

Kuthe! The word for ‘dog’ in India is used as an insult. In a place where humans have trouble surviving and thriving, the state of dogs takes the backseat, or more accurately, goes to the street. I’ve often counted the number of stray dogs I see while going to school from home – numbers reaching forty or fifty for a seven mile ride. My earliest memories range from feeding hungry, happy strays *rotis*, (Indian bread) and seeing the carcasses of dogs run over amidst reckless Indian driving, with no one paying heed to the issue. While volunteering with Maruthy Dog Shelter (MDS) of the Dogs Our Best Friends Trust, I have worked to promote the adoption of Indian breed dogs and educate the general public about the predicament of these dogs.

Stray dogs consist of the Indian pariah dog, one of the oldest dog breeds in the world, or mixed breeds of this variation. Unlike other breeds that have been genetically and forcefully bred [1], Indian breed dogs have naturally evolved. They are well suited to the tropical environment, rarely shed, and have extremely good health [2]. These dogs are also known as “mankind’s original domestic dog.” [3] However, even with the 30 million street dogs in India [4], many of which are suitable as strong companions, people choose to buy pedigree dogs as a trophy of prestige or opulent wealth. These first companions of humans are now left to fend for themselves on the streets, and the stray dog problem in India is only growing. At MDS, it’s difficult to accept and take care of new dogs due to reducing space.

MDS is a cage-free shelter with more than 100 dogs, many of which are Indian stray dogs [5]. Mistreatment of the strays and lack of care leads to them being taken in by the shelter. Puppies are abandoned overnight by the shelter’s gate, such as Precious (shown below) was.



Precious

Other dogs stay in the shelter for numerous years, growing up and dying there because no one is willing to take them in. Puppy mills that treat dogs like objects and assets instead of living beings are thriving in India. Many of these dogs are unhealthy and weak, as the breeders do not follow laws pertaining to these animals [6]. By promoting the adoption of Indian-breed dogs, the stray dog problem in Bangalore and the issue of illegal puppy mills can both be alleviated.



A few of the shelter's Indian-breed residents

I had to combat stigma that surrounds these dogs, as keeping a pet is not a typical aspect of Indian culture, where dogs are often used as a security measure rather than a faithful companion. I did so by helping groups of people come to MDS and interact with

these dogs. Slowly, people have realized that these dogs are just as, if not more, loving than any pedigree dogs. I remember a volunteer who was helping with paperwork come into the shelter, shaken with terror, who couldn't look at the dogs that were happily wagging their tails around her. After encouragement from fellow volunteers, she pet Charlie, a dog affected by paraplegia, who slowly started licking her hand – her expression changed quickly from absolute terror to a giggle - “It tickles!” Many others have gone through similar experiences at the shelter – at first overwhelmed by the cage-free dogs that approach them, and then finding it difficult to give each dog the love they deserve. The dogs tap hands with their noses, asking for more scratches and rubs.



I brought a group of classmates to Maruthy Dog Shelter, to interact with these mixed breed Indian dogs in a safe environment

To promote adoption from MDS, I created advocacy posters, featuring mainly Indian breed puppies with a few abandoned pedigree dogs. Furthermore, the trustees of Dogs Our Best Friends and I discussed a plan to advocate the adoption of Indian breed

dogs by supporting a family through the entire process, instead of leaving them to learn all the necessities of raising a puppy themselves.

Be Part of a New Family

ADOPT A DOG FROM THE MARUTHY DOG SHELTER

Did you know that research shows that living with pets has health benefits? If you are thinking of adopting a dog, PLEASE talk to us at Dogs Our Best Friends.

We have adorable, healthy, mixed breed Indian puppies waiting to warm your heart. ❤️

If you choose a dog through Dogs Our Best Friends, our experienced experts will actively support a smooth adoption for humans and dog, with continued support, advice, and training interventions.

House-trained, vaccinated, dewormed, and full of character, these delightful creatures will quickly become a forever member of your family.

Worried about travel? We will provide kennel service for your pup when you're out of town.

And if, for whatever reason, things don't work out, you can return the puppy and we will find a new forever home.

ADOPT, DON'T SHOP

Make your adoption a paw-sitive experience!

An "Adopt, Don't Shop" poster that I created

In this way, we are providing a much-needed service to new pet owners that have never had a dog before, at no cost. This, compared to the 16,000 INR (~250 USD) that illegal breeders charge for dogs on websites created to sell goods such as *OLX* or *Snapdeal* [7], should hopefully contribute to alleviating the burden of Indian breed dogs.

By streamlining the shelter's day-to-day activities and finding ways to reduce running costs, such as by building a new website, introducing new software systems,

holding fundraising drives where I raised \$2000 and 100 items overall, and designing more posters (e.g. “What 1000 INR Buys,” and “Sponsor A Meal” [refer to appendix]), I’ve tried to lighten the load on MDS so that they can focus on promoting the adoption of Indian breed dogs. Moreover, to address the lack of focus on animal welfare issues and change the perception towards stray dogs in India, I created a website called “For Barks and Sparks” [8] that connects animal welfare organizations with certain needs to volunteers who have them, and inspires people to address the issues at hand.

Advocacy and education make a difference. Just because they look different, that doesn’t mean that these dogs love anyone any more or less. These Indian-breed dogs can be “man’s best friend” once again. In my grandparent’s hometown, my grandparent’s neighbors had built a brick shelter for a mother who gave birth to a litter of puppies so that they could be protected from ongoing rivalries between dogs. I recall holding one of the week-old puppies in my hands, wondering how someone could possibly discriminate against this tiny living being. Hopefully, eventually no one will.



Appendix

Your **₹1000** can



Sponsor a dog for a month
THIS INCLUDES EVERYTHING, FROM FOOD TO VACCINATIONS, MEDICATIONS TO SHAMPOO.

In other words, it can provide for...

100 MEALS OR **2 SACKS OF RICE**



x 100



2 BOTTLES OF FIPRONIL SPRAY OR **3 BOTTLES OF MEDICATED SHAMPOO**



20000 LITRES OF WATER OR **2 GAS CYLINDERS**



Your donation makes a difference to the Maruthy family.
Just look at the smiles on the pups' faces!



SPONSOR A MEAL



₹1000 FEEDS 100+ DOGS

EACH OF OUR 100 DOGS IS FED A LOVINGLY PREPARED, NUTRITIOUS MEAL OF CHICKEN AND RICE TWICE A DAY
₹1000 SPONSORS ONE MEAL FOR ALL THE DOGS



MAKE A DIFFERENCE
DONATE ₹1000 TODAY



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Posters created using infographic design software Piktochart.