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THE STRAY ANIMAL CRISIS IN INDIA: POLICY IMPLEMENTATION AND GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The problem of stray animals in India is not new especially numbers of dogs and cattle has grown into a serious social, legal and public health issue. According to the Press Information Bureau (government of India Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry & Dairying National level) information regarding Livestock population is collected every 5 years. The last livestock census was conducted in 2019. As per 2019 census, total population of stray dog and stray cattle in the country was 203.31 lakh. India is home to an estimated 62 million varieties of stray dogs and reports the world's highest number of rabies-related deaths. While animals have always been a part of Indian society, culture and religion. Moreover, the rapid urbanization, poor waste management and abandonment of pets and cattle have made the problem worse. Stray animals not only suffer from hunger, malnutrition and disease but also possess the risks to injure people through bites, road accidents and the spread of zoonotic diseases such as rabies.

India has legal statute and policies related to animals such as the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1960 and the Animal Birth Control Rules which prohibit any individual from mass killing of strays. Moreover, these law instead focus on humane and non violent methods like sterilization and vaccination. The Supreme Court has also intervened to balance rights of animals with safety of public. However, the actual implementation of these laws is not so simple the major setbacks are lack of funds, weak municipal infrastructure and limited access to veterinary services. This has created a wide gap between policy and practice.

This paper examines India's legal framework, the challenges in its enforcement and the recent Supreme Court decisions on stray dogs. It also compares India's approach with successful international models such as the Netherlands which eliminated stray animals through strict laws and adoption incentives and country like Bhutan, which carried out nationwide sterilization and vaccination.

The study argues that India needs a stronger, multi-stakeholder approach that combines law, public health and community participation. The solution lies not in culling but in effective sterilization along with vaccination. It could be done through strict anti abandonment laws and awareness campaigns that encourage adoption and responsible pet ownership.

Keywords: Stray animals, Rabies, Animal Birth Control, Public health law, Comparative policy, Animal welfare.

Introduction

Stray animals have been within a perennial component of Indian culture. Local communities sometimes do care for dogs, cattle, and other animals that often can roam freely in towns and in villages, but most of the time they are left to fend alone by themselves. This coexistence, historically, was viewed as being natural. Dogs, as an example, were companions and guardians of households. Cattle, on the other hand, were central to religious practices as well as agriculture. However, in modern India, this relationship does strain more and more now. Rapid urbanization, poor waste management, and changing farming practices created a large unmanaged stray animal population.

India today has one of the largest stray animal populations in the world. Reported by the State of Pet Homelessness Index in 2021, India has estimated that around 62 million stray dogs roam across the country's cities, slums, and rural areas¹. While many of these dogs are tolerated or even fed by residents out of compassion or religious belief, the sheer number of them has created major social and legal challenges. The World Health Organization reports that dogs account for up to 99% of human rabies cases worldwide², and that 36% of global rabies deaths occur in India alone³. This makes stray dogs not just an issue of animal welfare but also of serious public health concern.

Stray cattle pose another layer of complexity. With the mechanization of farming, bulls are no longer needed for plowing, and many unproductive cows are abandoned⁴. Laws like anti slaughter in several states have further increased the number of abandoned cattle, as farmers cannot sell them for meat even when they are no longer in use. These cattle often end up on

¹ State of Pet Homelessness Index 2021.

² World Health Organization.

³ Times of India.

⁴ The Indian Express, in 2019 report.

busy streets of cities and feeding on garbage which includes plastic waste which then leads to malnutrition and disease. They also frequently cause road accidents, sometimes causing damages to vehicles particularly at night.

India has adopted a more lawful sympathetic attitude for unowned animals. The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act of 1960⁵ addresses such an important topic. That topic of discussion is animal welfare. Causing pain to animals or causing unnecessary death is illegal. Under the Animal Birth Control Rules, stray dogs must be properly sterilized then vaccinated before return back to original locations: killing is prohibited⁶.

Despite laws and judgments the implementation of these laws remains one of the biggest challenges. Lack of funds, veterinary staff and proper infrastructure is major setback to carry out mass sterilization and vaccination programs. As a result, sterilization rates cannot keep pace with the fast breeding cycle of dogs. According to a report of Bihar government, stray dog bites are now the third significant cause of illness in the state⁷. Frustration of public is rising, as in states like Maharashtra, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu the cases of dog bite are frequently reported.

Worldwide, similar challenges have faced by other countries but they have adopted stricter and more effective measures. For example, Netherlands became the first country to completely eliminate stray dogs by implementing massive scale sterilization, strict anti abandonment laws as well as tax incentives for adopting shelter animals. Country like Bhutan successfully sterilized and vaccinated its entire stray dog population through government organised programs in partnership with NGOs. Countries like Switzerland and Australia require compulsory registration, microchipping and desexing of pets which eventually prevents abandonment and overbreeding.

Therefore, the central problem that this paper addresses is the gap between India's humane legal framework and its weak enforcement mechanisms. While India has fail to implement sterilization and vaccination programs at the required scale which left both people and animals vulnerable. The issue is not only just about animal but also is about balancing animal rights

⁵ The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960.

⁶ Animal Birth Control (Dogs) Rules, 2001, revised in 2023.

⁷ the Bihar Economic Survey 2023-24

along with public health and human safety in a rapidly changing society.

This research sets out to answer three key questions:

1. What are the causes of the stray animal crisis in India?
2. How effective are India's current policies and judicial decisions in dealing with the crisis?
3. What best practices from other countries can India adopt to create a more effective system? The study argues that stray animal management in India must move beyond fragmented efforts. It requires a multi stakeholder approach which includes government agencies, municipal bodies, veterinarians, NGOs and all local communities. Only by combining law, public health policy and community responsibility India can reduce its stray population, prevent diseases like rabies and ensure humane treatment of animals.

Literature Review

When we talk about stray animals in India, most people immediately think of dogs. But the reality is that the crisis goes much beyond that. Stray cattle, monkeys, pigs, cats and even donkeys create serious problems in both rural and urban areas. These issues affect people's safety, health and daily lives however, they often don't get as much attention in law and policy.

Stray dogs

The relationship between Indian society and stray animals goes back centuries. Dogs, in particular, have been companions, protectors, and community animals. Many Indian cities and towns traditionally had free-roaming dogs, some owned by households and others collectively cared for by neighborhoods. During the British colonial period, the administration viewed strays as a threat to public health and order. Municipal rules often involved mass killing of dogs to control their numbers⁸. Locals protest against this measures, who considered dogs friendly and part of everyday life. After India's independence in 1947, the policy focus shifted gradually from elimination to management. Sterilization and vaccination began to replace killing as humane alternatives leads to mixed success⁹.

⁸ Article published in The Hindu.

⁹ World Health Organisation, *rabies in India Fact Sheet 2023*.

Stray cattle

Stray cattle are a very common sight on Indian roads. With farming becoming more mechanized, bulls are no longer needed for ploughing and strict anti slaughter laws mean farmers cannot sell unproductive cows. This leaves many farmers with no choice but to abandon them¹⁰. Once on the streets, these animals:

- Wander on busy highways and cause accidents, sometimes fatal.
- Eat plastic from garbage dumps, which slowly kills them.
- Damage crops in villages near cities.
- Spread infections through dung and poor hygiene.

Courts have taken note of this. For example, the Gujarat High Court in 2012 and the Delhi High Court in 2013 directed city authorities to take strong action against stray cattle after a series of road accidents¹¹. Though, cattle are caught and moved to gaushalas (cow shelters), these shelters are often overcrowded and underfunded which leaving the problem largely unsolved.

Monkeys

In states like Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and even parts of Delhi, monkeys cause daily nuisance. Feeding monkeys is linked with religious beliefs especially with Lord Hanuman which makes the problem even harder to manage. Moreover, the ground reality is tough:

- They raid homes, steal food and damage property.
- They bite or attack people which leading to injuries.
- They can spread deadly viruses and even monkey pox.

The Supreme Court in 2017 permitted sterilization of monkeys in Himachal Pradesh which acknowledging that the situation had become unmanageable¹². However, sterilization is slow, costly and sometimes opposed by local communities.

Pigs

Stray pigs are usually seen in poorer areas and near open drains. They survive by eating waste but this creates severe public health risks. Pigs are known carriers of Japanese Encephalitis and swine flu¹³. Municipal bodies sometimes carry out culling but it is not consistent and often faces criticism for being inhumane.

¹⁰ Times of India report in 2022.

¹¹ Times of India (2022) and Delhi High Court Order, 2013.

¹² Indian Express (2017).

¹³ World Health Organization (WHO), *Japanese Encephalitis Fact Sheet*.

Cats and Other Animals

Stray cats breed quickly and while less visible than dogs or cattle they can spread diseases like toxoplasmosis¹⁴. Donkeys and horses are also abandoned in some parts of India once they are too old or weak to work. Left on the streets they are at risk of abuse, starvation and traffic accidents.

Why This Matters

At its heart, the problem is the same: animals are abandoned when they are no longer useful, and cities are not equipped to handle them. Whether it is cows eating plastic, monkeys attacking people, or pigs spreading disease, the issue goes beyond inconvenience — it affects public safety, health, and the dignity of animals themselves.

❖ Causes and Challenges:-

A number of studies and reports identify why India continues to struggle with stray animal overpopulation:

- **Urbanization and Habitat Loss:** Rapid urban growth has displaced animals from their natural habitats while abandoned pets add to the urban stray population.
- **Inadequate Waste Management:** Stray animals feed on open garbage. According to Press Trust of India reports Cities with poor disposal systems tend to have higher concentrations of strays.
- **Cultural and Religious Practices:** Dogs are viewed as sacred within Hinduism since they represent loyalty as well as protection plus spiritual guidance and since they have associations for deities such as Lord Bhairava and Lord Dattatreya. However, they do not regard them as sacred as cows, but they respect them as a part of life rather than worship idols. An act for religious merit is often that of feeding strays. Compassion fosters normalization of large stray populations also.
- **Lack of Veterinary Infrastructure:** Veterinary centers seem limited and medicines seem short. Became dogs throughout both urban and rural India behave evasively, catching, vaccinating, along with sterilizing them is difficult..
- **Public Safety Concerns:** Stray animals may suffer malnutrition, diseases and road accidents. Bites as well as dangerous diseases such as rabies, leptospirosis and also toxoplasmosis cause risks for humans.

The issue about stray cattle has deteriorated as well. Reportedly, gaushalas (cow

¹⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

shelters) remain overcrowded and underfunded. This shows flaws in the common control of cattle.

❖ **Legal Framework in India:-**

India's legal framework adopts a sympathetic approach:

- Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960: Prohibits causing unnecessary suffering on animals and criminalizes neglect or abandonment¹⁵.
- Animal Birth Control Rules, 2001 which was updated in 2023: Provide for the sterilization and vaccination of stray dogs before returning them to their original locations¹⁶. Killing of dogs is prohibited except in cases of incurable illness or extreme aggression.
- Indian Penal Code Sections 428 and 429: Criminalize causing injury, poisoning or killing of animals.
- Constitutional Provisions:
 - Article 51A(g): Duty of individual to show compassion to living creatures.
 - Article 48A: Directive principle of state policy to protect the environment and wildlife.
- Municipal Laws: Gaushalas and Ponds for cattle must be maintained.

❖ **Judicial Decisions :-**

The of balance public safety with animal welfare is main aim of judiciary :

- In the case of Animal Welfare Board of India vs A. Nagaraja in 2014 the Supreme Court declared that animals also have intrinsic rights and dignity under Article 21 of the Constitution¹⁷.
- In 2023, the Supreme Court intervened after a rise in stray dog attacks in New Delhi. Initially, it ordered all strays to be captured and housed in shelters. Following widespread public resistance, the Court modified its order, directing sterilization and vaccination before returning dogs to their original locations, except for rabid or dangerously aggressive animals. It also banned public feeding in random areas and ordered creation of designated feeding zones¹⁸.

¹⁵ Government of India, *The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960*.

¹⁶ Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying, *Animal Birth Control Rules, 2023*.

¹⁷ *Animal Welfare Board of India v. A. Nagaraja & Ors.*, (2014) 7 SCC 547.

¹⁸ India Today (2025)

- The Kerala High Court 2016 allowed killing of aggressive dogs after a series of attacks which sparking nationwide debate and later reviewed by the Supreme Court.

These cases reflect the tension between animal rights activists and public safety concerns.

❖ **Rabies and Public Health Dimension:-**

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 99% of all human rabies cases worldwide caused by dogs. 36% of global rabies deaths reported in India alone, making the disease endemic here. Unless treated with vaccines immediately after a bite, rabies is almost always fatal. The Bihar government ranks stray dog bites as the third leading cause of illness in the state¹⁹. This highlights that the stray animal problem is not only about welfare but also about preventable human deaths.

❖ **International aspect :-**

The issue of managing the population stray animals is not unique to India. Countries across Asia, Europe, and America have faced similar issues. What differs is the policy response ranging from large scale sterilization and vaccination programs to harsh culling drives. A closer look at global practices provides useful lessons for India.

I. *Europe*

The Netherlands is often cited as a global success story. By 2016, it became the first country to report near-zero stray dogs. This was achieved not through killing, but by introducing a mass sterilization program, strict anti-abandonment laws, and heavy fines for neglecting or dumping pets²⁰. The government of Netherlands also imposed higher taxes on dogs purchased from breeders, while shelter adoptions were made free. Public campaigns promoted “Adopt, don’t shop,” creating a cultural shift in attitudes toward stray dogs. Germany follows a strict system of compulsory pet registration and microchipping. Every pet must be registered, vaccinated, and subject to an annual “pet tax.” Municipal shelters (Tierheime) are well-funded, and abandonment rates are low. Switzerland requires every pet owner to undergo training before adopting a pet. Microchipping is compulsory, and pet abandonment is treated as a

¹⁹ Government of Bihar, Health Department Report (2022).

²⁰ *World Animal Protection Report* (2016).

serious criminal offense. This combination of legal enforcement and education has kept strays under control.

II. *Asia*

Bhutan faced a growing stray population in the early 2000s. By collaborating with multiple social groups and NGO like Humane Society International, Bhutan carried out a national sterilization and vaccination campaign²¹. Use of mobile veterinary clinics, more than 75,000 dogs over a decade were sterilized and vaccinated. In 2025, Bhutan declared that nearly all free roaming dogs had been sterilized, making it one of Asia's most successful humane control models. Sri Lanka banned dog slaughter in 2006 and adopted mass sterilization and rabies vaccination methods²². Although challenges were there but gradually rabies deaths have declined significantly. Turkey amended its animal welfare law in 2021 making pet abandonment a criminal offense. Stray dogs are collected, sterilized, vaccinated and then released in their neighborhoods under municipal supervision. Public feeding stations have also been installed in many cities. In contrast, Pakistan and several Gulf countries like Saudi Arabia and Kuwait have often relied on mass extinctions through poisoning or shooting. These measures are widely criticized as cruel and ineffective, since dog populations rebound quickly if sterilization is not carried out.

III. *Australia and New Zealand*

Both countries follow strict pet responsibility models. Microchipping, registration and desexing of pets are compulsory. Unregistered or free roaming animals are impounded and adoption is promoted through shelters. Public awareness programs encourage responsible ownership eventually reducing abandonment and strays.

❖ **Global suggestions:-**

The World Health Organization and the World Organization for Animal Health agree that slaughter is not a solution. They recommends sterilizing at least 70% of stray dogs in one reproductive cycle to achieve population control. Vaccination against rabies is considered equally crucial for both for animal and human health. According to the Journal of Veterinary Science and by organizations like Humane Society International

²¹ *Bhutan National Dog Population Management Project 2012–2016.*

²² *Journal of Veterinary Science*

also confirm that trap the animals vaccinate and return them is the most effective and humane long term strategy.

❖ **Lessons for India :-**

From these international models, a few clear lessons emerge:

1. **Sterilization and Vaccination at Scale:** Countries like the Netherlands and Bhutan prove that population control is possible if sterilization covers the majority of animals.
2. **Strict anti abandonment Laws:** Punishing pet abandonment as in Germany and Turkey prevents new additions to the stray population.
3. **Compulsory pet registration:** Helps trace ownership and ensures accountability.
4. **Public awareness and adoption encouragement:** Changing cultural attitudes is as important as legal frameworks. Adoption drives and education campaigns create long term change.
5. **Government and social groups partnerships:** As seen in Bhutan and Sri Lanka where collaboration improves outreach and reduces costs for the state.

Research Methodology

This research adopts a doctrinal, policy oriented and comparative approach which focusing not only on stray dogs but also on cattle, monkeys, pigs, cats, donkeys and other abandoned domestic animals.

Nature of Research:-

The doctrinal method forms the core of this study which means it examines laws and constitutional provisions along with judicial decisions that directly or indirectly address stray animals. In India, the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act in 1960 provides the basic legal framework for animal welfare with prohibiting cruelty also neglect and abandonment of animals. However, specific rules like the Animal Birth Control Rules of 2001 and 2023 apply only to stray dogs. For cattle, monkeys, and pigs there is no equally comprehensive national program but their regulation is spread across municipal laws, cattle pound rules and High Court or Supreme Court directives. For example:

- The Supreme Court (2017) allowed sterilization of monkeys in Himachal Pradesh due to rising attacks.

- The Gujarat High Court in 2012 ordered strong measures against stray cattle in Ahmedabad after fatal road accidents caused by roaming animals on roads .
- The Delhi High Court in 2013 directed municipal bodies to create proper cattle shelters.
- In *Animal Welfare Board of India v. A. Nagaraja* (2014), the Supreme Court recognized that animals have a constitutional right to dignity and life, which extends to all stray animals.

The comparative method is equally important. Many other countries face stray animal problems — whether dogs, donkeys, monkeys, or pigs — and their policies provide lessons. The Netherlands achieved near-zero stray dogs through sterilization, adoption, and strict anti-abandonment laws. Bhutan sterilized almost all of its dogs through a government-NGO partnership. Turkey requires municipalities to sterilize and vaccinate strays, not only dogs but also cats. In Thailand and Indonesia, stray monkeys near temples are controlled through relocation and sterilization programs. Kenya has introduced welfare laws for working and abandoned donkeys. Comparing these approaches helps highlight what India can learn to design holistic stray animal policies.

Sources of Data:-

This research relies on primary and secondary sources:

- **Primary Sources:** prevention of cruelty against animals Act, the Indian Penal Code sections 428 to 429, constitutional provisions Articles 48A and 51A(g), municipal cattle and dog pound rules and landmark judicial decisions by the Supreme Court and High Courts are some primary sources .
- **Secondary Sources:** Academic articles, newspaper reports such as *The Hindu*, *Indian Express*, *Times of India*, WHO and WOAHA guidelines, NGO reports (*Humane Society International*, *People for Animals*) and government statistics. For instance, the *Press Trust of India* estimates India's stray dog population at 62 million, while state governments report rising monkey attacks and cattle-related accidents.
- **Health Data:** WHO statistics show India accounts for 36% of global rabies deaths, largely linked to dog bites, but public health reports also warn of Japanese Encephalitis linked to pigs and zoonotic infections linked to monkeys and cattle.

Research Tools and Analysis:-

The research uses textual and contextual analysis to study laws, policies, and court judgments,

asking how they operate in practice. Case law analysis helps trace how courts have interpreted animal welfare — whether in protecting strays under the animal birth control Rules or in ordering shelters for cattle and sterilization of monkeys. Comparative evaluation draws lessons from global practices across multiple species, rather than focusing only on dogs.

Scope and Limitations:-

The scope of this study covers all major stray animals in India including dogs, cattle, monkeys, pigs, cats, donkeys and horses. It considers how each group creates unique challenges for public safety, their health and governance. However, the study does not extend to wild animals since wildlife conservation is governed by separate laws like the Wildlife Protection Act. A limitation is that the research relies on secondary data statutes, judgments, reports and published figures without field surveys or first-hand interviews.

Analysis and Discussion

1. Why has India's legal framework failed to control the stray animal population?

India has a long list of laws that deal with animals. The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960 is the most important one, and it makes cruelty towards animals an offence. Later the Animal Birth Control Rules 2001 which were recently updated in 2023. These rules make it very clear that stray dogs should not be killed instead they must be sterilised and vaccinated before being returned to the same place.

On paper, this looks like a very progressive framework. Yet the ground reality is very different. Reports suggest there are more than 62 million stray dogs in India, along with lakhs of cattle on city streets and rising numbers of monkeys in urban areas. Every few weeks, newspapers report tragic cases: a child mauled by a pack of dogs, a road accident caused by cows sitting on a highway, or residents of Delhi colonies attacked by aggressive monkeys. Clearly, laws alone have not solved the problem.

One of the biggest reasons is that municipal bodies simply don't have the capacity. The World Health Organization recommends that at least 70% of stray dogs in an area should be sterilized within one breeding cycle if we want to see numbers fall²³. Most Indian cities don't even come close; some manage 10% or 15%. Small towns often have no vets or sterilization centres at

²³ World health Organisation, World Organisation for animal Health.

all²⁴. Even when funds are allocated, audits by the CAG (Comptroller and Auditor General) show that money is frequently diverted to other municipal works.

Another issue is that India's laws are fragmented by species. Dogs have a detailed program in the form of the ABC Rules. For cattle, the system depends mostly on gaushalas (cow shelters), which are often overcrowded and poorly run. Monkeys are dealt with through occasional sterilization drives especially in states like Himachal Pradesh but these efforts are inconsistent and sometimes face public opposition. Pigs, donkeys and other strays are either ignored or culled locally without any structured program. This patchwork approach means India does not have a single coherent policy that looks at stray animals as a whole.

The courts have stepped in many times but their directions have not always been consistent. In *Animal Welfare Board of India v.s. Nagaraja* 2014 the Supreme Court went as far as to say that animals have a right to dignity and fair treatment²⁵. Yet in other cases like those arising from the dog bite crisis in Kerala then courts have also expressed deep concern for human safety and hinted at the need for stronger measures. In August 2023 the Supreme Court first directed that all stray dogs in Delhi should be permanently shifted to shelters. After public protests it modified the order within a week saying only rabid or aggressive dogs should be removed while others must be sterilised and released back. These swings create confusion for local authorities who are left unsure about how far they can go.

There is also a social angle. Feeding stray dogs and cattle is seen as a religious or moral duty by many. In Hindu traditions, feeding animals is often linked with good karma. This means that even when sterilization is attempted, community feeding ensures that animals continue to survive and reproduce. As *The Hindu* noted in a 2022 article, unless policy solutions take such cultural practices into account, the law will remain “an abstract promise.”

Taken together, the picture is clear. The problem is not that India lacks laws in fact, the country has one of the most compassionate legal systems in the world when it comes to strays. The real issue lies in weak municipal infrastructure along with lack of funding, judicial contradictions and cultural practices that unintentionally encourage the growth of stray populations. Without addressing these deeper issues the crisis will continue.

²⁴ *The Hindu*.

²⁵ *Animal Welfare Board of India vs A.Nagaraja & Ors.*, (2014) 7 SCC 547.

2. *Why are Indian policies dog-centric while neglecting cattle, monkeys, pigs, and others?*

When we look at India's laws on strays one thing immediately stands out the focus is almost entirely on dogs. The Animal Birth Control (Dogs) Rules 2001 recently updated in 2023 lay down a very detailed system for managing stray dogs through sterilization and vaccination. There is even a clear direction from the Supreme Court that killing dogs is not allowed except in cases of incurable disease or extreme aggression. In many ways this legal clarity has helped protect dogs from mass culling.

But what about other stray animals? Here the law becomes patchy. Stray cattle, for example are a common sight on Indian roads. They cause traffic accidents, block highways and fall sick after consuming plastic waste from garbage dumps. Yet the legal framework for cattle is fragmented across state laws, anti slaughter bans and municipal by-laws. Instead of a national policy most states rely on gaushalas (cow shelters). Reports from states like Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat and Rajasthan show that many shelters are overcrowded, underfunded and unsanitary. Courts have stepped in from time to time such as the Gujarat High Court which directed municipal corporations to remove stray cattle from Ahmedabad roads but long term solutions remain elusive.

The story is similar with monkeys. In states like Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Delhi monkey attacks are a genuine public safety issue. They snatch food, enter homes and in some cases have caused serious injuries. In 2017, the Supreme Court dealt with petitions from Himachal Pradesh on sterilizing monkeys. While it allowed sterilization programs, it also reminded the state that relocation or culling was not permissible. However, sterilization drives are expensive, slow and often face public opposition from those who consider monkeys sacred especially in relation to Lord Hanuman. As a result, the problem continues without a clear national policy.

Pigs form another neglected category. In many urban slums stray pigs are a health hazard as they spread diseases like swine fever and Japanese encephalitis²⁶. Unlike dogs or cattle, pigs are often culled in an ad hoc manner by municipal bodies. There are few legal protections and policy attention is minimal. Donkeys, which are often abandoned once they are too weak for work also slip through the cracks of animal welfare laws.

²⁶ The Indian Express reports pigs act as excellent hosts for JE virus in affected areas.

So why this imbalance? One reason is visibility. Stray dogs are the most visible to the public and the media. They live in almost every colony, and dog bites — often reported in newspapers — generate immediate public concern. Cattle, pigs, and monkeys certainly create problems, but they are not perceived with the same urgency, and sometimes their presence is normalized as part of Indian urban life.

Another reason is the role of international organizations. Both WHO and World Organization for Animal Health have repeatedly emphasized dog sterilization and vaccination as the global standard for rabies control²⁷. This international pressure has influenced Indian policy keeping the focus narrowly on dogs while leaving other strays out of the conversation.

There is also a cultural factor. Dogs and cattle occupy very different places in Indian society. Dogs are increasingly seen as companions, while cattle are tied to religious sentiments. Monkeys, associated with Lord Hanuman, are also seen by many as sacred. This makes it politically sensitive for governments to push strong population control programs for species other than dogs. As a result, we end up with a legal system where dogs are governed by detailed rules, cattle by piecemeal shelter laws, monkeys by occasional court orders, and pigs by neglect or culling.

This dog centric approach has created a blind spot. By focusing only on one species, India risks ignoring the larger picture. Stray animals of all kinds whether dogs, cattle, monkeys or pigs contribute to public health risks, road accidents and human animal conflict. Without an integrated policy that looks at strays as a whole the problem cannot be solved.

3. What lessons can India learn from other nations to stray animal management?

Stray animals are not only problem in India though many countries have struggled with them at different points in time. What makes difference is how they managed to bring the issue under their control through a mixture of law, infrastructure and community involvement. These experiences gives us a clearer picture of where India is falling short and what can be done differently.

Take European countries as an example. In the 1960s and 70s, stray dog populations were common in cities across Italy, Greece and Romania. Over the time these countries adopted a

²⁷ World Health Organisation, call for experts- the regional technical advisory group.

strict system of mandatory registration and licensing of pets. Abandonment of animals became a punishable offence and municipal bodies were held accountable for sterilization and adoption drives. For instance in Italy, Law No. 281 of 1991 made regions responsible for controlling strays through sterilization, banned euthanasia except in extreme cases and created public shelters where adoption was encouraged. As result the stray problem declined sharply within two decades²⁸.

In contrast, Romania faced international criticism in the 1990s and early 2000s for mass culling of dogs especially in Bucharest. The European Court of Human Rights in Romania in 2009 even criticized the conditions of animal shelters. Since then the Romania has shifted to sterilization and vaccination programs, supported by NGOs and EU funding. This shows that purely violent measures do not work in the long term humane, legally backed systems are more effective.

Outside Europe, Brazil offers another useful comparison. Cities like Rio de Janeiro struggled with both stray dogs and stray cattle in urban areas. The government introduced integrated programs that combined sterilization with public education campaigns where teaching citizens not to abandon animals. They also built municipal shelters and partnered with veterinary universities for cheap surgeries. This mix of law with education and infrastructure has been credited with stabilizing stray populations over the last decade.

Sri Lanka has successfully reduced rabies deaths through massive vaccination campaign supported by health organisations and NGOs. The government there made rabies control a public health priority which shows that regional cooperation and political will can make a difference.

International animal welfare frameworks also stress more holistic approach. The World Health Organization and the World Organisation for Animal Health have both emphasized that effective stray management must involve four pillars (1) mass sterilization and vaccination (2) responsible pet ownership laws (3) community participation and (4) adequate funding for shelters. India has adopted parts of this model mainly sterilisation of dogs but it has not extended the same approach to cattle, monkeys or pigs.

²⁸ Study on the Public Perception of ‘Community-Owned Dogs’ in the Abruzzo Region, Central Italy” (PMC).

What India can learn from these global experiences is clear. First, stray management cannot be left to underfunded municipalities alone; it requires strong national policy, steady funding, and active enforcement. Second, laws must go beyond dogs and cover all stray species in an integrated way. Third, public education is essential people must understand that feeding animals is not enough rather responsible ownership, sterilization and waste management are just as important. Finally, international cooperation, especially in rabies control can provide technical and financial support to strengthen India's system.

By looking outward, we see that the problem is not impossible to solve. Countries with similar challenges have managed to balance with control. The key lies in a humane, legally coherent and practically funded approach.

Findings

This research highlights that the stray animal crisis in India is not only a legal or administrative challenge but also deeply rooted in social attitudes and cultural contradictions. On paper, India has a strong legal framework and multiple laws which provide mechanisms for humane management of strays. But somehow, their impact remains limited because implementation has been uneven and public participation inconsistent. According to multiple studies, nearly 62 million stray dogs live in India today and accounts for 36% of the world's rabies deaths which is a striking indicator of the scale of the problem²⁹.

A major finding is that the Indian response to strays is selective and discriminatory. Many urban residents call themselves "dog lovers," but their affection often extends only to pedigreed, high-breed pets purchased from breeders or pet shops. Street dogs, by contrast, are seen as a nuisance and are rarely adopted. This trend has been pointed out in animal welfare blogs and adoption studies, where it is noted that shelters remain full of Indian "desi dogs" while expensive foreign breeds are bought for status or fashion. A similar contradiction exists with cattle: while cows are worshipped as "mother" and treated as sacred in Hindu tradition, once they stop producing milk they are often abandoned on the streets, where they eat plastic, cause road accidents, and suffer neglect. As The Hindu and Indian Express have reported in several features, gaushalas (cow shelters) are frequently overcrowded and underfunded, leading to further suffering rather than protection.

²⁹ *India Today*, "India Stray Romance Love Lies Rabies Solutions" (2025).

This selective compassion extends to other animals as well. Farmers, for example, rarely keep male buffalo calves since they cannot produce milk, leading to their abandonment. With the rise of cheap electric rickshaws, horses once used for pulling carts in Indian towns have also been left without purpose or care, joining the invisible category of stray working animals. These cases show that while Indian society often expresses love for animals, that love tends to be symbolic or conditional which limited to situations where animals serve religious, economic, or social value. When responsibility and long-term care are required then abandonment becomes common.

Such selective affection is one of the root causes of the crisis. In a magazine named Down to Earth which is a pioneer environmental magazine in India it was argued that India loves its animals “from afar,” but when it comes to responsibility whether adopting a street dog, managing cattle sustainably or funding proper shelters most people step back. This inconsistency fuels overpopulation, suffering and human-animal conflict.

At the governance level, municipal bodies still struggle to keep pace with sterilization and vaccination drives. According to health organisations 70% of a stray dog population must be sterilized within one reproductive cycle to achieve control, but very few Indian cities have reached even half of this target³⁰. Poor waste management particularly in slums and peri-urban areas which continues to provide stray animals with a ready food source. Case studies from The Times of India have shown how large dog populations often cluster around garbage dumps, hospitals and markets that makes population control even more challenging and in those busy areas situations became more tense between humans and animals.

To conclude, the findings suggest that India’s stray animal crisis continues not because of a lack of compassion rather because compassion is selective, inconsistent and often symbolic. Until we swap those selective and selfish motives with real responsibility and actually back up our laws with money, awareness and some actual enforcement, things won’t change. The gap between what’s on paper and what is actually happening on the streets is just gonna keep getting bigger.

³⁰ *Mongabay India*, (2025).

Conclusion and Suggestions

The stray animal crisis in India reflects a deeper imbalance between law, governance and public attitude. While policies and Supreme Court directives have made it clear that mass slaughtering is not an option implementation on the ground has had a different story. Millions of animals continue to live without shelter, food or proper medical care which exposing people to risks such as rabies, traffic accidents and property damage. At the same time these animals themselves suffer from malnutrition, untreated injuries and neglect.

One of the most striking features of this issue is the selective compassion shown toward animals. Pedigree dogs are celebrated as symbols of status, while Indian street dogs are dismissed as “nuisance animals.” Cows are revered in temples but left to wander once they stop producing milk. Male calves and buffaloes are often abandoned because they bring no economic return, while horses once central to local transport have been discarded in the age of electric carts. Such selective affection has created an environment where responsibility ends when utility ends. Until this type of mindset changes the best policies will remain ineffective.

To create meaningful change in India multi dimensional approach is needed. The government should treat non governmental organisations and grassroots initiatives as equal partners in policy execution by providing them with financial support, legal recognition and infrastructural assistance. Partnerships with social media influencers and local leaders can help transform the way people see stray animals especially by challenging selective compassion that glorify pedigree dogs or productive cattle while ignoring strays, abandoned calves or street dogs.

Equally important is public education. Schools, colleges and community centers should run awareness programs on responsible pet ownership, rabies prevention and the importance of adopting rather than buying animals. Children and youth can become long term agents of change if they are taught early that compassion is not selective or conditional. Campaigns in local languages which must be supported by government and NGOs together this could also reduce fear and hostility toward stray animals.

On the policy side the reforms must address structural gaps. Strict non abandonment laws, compulsory pet registration and incentives for adoption would prevent irresponsible ownership. Waste management must be prioritized as garbage dumps sustain stray

populations. Cattle shelters should be upgraded with better funding along with trained staff and transparent oversight to ensure animals are not merely transferred from the streets to overcrowded and neglected facilities. Mobile veterinary units drives into rural and semi urban areas where infrastructure is weak.

While government policies and judicial directions form the backbone of animal welfare in India but the real work on the ground is being carried out by non governmental organizations, local groups and individual influencers. These organisations have often stepped in where municipal systems have failed by providing rescue, medical treatment and long term care for animals that would otherwise be left to die on the streets.

A strong example is Peepal Farm in Himachal Pradesh which has leading organisation driven care for stray and injured animals. They not only rescue and treat animals but also run awareness campaigns about compassion, adoption and responsible ownership. Their social media outreach has educated millions, specially young people about the importance of caring for animals beyond pedigree pets and they rescue hundreds of animals from very devastating stage. Similar initiatives by Animal Aid Unlimited in Udaipur and Friendicoes is the oldest animal hospital and shelter in Delhi show how voluntary efforts can create sustainable change when supported by the community.

In conclusion, the stray animal crisis in India is not just a question of overpopulation but of responsibility. For too long, animals have been loved from a distance but abandoned when they require care. Changing this requires not only better laws but also a shift in cultural attitudes and stronger partnerships between governments, non governmental organisations and citizens. If India embraces compassion alongside accountability then it can build a future where stray animals are not seen as a burden but as part of a shared environment living safely and with dignity alongside human communities.