantly kill them. "The situation is likely to go out of control if this trend continues. It is imperative that this menace is contained by immediate reduction of stray dog population to a manageable level, failing which people will take the law into their own hands and start culling dogs by themselves, which has already begun in some places openly," the committee said. "Majority of people in the state are aggrieved by inaction of authorities in the matter of containing the menace to an acceptable level. Schoolchildren and women are easy targets for dogs and many dog bite incidents are being reported daily. Most victims of dog bites belong to lower strata and lower middle class," it added. The committee headed by former Kerala HC judge S Siri Jagan, in its 12-page report, explained the reason behind local politicians arranging open culling of stray dogs and expressing willingness to go to jail. "It is an open secret that people are stealthily killing dogs by feeding them poisoned meat," it said. Kerala health secretary and the director of health services are the other members of the committee.

5. Ramesh Babu (2016)

Residents of a Kerala town killed 40 stray dogs on Thursday, a day after a 90-year-old man was mauled to death by a pack of canines, prompting the government to order sterilisation of an estimated 2.7-lakh feral dog population in the state. The government also rejected Union minister Maneka Gandhi's suggestion to book people killing stray dogs, blamed for the death of at least 10 people in the state. The killing of dogs by angry people have set off a war of words between the government and Gandhi, a known animal lover. The nonagenarian died at the Thiruvananthapuram Medical College after he was attacked by strays at Varkala while sleeping on the portico of his house on Wednesday.



International Journal Of Engineering Sciences & Management Research

He was the 10th victim of stray dogs. Though police rushed to the spot after the killings, locals prevented any arrest. The carcasses of the dogs were later displayed at the local market. The state government ordered implementation of animal birth control measures on a war-footing and asked local bodies to recruit enough people to carry out the programme effectively.

6. ANI (2017)

The activists have challenged the order passed by various civic bodies for culling of stray dogs in Kerala and Mumbai. The Supreme Court will on Wednesday resume its hearing on a bunch of pleas filed by animal rights activists as well as a group of people seeking to stop killing of stray dogs. The activists have challenged the order passed by various civic bodies for culling of stray dogs in Kerala and Mumbai.

FINDINGS

Doctors tending to victims of dog attacks in Kerala confirmed that earlier isolated cases of a single dog biting or scratching used to come up but now we hear of pack of dogs targeting humans. While the Kerala government claims its response to the stray dog menace in the state is a mix of sterilization and culling of stray dogs who are deemed 'dangerous', activists allege that stray dogs are being killed indiscriminately.

While the essential anti-rabies drugs are not available in government hospitals, the committee said private hospitals were charging excessively for anti-rabies treatment.

There have so far been 60 claims for compensation from dog bite victims but had not been able to process them because of Kerala government's lethargy in providing the apex court-appointed panel with appropriate infrastructure facilities.

Animal lovers have raised doubts about the data based on which the SC-appointed committee drew its conclusion and the manner in which sterilization is conducted in the state. The lack of a monitoring committee as mandated by Animal Birth Control Rules has also worsened the problem.

Lack of enough veterinary surgeons, trained dog handlers and poor infrastructure at hospitals are crippling the ABC programme in Kerala. Majority of local bodies are yet to switch over from traditional sterilization method to keyhole surgery, a standard procedure followed globally.

CONCLUSION

In fact, the law does not prohibit culling of stray dogs but it must be done in accordance with the laid down rules. A balance has to be struck. The life of human beings should have precedence over stray dogs but stray dogs cannot be treated with indignity. Indiscriminate culling of innocent animals cannot be a permanent solution to the problem. The State Government should employ the ABC (Animal Birth Control) Rules to contain population of stray dogs. It is learnt that the sterilization reduces aggressiveness or ferocity in them. To sum up, stray dogs too have a right to live and only violent dogs could be eliminated only if they became a menace to the society. There has to be a balanced approach on the issue. While compassion should be shown towards stray dogs but at the same time, the violent dogs could not be allowed to become a menace to the society.

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