



Original Research Paper

Between Law And Ethics: Judicial Intercession On Stray Dogs In India (2025) And Their Implications For Human-Animal Coexistence

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Abstract— The stray dog provisions in the Supreme Court orders issued on 2025 are of fundamental ethical and constitutional concern with regard to the status and role of animals in urban administration, first by directing the removal of stray dogs to shelters and second by releasing sterilized and vaccinated dogs and confiscating the ones found rabid or aggressive. Such decisions are contrary to the constitutional rights of the animals, such as protection of animals and the intrinsic value principle, which also says that the protection of public health at that area will be impacted by their actions of catching, seizing and killing the street dogs. This article suggests that these interventions are normatively incoherent, because they do not respect the animal's right to life, dignity, and territorial belonging; and because they are constitutionally problematic to the extent that they place the animal's right to life, dignity, and territorial belonging on a second tier, behind a risk management logic of humanity. Based on theoretical reflections upon multispecies ethics, post humane political theory and critical animal studies, the critical analysis of Supreme Court judgements on co dwellers raises the question of how judicial reasoning renders animals as underlings and not co dwellers. It is a product of analysing Supreme Court jurisprudence, policy documents, media reporting and, most important, the public reactions of stakeholders to the court's decisions to show how vulnerabilities of animals, care and spatiality have been re-framed in thematic sense making in ethics. The results demonstrate how juridical anthropocentrism exists, and how to implement an ethic of the animal in local governance.

Keywords: *Juridical Anthropocentrism, Human-Cantered Legal Reasoning, Territorial Belonging, Risk Management, Care and Control, Human-Animal Coexistence*

INTRODUCTION

In modern societies issues of humans and animals have emerged as a subject of legal, ethical and political controversy. The great speed of urbanisation, population growth, and ecological changes have increased human–non-human species interactions in shared environments. One of the most evident aspects of this co-existence in India is the stray dog in street, neighbourhood and town. The stray dog is a complex social and legal phenomenon and are viewed as part of a community, as a public health issue and as a subject for regulation by the state. Recent judgments of the Supreme Court of India (2025) on stray dogs sparked a new discussion about the role of the judiciary in human-animal relations (Shweta, 2023). The Court was trying to reconcile the public safety issues with the animal rights issues, but the law that was taken was a more profound constitutional and ethical question of what role animals play in democratic societies. The judicial route appears more to the human

rights and security side, but regulating animals, as opposed to focusing more on the intrinsic value of animals.

It is not just a matter of public health and animal control but it is a matter of moral co-existence. The legalization of stray dogs has an impact on people's perception of the legality of the presence of animals in urban areas, and the extent to which animals can be seen as co-dwellers, living in public space alongside people.

Background of Judicial Interventions on Stray Dogs in India

Public health issues, animal welfare laws, and constitutional values have all played a role in the governance of stray dogs in India. The Animal Birth Control (Dogs) Rules were enacted as a way to control the stray dog population without resorting to extermination, by sterilizing and vaccinating dogs (Jaiswal *et al.*, 2023). These practices were an early sign

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of an awareness of “caring for animals” and “balance in nature”.

The Supreme Court's rulings in 2025 have sparked widespread interest in the implications of their ruling for the public safety and animal rights. Early court orders focused on removing roaming dogs from the street to shelters were similar to issues of dog attacks and health risks (Johari, 2026). Future changes were to allow the sterilised, vaccinated dogs to be returned to their territories and to have confiscation of rabid or aggressive dogs without being in the way of any other interest.

But implementing such measures brings up issues of practicality and conceptual coherence. An interrelationship between animals and their categorisation on degrees of perceived risk is developed; whereby, animals are made the subject of surveillance and control (Johari, 2026). This renders the language of the law distinct from the language of recognise animals as part of common social space, to the language of administration, regarding animals as objects of administration to be managed.

Constitutional Dimensions of Animal Protection in India

There are several articles in the Indian Constitution that have been adopted due to the worry for environment and animal welfare. The State shall promote the conservation of the environment and forests and protect and improve wildlife and environment, Article 48A. Similarly, under Article 51A(g) it is a fundamental duty of citizens to have compassion towards the living creatures.

However, in recent years the scope of constitutional morality and the constitutional protection of the environment have been expanded through interpretation of the Constitution. The Judiciary has acknowledged animal welfare as part of the constitutional aspirations and environment protection (Shetty, 2025). Different courts have upheld that animals have an intrinsic value, independent of their value to people.

The issue of the constitution comes in when the animal welfare rights come into conflict with the human rights under Article 21. In most cases the understanding of the right to life is in relation to human issues like safety, health and security. These interpretations create a hierarchy, in which the interests of animals are secondary and are based on human convenience.

The challenge to the Constitution thus concerns balancing human welfare concerns with the larger ethical commitments to non-human life (Abrahms-Kavunenko, 2026). These interests can't be seen as distinct interests—interpretation of the Constitution may need more broad and expansive frameworks that can accommodate interconnected modes of existence.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Multispecies Ethics: Multispecies ethics are the ethics of relationships that are not limited to human and human interests but that include all the other species. In the past, traditional ethical frameworks have been centered on human beings and the idea that only humans have the attributes essential for moral recognition: rationality, language, self-awareness, etc. Other living thing is, therefore, often considered in terms of its usefulness, economic or welfare value. Multispecies ethics questions these assumptions and asks to think about ethics other than the human-centered.

Multispecies ethics is based on the premise that humans and non-human organisms are not separate entities, but

Journal of Animal Environment, Vol. 18, No. 2s, Spring 2026 are part of complex relationships and ecosystems (Richardson, 2026). The level of interaction between animals, plants and their environment is significant in human life. This is not a relationship of complete separation of species, but one of mutual dependence and co-existence. Therefore, moral accountability reaches beyond human communities and is expanded to other networks of interdependence – other life forms.

Multispecies ethics is not about preserving animals as objects to be protected, controlled or managed. Animals are known as agents of environment, an environment that can interact with them, act in them, and relate to them, and whose relationships, actions and interactions are what create it (Szarycz, n.d.). This mind-set highlights that animals are not merely victims of human choices, but rather are active participants in a larger ecological and social framework.

Multispecies ethics arose, as environmental issues, ecological interdependence and a greater recognition of animal subjectivity within current scholarship started to take center stage. People who have taken this perspective are likely to think that human beings are deeply intertwined with non-human life and that social systems can't be understood without considering these human/non-human relationships. Ethical obligations, consequently, surpass the human interest and embrace more universal aspects of your ecological balance and common life.

One such approach is multispecies ethics which is significant when studying human-animal relations within the city context in India with regards to stray dogs. Traditional perspectives tend to see the city and public space as space for humans – humans act within this space how they please and make it easy for them (Marak, 2026). However, on these premises, urban animals are often considered pests or unsolved control problems, and are typically subjected to a public authority.

Multispecies ethics challenges the anthropocentric perspective by suggesting, instead, that urban space is not only human but is created through the interactions of multiple species. Streets, neighborhoods, parks and public space is common ground where human and animal interactions are constantly occurring. Stray dogs should not just be considered as external threats or administrative issues but can be thought as an actor in these common urban ecosystems.

The control measures are usually mentioned in the context of stray dogs' treatment by legal and administrative means, such as relocation, confinement, and population management. The ethics of cohabitation draw questions in this context regarding the ethics of multispecies ethics, and also, it seems, indicate that they are not always necessarily indicative of a wider ethical dimension (Chattopadhyay *et al.*, 2025). Risk reduction policies can perpetuate the separation of human and non-human life and neglect the animals' right to be present in spaces that are shared with humans.

Ethical co-existence is required for multispecies perspectives, and transcends the domination and management paradigm. It rather builds relationships based on caring, recognition and being eco-responsible. Adopting an animal as a co-inhabitant in the same space does not take away from humans' well-being worries, but rather encourages more feasible and inclusive management of life together.

To conclude, multispecies ethics provides a different way of thinking about stray dogs within the framework

of judicial interventions, and a way in which interconnectedness and shared existence are foregrounded (Venugopal and Sen, 2025). Not only is it a question of regulation or protection, but also one of the recognition of animals as protagonists of common social worlds and highlighting the ethical responsibilities involved in constructing more just mechanisms of cohabitation across species.

Posthuman Political Theory: Posthuman political theory offers an important critique to anthropocentric assumptions which are well entrenched in the legal, social and political structures. Anthropocentrism is a focus in moral, legal and political values on human life when compared with non-human forms of life (Sen, 2022). In the political imagination, rights, citizenship, agency, participation, belonging has always been seen in terms of what is uniquely human: rational, linguistic, self-conscious and autonomous. That is the reason why ethical and political issues are ignored and marginalized in the legal and political frameworks of non-human entities. In this chapter, however, the posthuman political theory challenges these notions and provides alternative political imaginaries of "living together" in common ecosystems and societies.

The posthuman approaches arose, in part, because of the shortcomings of classical humanist thinking (Sen, 2022). Firstly, traditional humanist conceptions elevated humans to a higher position, and attributed to them a special moral stature and authority over nature. Political systems with this view make a hierarchy of man and animal, seeing humans as acting agents and animals as passive objects to be regulated and controlled. These differences have led to systems of animal recognition based on their utility, economic worth, or danger to human society as opposed to a system in which they are understood as an entity with intrinsic value.

The main worry of posthuman political philosophy is that political communities should not be restricted to "purely" human characteristics (Prova, 2025). For the posthuman conception of political belonging, the interdependence and relationality of systems must be considered. Humans are not only part of nature, but part of a system of animals, ecosystems and other non-human entities. Thus, political institutions need to take these interdependencies into account and transcend the boundary between man and nature.

The problem of stray dogs in India is an important case study in posthuman political theory. Social and legal space is often created in an urban context through an act of making space for people to use and occupy. The wildlife that live in these areas are viewed as trespassers, or as a management problem rather than as a neighbor. Such speculations continue to foster ideas of public space and the appropriation of place that privilege the human.

When it comes to judicial actions concerning stray dogs, the animals' characteristics are often described by the safety, aggression, nuisance, or public health categories (Palkovich, 2024). These classifications can arise out of valid concerns about public safety but can also help to uphold structures of human exceptionalism. Rather than understanding and recognising the animals themselves and their needs, animals are understood in terms of what they may do to promote human welfare.

When stray dogs are classified as 'risks' to be managed, it is the enactment of law that puts them into the category of 'subjects of administration' (Haq, 2022). The welfare-protective language can make measures of

Journal of Animal Environment, Vol. 18, No. 2s, Spring 2026 capture, relocation, confinement, surveillance seem legitimate. Posthuman political theory, however, argues that such interventions can be equally understood as devices of control which manage and limit non-human life in accordance with human agenda.

In addition, posthuman discourses contradict the idea of co-existence as a process that involves excluding or even removing the non-human from that which is shared. Rather, they make a case for the recognition of the legitimacy of animal presence in urban environments in more political and ethical ways. Not a call for animal citizenship in the conventional sense but one that asks what it means to be a citizen, what it means to have rights, what it means to have responsibilities, what it means to belong to a democratic society.

Under this backdrop of judicial interventions on stray dogs, then, the posthuman political theory provides another lens to view human-animal relations. It transcends 'management' and 'welfare' practices and recognises animals as part of a wider social and ecological system, where they have an ethical responsibility to each other (Joshi and Joshi, 2026). This would enable the development of more inclusive co-existence models, including anthropocentric ones, that would result in more equitable relationships between humans and nonhuman living.

Critical Animal Studies

Critical Animal Studies (CAS) is an interdisciplinary approach to the social, cultural, political and institutional processes which lead to marginalization, exploitation and subordination of animals in human societies. Critical Animal Studies draw on critical theory, animal rights research and social justice theories and practices to contest dominant modes of thought which naturalise human superiority and domination over non-human animal life. Critical Animal Studies aim to explore and question the wider systems of power that are produced and reproduced that cause animal/human inequalities rather than the issue of minimising animal suffering in existing power systems.

Critical Animal Studies' key position is that relations between humans and animals are not natural, nor neutral, but are influenced by social institutions, cultural practices and political ideologies (Ganesan, 2024). Humans frequently establish a hierarchy and claim their superiority over other species and justify their unequal treatment on grounds of things like intelligence, rationality, language, productivity or usefulness. Such hierarchy-based beliefs result in a thinking style that sees animals as objects, resources or things primarily useful to humans.

Critical Animal Studies argues that the law can be a great asset to the maintenance of the power dynamic. In this respect, animals are frequently assigned to "classes" in laws and policies that are determined by human interests rather than their value. Consequently, laws can reinforce relations of domination that normalize humans' control over non-humans.

This perspective on legal regulation is not only regulatory of human-animal relations, but also involved in the creation of social understandings of the value and status of animal life (Domingo, 2023). Legal classifications dictate the understanding of animals and its influence on the overall society's attitudes towards their treatment and their existence.

Stray dogs in India is a context for the relevance of Critical Animal Studies. Where stray dogs are concerned, there is a tendency to view them either as a

vulnerable subject that needs to be protected, or a threat that needs to be regulated, and a balance between the two. The judicial descriptors of 'nuisance dogs', 'aggressive dogs', 'public health risks' and 'high risk dogs' are commonly referenced terms when describing stray dogs, and are frequently used in public policy discussions about stray dogs.

These differences were seen by Critical Animal Studies as only descriptive categories, but also as social constructions, that influence the perception and treatment of animals (Shekhar, 2022). The "public danger" classification of 'stray dogs' is illustrative of the mechanisms through which legal and institutional discursive frames can make vulnerable beings seem like a "public danger. While some of these stories may have some truth to them, they can often be simplified in the name of safety and animal attacks, with the intention of presenting the facts, but in reality, do not.

Such representations have a considerable impact on public perceptions and institutional reactions. Animals that are classed as 'risks' are more likely to be the targets of interventionist actions like surveillance, capture, movement or population control strategy. These interventions frequently are directed at mechanisms of control instead of toward coexisting and toward recognizing each other.

Furthermore, according to Critical Animal Studies, language of the welfare and protection is sometimes a veil for bigger power structures. Public interest measures can serve to strengthen systems which allow humans to control the circumstances of animal lives. In this situation, animals are only valued in as far as they are subject to human decisions and institutional agendas. Furthermore, animal studies have made one important contribution that is missing from the literature on animal oppression: the way that animal oppression connects to other forms of social inequalities (Jodha, 2022). Focusing on systems of power that marginalise animals can bring to the fore processes that marginalise, oppress, or exclude others in society. It is therefore crucial to grasp the human-animal relationship in the context of more complex systems of power and inequality.

The framework of Critical Animal Studies will be useful to examine social attitudes and institutional practices regarding stray dogs in the context of judicial intervention in the law. This focus is not just about regulating and protecting animals, but also invites the consideration of power dynamics within the relationship between humans and animals. An approach that helps to build more inclusive and ethical frameworks for living together which break systems of domination and that recognize the value of non-human life.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study adopts a qualitative research approach and thematic analysis is used to analyse judicial interventions with regard to stray dogs in India and the overall human-animal relationship. As the present study has an understandings purpose, and it is expected to be in search of meanings, values, interpretations and ethical assumptions that are embedded in judicial reasoning and legal discourse, we believe that it is suitable to be used a qualitative research methodology. The problem of stray dogs is a complex one with legal, ethical, public policies, constitutional and animal welfare concerns and social perceptions. Therefore, it is appropriate to adopt qualitative study to explore these multi dimensional aspects in detail.

Research Approach: The study takes a qualitative interpretative research methodology to study judicial ruling and broader social and moral issues involving animals in shared urban spaces. Qualitative research can be helpful for understanding the framing of particular social issues in the narratives and meanings produced by social institutions. The issue of stray dogs cannot be viewed solely in terms of numbers and demographic parameters as it deals with values, rights, power and moral responsibilities.

The constitutional arguments, legal assumptions and social interpretations of stray dog governance can be investigated in detail in the qualitative approach. It also helps to make sense of legal mechanisms that influence the interface between humans and animals and of the norms and perceptions that arise from the definitions.

Research Design: Descriptive and analytical research. The descriptive part of the study includes an analysis of the legal instruments, policy frameworks and social narratives that reveal the nature of the judicial interventions in relation to stray dogs. The analytical part requires the ability to read and elaborate on these materials to uncover the more general ethical and constitutional questions raised by them (McIntyre-Mills, 2022).

Research attempts to steer clear of direct causal relationships of variables. However, it is intended to discuss the production of certain conceptions of animals and conviviality by means of language, legal norms and social representations. The design is therefore an interpretive one as it seeks to uncover meanings and assumptions that may not be apparent within legal texts.

Sources of Data Collection Data sources in this research are secondary data, qualitative and documentary data which are used more than once. Findings are more credible when multiple sources are used and in the process of triangulation of information. A selection of sources were chosen as they all present a unique view on the topic which is being investigated.

Supreme Court Judgments and Judicial Documents Sources of analysis are the most important sources that are used in this study, which are the supreme court judgments and judicial documents (Roy, 2022). The constitutional interpretation, legal reasoning and institutional strategies of constitutional courts with respect to stray dogs and animal welfare issues are clearly reflected in judicial documents.

Assumptions regarding public safety, animal protection, constitutional responsibilities and ethical responsibilities were discovered through the judicial interventions. Special emphasis was paid to the language used in judicial speech and the rationales used by the courts for specific measures like removal, confinement, vaccination, sterilization or release of stray dogs.

The study further investigated whether judicial reasoning primarily reflects human-centered concerns or whether it acknowledges animals as legitimate participants within shared environments. Judicial observations were analyzed to understand how constitutional principles are interpreted within the context of human-animal relationships.

Government Policy Frameworks: Government policy documents and guidelines, related to stray dog governance, also constitute an important aspect of the data collection. The population management was considered, the sterilisation programmes, vaccination campaigns, animal welfare laws and the public health laws (Mohan, 2022).

Policy frameworks can be analyzed to better understand the interpretation and implementation of the constitutional values and directives in practice. However, when it comes to stray dog control, the institutional response reflects other policy orientations and understandings of the role of the state, in many cases.

An analysis of such policies can also provide an indication of whether they prioritize care and living together or are geared toward monitoring, controlling and managing risks.

Media Narratives: This study also takes into account a critical information source – media narratives. The public understanding of stray dogs and public debates are often formed by news reports, public narratives and online discussions.

The media usually create different representations on stray dogs in media reports. They are sometimes regarded as a hazard in health matters and in dog bites, at other times as feeble creatures to be sympathized with and saved (Mohan, 2022). Such depictions have a major impact on the perception and policy debates.

Study of media narrative, therefore, provides an understanding of the interpretation and communication of the legal developments in the society. General social problems of care, responsibility and fear, of safety and coexistence are also caught in the images of the media.

Stakeholder Responses

The stakeholders' responses, which were expressed publicly, were also examined in this research. Stakeholders involve animal welfare organisations, community organisations, activists, legal commentators, policy makers and public.

Stakeholder responses offer insights into the multiple ways of understanding judicial actions and policies. There can be varying viewpoints across groups regarding public safety matters, animal rights and the ethics of responsibility to animals.

Stakeholder responses provide a more complete view of social issues that stem from judicial decisions and actions.

Data Analysis Procedure

Thematic analysis was used in the analysis of the collected data. Thematic analysis is a method used in qualitative research to identify, categorize and interpret common themes and patterns in textual data (Mayo and Foucault, 2025).

There were several steps in the analytical process.

Familiarization with Data

The first step was to reiterate the judicial documents, policy guidelines, media coverage and reactions from stakeholders. Multiple readings helped to build knowledge of the material and helped to make some initial observations and important ideas in the data come into focus.

Coding Process

The second phase included systematic coding of textual information. Coding is a process of labelling the meaning or idea, which is present in the collected material.

During analysis a number of initial codes emerged:

- Animal welfare
- Public safety
- Constitutional values
- Human rights
- Compassion
- Risk management
- Vulnerability

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- Territorial belonging
- Care
- Coexistence

These codes helped to structure large quantities of information and search for relations between various concepts.

Development of Themes

The identified concepts and categories were then grouped together into more general themes that were overarching patterns in the data sources after coding (Shweta, 2023).

The following key themes were identified:

- Vulnerability and protection
- Cares and is responsible for others in an ethical way
- Territoriality and belonging
- Human-animal coexistence

Mechanisms for risk and control

- Juridical anthropocentrism

Themes were used as conceptual categories to help explain the broader implications of legal and social scenarios.

Interpretation of Themes

Themes were identified and then interpreted using the theoretical frameworks presented in the study: multispecies ethics, posthuman political theory and critical animal studies. These theoretical approaches and concepts provided analytical tools to explain the power dynamics and moral ideologies that are also inherent in legal discourse (Jaiswal *et al.*, 2023).

The search for interpretation has mainly been oriented towards comprehending the construction of animals in judicial discourse, and its effect on wider social discourses and institutional procedures.

Ethical Considerations

The present study was conducted based on the only secondary sources and documentary evidence which are of public domain, therefore, there was no need for the direct involvement of human participants. This meant that the issue of consent and confidentiality of the participants was not relevant.

Ethical problems were noted in the study where the interpretation of the legal documents is accurate and information is not selected. Objective and balanced discussion of issues related to public safety and animal welfare was maintained.

Limitations of the Study

There were some limitations in this study that should be noted. The study is conducted in the documentary method and does not use field observation and conducting interviews with the parties involved (Johari, 2026). As such, the findings are based on the stories and data that are publicly accessible.

Secondly, media stories and stakeholder views might include personal views and biases. The restrictions were limited by multiple sources, but it is not possible to obtain a perfect neutrality.

Finally, there will be changes in interpretation of the law/policy over time (Shetty, 2025). Thus, one ought to take into account the judicial and social developments in interpreting the findings of this study.

Even with its drawbacks, the qualitative thematic approach is a helpful tool in understanding the ethical, legal and constitutional nature of judicial activities on stray dogs in India.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The analysis shows that the legal arguments on stray dogs in the context of India will still be in the juridical anthropocentric approach. In many instances, the

reasons given for taking action are based on animal welfare and/or humanitarian concerns, but the motives are still largely based on the human interest, security and administrative interest (Richardson, 2026). The development of decision-making structure continues to be a hierarchy of human interest over animal interest while law struggles to reconcile the interests of the public and animal interests. Therefore, animals are being more and more controlled, managed, rather than agents of their social and ecological worlds.

Juridical Anthropocentrism and Human-Centered Legal Reasoning: The results of the analysis suggest, among others, that the assumption of anthropocentrism does not disappear from judicial discourse. One of the main results from the analysis is that the anthropocentric assumption still exists in judicial speech (Marak, 2026). Anthropocentrism is a worldview that emphasizes human beings as the focus of moral, legal and political significance, and deems lesser importance to non-human life. The assumptions are also invoked in the legal world, where they influence the interpretation of rights, duties, and the public interest.

The attitude is sometimes vividly reflected in judicial decisions on stray dogs where legal issues are rarely discussed, if at all, other than in terms of human safety, health and security. Compassion and animal welfare is known to be relevant in judgments; typically however this is dependent on other interests of people. A hierarchy of values is created accordingly within the legal system, where human concerns are the primary, and perhaps only, principle to guide decision making. It does not imply that animals are not considered in the design of this human-made structure. Rather, it is a result of fundamental beliefs that underlie the law and policy of those who make the laws and policies who believe certain groups have the right to rights and protections while others do not (Chattopadhyay *et al.*, 2025). Typically animals have only a legal personhood when they are involved in human needs and wants.

Construction of Animals as Objects of Risk and Management: Another discovery is that animals being built as objects of risk and management is a crucial part of the depiction of animals in legal discourse. Categorization relating to public health threats, aggressiveness, nuisance and safety concerns are often used in judicial debates about stray dogs. The illustrations add to the general impression of the role of animals in the city.

Just as often, it is more about administration than law when it comes to the presence of stray dogs. This has shifted the focus away from the animal as an organism interacting in a shared environment and towards using technology to "fix" the animal as a problem. Thus, management practices such as sterilisation, confinement and relocation, and surveillance have to play an important part in governance practices.

The analysis does not suggest that narratives of risk do not play a part in public safety, but rather that they can have counterproductive effects if over-relied upon (Venugopal and Sen, 2025). When animals are viewed mostly as threats, a fear of them can be perpetuated and contribute to the notion that the presence of animals in public spaces is problematic.

The constructions also have an impact on mentalities outside of them. However, the law and media coverage of animals can sometimes shape public opinion, which can be an oversimplification of the situation, and thus an oversimplified view of animals as victim to be pitied or

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as threat to be controlled. The binary opposition human – animal can sometimes be misleading regarding the complexity of the human-animal relation and restrict the possibilities of a more balanced human-animal cohabitation.

Territorial Belonging and Exclusion within Urban Spaces Territoriality and belonging issues in the city are also highlighted and raised from the analysis. Public spaces are often seen as spaces which are used mainly for people to be in and occupy. Stray dogs are thus a nuisance and often seen as an intrusion in the "social" human space.

This is related to other ideas about who controls and who has a right to in city governance systems. Humans are allowed and accepted on roads, in communities, parks, and public places; animals are usually not expected and accepted in these places without explanation.

The cases of relocating or confining stray dogs are a good example of this selective use of territorial belonging. There are traditional rights and interests of human communities in the use of public space and the animals are viewed as something outside of them and must be controlled or eliminated.

However, the relationship between animals and urban areas is not so straightforward, as the above assumptions suggest (Sen, 2022). Feral cats form 'presencesongs' and territoriality in the environment and have a dynamic relationship with humans. Animals removed from these areas might have an impact on the ecology and social interactions that have evolved, and might have unanticipated effects.

The findings therefore suggest that legal regimes should take into account that cities are not simply human spaces, but are also multi-species, co-created places.

Classification of Aggression and Ethical Challenges: Ethical issues arise because of the classification of stray dogs based on their temperament (aggression or danger) introduces extra ethical issues. Judicial and administrative decisions often depend upon classification of animals as 'harmless' versus 'potentially dangerous'.

The analysis suggests that there may be subjective judgements made and that there are possible interpretations that are different across classifications (Sen, 2022). Aggression can be a difficult diagnosis to make as there are many factors that could be affecting an animal's behaviour – environmental, human, fear, health and past experiences.

This may widen systemic discrimination against an animal that is deemed to be dangerous, a judgment that could be subjective. Animals that are marked as threats are more likely to be confined, moved or subjected to other intervention.

The moral dilemma is that classifications of behavior could indirectly perpetuate the notions that some animals have less reason to be protected and coexisted with. These methods may result in the oversimplification of complex safety/danger relationships.

Care, Protection, and Mechanisms of Control: One of the other relationships that appeared in the analysis is between the discourse of care and that of control, namely Care and Protection, which emerged from a number of discussions. In the discourse surrounding interventions with stray dogs, the concepts of care, protection and welfare are often heard. It is often suggested that relocating to shelter or animal

impoundment of an aggressive animal will help protect animals and people.

An analysis does show, however, that means of regulation and control can be embedded in the language of care (Prova, 2025). Protective interventions frequently involve curtailing movement, reducing autonomy, and altering the natural relationships.

Ethically, it's an interesting paradox. When one takes action on behalf of animals, one also violates their freedom, and can contribute to the reinforcement of structures in which they live under the conditions that are imposed upon them by the human institutions.

This can thus be complex and become entangled in care and control. You can see that measures with a protective purpose in systems of governance can have a disciplinary effect.

Constitutional Tensions and Inclusive Possibilities

There are also tensions between constitutional appeals to compassion and government strategies for risk reduction, which are also identified through the analysis. The values of nature and compassion for living things are promoted through constitutional values. But in real life, administrative responses are frequently geared to the outcomes of public safety and risk management.

The paradox underlines the state of the law today and also the potential for more extensive approaches to human-animal relations (Palkovich, 2024). Current legal frameworks, which reflect mostly anthropocentric assumptions, may face challenges in dealing with new ethical issues on living in coexistence and ecological interdependence.

Other more extensive interventions may include thinking about animals as players in social and ecological systems rather than as things to be managed. This does not mean ignoring lawful public safety issues, but fostering the consideration of the public safety issues alongside the wider ethical considerations of living together, caring for others and caring for the environment.

In conclusion, it suggests that current and future strategies for human-animal governance need to transcend the 'control' or 'risk' paradigms, and adopt more equitable governance models that will provide an opportunity to reflect on the interconnectedness of human and non-human beings.

Towards an Animal-Centered Constitutional Ethic

If the constitution is animal-centred, then the law and moral concepts of human-animal relationships need to be re-thought (Haq, 2022). An understanding that does not use animals only as objects of protection and regulation, but that animals have an intrinsic value and have legitimate claims to coexist.

Policies for urban governance need to stop restricting themselves to measures of population control and risk management (Joshi and Joshi, 2026). Coexistence, public awareness and eco-sustainability can offer more sustainable alternatives in the community approach.

The meaning of dignity and interdependence also has to be more widely appreciated and used in constitutional interpretation. When applied to animals, it doesn't detract from the human rights, but it does add a promise of justice and compassion beyond species.

CONCLUSION

The Supreme Court of India's ruling on stray dogs in 2025 is a pivotal milestone in the interplay between law, ethics, and animal welfare. These judicial practices intend to balance human safety and welfare, but

Journal of Animal Environment, Vol. 18, No. 2s, Spring 2026 demonstrate considerable conflicts in constitutional and ethical structures.

The results show that at present the legal system still has a human interest perspective and that constructions of animals are still largely narrative based, including risks and managements. It is these perspectives that can cause moral disagreements over commitments to compassion and ecological responsibility to be a constitutional issue. Anthropocentric assumptions need to be set aside and there needs to be an understanding of animals as co-habitants of common spaces to draft more equitable laws. By fostering more just and sustainable relationships between humans and animals through a constitution that reflects this, an animal-centered constitutional ethic paves the way for a more ecologically-sound and equitable coexistence between humans and animals.

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