

Thursday, March 08, 2001

Dear Hon'ble Dr. Justice Anand,

I love animals and from childhood have been told that none, including small creatures, be it an insect or a venomous snake, should be hurt. But when I was told by eye witnesses the aftermath of an attack on a small girl by a pack of stray dogs on our campus (they literally mauled her) and saw the child later on I had my own doubts. I have several times faced snarling dogs but still could bravely pretend to be friendly, despite a pounding heart and avoid being pounced upon. I was, more than immediate injuries, bothered about the psychological trauma of such encounters. After a lot of soul search and never intending to be hurting I had convinced many here that we could leave them tied up and feed (impossible task though) if every one cooperates. This has somehow not happened.

I write this after a night of lost sleep due to continuous and vigorous barking by a large number of dogs around a colony of 400 houses in may be five acres of land although less crowded than most other parts of this city. I had been away for several days attending a meeting on Plasticity in the Adult Brain and could not help worrying about the effects of such horrendous input to our mind and brain. All human rights and value systems we have can be traced to the one right all of us must have, that is to live and develop our minds to its full capabilities. Mike Merzenich an important participant at the meeting, a Professor at UCSF and the Chief executive of Scientific Learning Corporation, told us how he has developed software based on sound inputs to cure dyslexia and even schizophrenia and succeeded to do so in a spectacular manner. These he has developed over several decades of his research on how plastic and malleable our brain is and how permanent changes happen due to sensory inputs. He said in very clear terms that much of our mental activity is closely linked to the developments of the auditory systems and that we think in sounds more than through images. He also told us how, a 40-hour regimen of certain auditory inputs, are sufficient to derange a person mentally. All of his work is published in reputable journals of science. I came back from this meeting which was held in sylvan surrounds of Coorg and was rudely awaken sweating and disoriented at night by perhaps about twenty howling dogs in our campus. It took me two hours and psychoactive medication to be able to clear my head. I am really scared

that with the density of stray dogs and the rather unexpected ways and times in which they decide to howl, in a restricted environ like this city with its tall buildings, it might cause untold harm to the young minds of children and affect them in their studies when they prepare late night for exams or even affect those yet not born. There is even scientific support to the mythology of Ashtavakra learning Vedas while he was still in his mother's womb.

I do not want to repeat the many dangers from Rabies and other diseases that they may transmit by their bite or through their feces. I must however reiterate that the most cases of rabies as per a UN survey are in India, the highest density of stray dogs are in India, the highest percentage of rabies carrying animals are in India. These can in principle be contained although I am not sure how well. Perhaps, at great expense to the National exchequer, many can be sterilised to reduce their numbers in future (although I personally consider that as inhuman as killing, since it is in the nature of animals to proliferate their kind). But the psychological damage due to physical attacks and the barrage of howls all night as it happens now cannot be so limited particularly in a crowded city. There is legislation to protect people from pollution including noise, or like the recent one to protect non-smokers from passive smoking. I only request that the basic human right for a life free of fear and damage to our minds be given to all of us. I request the Chief Justice and the National Human Rights Commission to consider this a Public Interest Petition and do the needful to instruct local authorities and governments of states and the Nation that they take such measures to eliminate involuntary physical (that includes aural) interaction between stray dogs and citizens. Thanking you and looking forward to your indulgence in alleviating a purely man-made suffering imposed on a vast majority of India's citizens by a misguided few.

Sincerely

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