

ANIMAL WELFARE

As NGOs mushroom to champion human causes, Dr Mini Vasudevan is a foot soldier for compassion towards animals, as Anju Susan James discovers



Compassion as a way of life



"I turned a vegetarian at the age of eleven, as I could not stand the cruelty shown towards them," Mini Vasudevan divulges. The same reason prompted this electrical engineer to launch the Humane Animal Society (HAS), a non-profit organization in the city for the protection of animals.

"I lived in the US for 13 years till 2004. After completing my PhD, I was working with a telecommunications firm in Texas. At that time, I used to volunteer on my weekends to protect the animals," she recalls.

"Things are so different there, the endeavours of animal protection societies are dependent almost entirely on volunteers. You just have to handover the animals which have been abandoned on the streets to the societies. The rest is up to them and we need not worry any longer," Mini discloses.

"On the other hand, animal rights

activism is not an easy task at all in India. The number of stray dogs here is so high. You cannot help spot one chasing pedestrians or two-wheelers in every nook and corner of the city. This sorry state of affairs persists mainly because of the unawareness amongst the public about the things that can be done. Miracles do not happen overnight. We have to work consistently to curb the stray dog menace. In the US, for a dog to be kept as a pet, it will perforce have to be sterilised. Only if you are a licensed breeder, you can keep dogs without sterilising them. This policy has proved to be very successful in controlling the number of dogs there," she says.

"Unfortunately,

that is not the case here. Written laws alone will not do the job. There should be a systematic way of doing things. When I first came here, I found so many stray dogs and wanted to do something to protect them. However, I realised much to my dismay that there was no organisation to whom I could turn for help. Only later did I hear about the PFA. So Humane Animal Society (HAS) was formed in 2006. It started out as a non-profit organization run by myself and my husband Madhu Ganesh. Now 'HAS' has three more trustees and many volunteers," a proud smile spreads across her face.



HAS has played a major role in creating awareness amongst the denizens about the need to protect animals. "We mostly stress the need to sterilize the dogs. Whenever we approached someone, they used to maintain that their's was a 'vetu naal' (house dog) and therefore there was no scope for alarm. But we have always insisted that all the dogs whether they are kept as pets, or those wandering in the streets, should be sterilized," Mini reveals.

"People should come forward to adopt pups delivered by stray dogs. Once we received 15 such pups at Shelter, a joint venture of HAS and People For Animals (PFA). Though there is a huge demand for male pups, female pups are the best when it comes to providing love and affection," she avers.

"I think stray dogs should be known as a distinctive 'Indian breed'. Foreigners like our dogs on account of their wide range of colours and robust na-

ture," she notes. "An American lady who came to an ashram near Anakatti a few years ago liked a stray dog very much and wanted to take it along with her when she went back. We helped her in procuring all the necessary documents for that. Seeing many others like her go to great lengths to take care of the dogs here, I sometimes wonder why we Indians do not put in even a small fraction of their effort," she remarks.

Over the last one year, HAS has been working in conjunction with PFA for conducting the Animal Birth Control (ABC) programme here and has been actively taking care of several stray as well as abandoned dogs. "I wish more like-minded people will join us to make a difference. Instead of chasing individual agendas and reaching nowhere, animal lovers should band together to curtail the atrocities against the animals and make the city a better place for them to live in," she stresses.