



Freedom for the Canines

K.V. RAGHUPATHI

drkvraghupathi9@gmail.com

“What is the charge?” The judge in a black robe asked the prosecutor who appeared perplexed.

Regaining his composure, the stocky, medium-height prosecutor spoke up immediately. “It is an instance of dogs’ barking and public annoyance.”

“What is the issue here?”

“Two rival groups of dogs belonging to two different streets are at loggerheads and creating a nuisance for the residents.”

“What is the court's role in this situation?”

“The court has to handle it, your honour.”

“Don’t you realize that this is a human court? It addresses situations involving only people.”

“But I beg your pardon, sir; the matter is before the court. There is an urgent need.”

“The case does not fall within the court's jurisdiction.”

“There are no courts that deal with the animals.”

“There are courts that deal with wild animals.” The judge replied, disagreeing with him.

“The dog, however, is not a wild animal. It is a stray canine. It coexists alongside people. It doesn't inhabit the wild forest. It is humanity's friend. As a result, sir, the court must handle it.”

After a bit of reflection, the judge asked, “What is the charge against the dogs?”

“The charge is the rivalry between two pack of dogs. One group belonging to one street invading the other group of the adjacent street. Each group is trying to take an upper hand over the other group. However, it isn't warm-hearted, sir. The dogs are constantly barking and growling day and night to have the upper hand over the group, annoying the residents. Conflict is present. Many elderly people have trouble falling asleep at night. They are constantly barking, disturbing the routine class work at the nearby school. Both the instructors and the pupils struggle to focus.”

“Since there are no laws that deal with this kind of circumstance,” the judge said, “the court cannot take up such a case.”

“However, since it is making a commotion, the court may take it up because humanity is also implicated. Such a matter can be heard by a human court because humanity is involved. It's my pleading.” The prosecutor insisted.



“Since dogs are a part of human civilization, you might have to put up with their annoyance. There isn't another option.” The judge said tactfully.

“It's about a nuisance they're making. The dogs are involved. During the conflict, one dog is seriously injured. Only one helpless, miserable dog! Can't we feel some sympathy for the seriously wounded? Can't we stop the wounded from suffering and pain? Can't we stop them?”

“On whose behalf are you arguing the case?”

“I support the wounded in the group belonging to YV Street.”

“Then who represents the other dogs belonging to MKR Street in defense?”

“The court must choose.”

After giving it some thought, the judge responded positively, “All right. This court is admitting the case and is appointing Madan Lal as the defense attorney based on the prosecutor's argument. The matter is postponed for hearing until October 10.”

“The prosecutor is delighted to thank the court for accepting the case and assigning Mr. Madan Lal as the defense attorney. Till then the court can remand the unruly dogs of the MKR Street to custody.” The prosecutor pleaded.

“Under whose custody?”

“Police custody.”

“Police are designed to deal with human cases and not animals.”

“There is no department that can take care of the custody of street dogs. I thus request the court to entrust the dogs to the care of the police.”

“Call the Inspector.”

The Inspector, tall and sturdy, who was dealing with another case in the adjacent chamber, stepped in and argued, “Sir, the police can deal with only humans, not canines. The task of detention can be given to animal rights activists.”

The prosecutor intervened and said, “Since the court is concerned and has admitted the case, it has acquired a legal dimension. The police have the right to keep the canines in their care.”

“True. This court is also aware of the Inspector's plea. But it is an exceptional case. Hence, the court orders the police take the dogs into custody until the case is resolved.”



The Inspector had no choice but to obey the court's directives.



In the meantime, the Inspector seized all the dogs belonging to the MKR Street from the prosecutor and transported them in a vehicle to the police station. When he arrived at the station, he discovered that none of the six custody rooms were empty and could not be used to house the dogs. He therefore gave his subordinates the order to transfer the inmates from room 6 to other rooms. As a result, the dogs were placed in the room and the convicts were moved to the other rooms.

The first day went without incident because the dogs didn't bark. Despite being dumb, they could not comprehend why they were kept in a locked room. They thought the location was weird.

The real problem started on the second day. They began to bark at the officers as if wondering why they had been taken there and imprisoned in the first place. The dogs soon caused problems for the cops, and the police station quickly turned into a den.

"I understand they must be hungry," said one constable, taking pity on the dogs.

"I don't believe so." Contradicting the first constable, the second constable remarked, "They must be feeling the place odd."

The third constable remarked, "I suspect the separation from the other group as the reason for their barking. They are used to fighting."

The Inspector arrived, and upon noticing him, the dogs stopped barking, sensing some danger. The three constables discussed with the Inspector how they felt about their constant barking. Agreeing with the first constable's assessment, he instructed the second constable to fetch some food for the dogs. No sooner had he received the orders than he rushed out and brought some cookies and sweet puddings.

Although they sniffed, the dogs were hesitant to eat the cookies and pudding. As long as the Inspector was at the station, they kept quiet. As the Inspector left the station due to an urgent call from the subdivisional police chief, the dogs resumed barking again, and the three constables at the station attempted to quiet them, wielding the *lathis*. The dogs began to bark in an odd manner as the constables used their *lathis* more frequently. Soon, the dogs' unrestrained, continuous barking



caught the attention of onlookers who were curious as to why the canines were chained up and why they were barking nonstop. They were, however, hesitant to congregate near the police station out of fear that it might upset law and order. Unable to endure the loud barking the three constables walked out and sat under a tree on the premises in the hope that their departure would stop the dogs' noisy barking.



The dogs' conduct remained unchanged. As this had persisted all day the three constables informed the Inspector, who reached the office the following day with the idea to separate each one from the group and detain them separately. "To accommodate ten dogs, we need ten rooms. There are only six rooms here. The prisoners are housed in the five rooms." The first constable came to a conclusion. "Sir, I have a thought. The ten dogs can be split into two groups. Determine which pets are making noise and move them to a different room. The four rooms can accommodate the prisoners currently in the five rooms." The second constable indicated that doing this would stop them from barking. The inspector endorsed him and stated, "It seems like a good idea." The third constable gave the inspector a simple nod of approval.

The dogs were split into two groups as soon as the plan was approved. The four ferocious dogs were identified, separated, and relocated to room number 1, and the convicts therein were moved to the other three rooms.

This, however, did not solve the problem. They began to bark louder and became angry as they were kept apart, and eventually, they began fighting among themselves, creating an unbearable racket within the station.

As word of the dogs' confinement in the police station trickled down, it quickly spread like wildfire and reached the animal rights activists' ears. The next day, a sizable group comprising one dozen animal rights activists belonging to different age groups assembled. There were four female activists. They quickly got into an argument with the constables, who explained the events that had brought about the canines' detention, and no sooner had the constables talked to the Inspector on mobile and apprised him of the situation than the latter rushed and reached the station. The protestors desperately begged the Inspector to release the dogs during the conversation immediately, but the latter strongly refused because the matter was still being examined in court. The talks broke

down and the campaigners at the end threatened the Inspector that if any dog housed in the station died, he would be held accountable.



Six out of ten canines living in two rooms seldom touched cookies, bread, or cooked rice, which led to a decline in their health. They stopped barking and started whining instead. The other four dogs likewise stopped barking and watched what was happening inside the police station in silence. The constables and Inspector were concerned as they started to get senile. The Inspector quickly called a veterinarian, who was informed of the pups' imprisonment and their deteriorating health.

The Inspector explained, "The dogs were accused of causing a public nuisance and harassing the dogs belonging to the YV Street and seriously wounding a dog in the group."

"The dogs' constant barking," the vet doctor, who seemed to be young and, in his forties, said, "caused them to become senile. They want to be released from custody. I can understand their sincere protest because I've worked with dogs for over a decade." The three constables remained silent, as the Inspector, who was seated in his rotating chair, carefully listened to him. "The dogs are being held in custody. I have no power to release them because it is a court order. It's not in my possession." After several drawn-out walls of silence, the vet puffed and said, "In that situation, I can give some medication, like carprofen and deracoxib. But in addition to this, they require food that is high in protein, fibre, and slow-releasing complex carbs to provide them energy. If you feed them with this food, they can be restored after a few days; I can assure you. They need independence, further. Better if done sooner." After uttering these things, he then came outside and sped off on his silver-coloured scooter.



However, when given high-protein foods like beef, pork, and chicken that were transported from the veterinary facility two kilometers away from the police station, the dogs refused to eat them. They stopped slurping after two or three sips of water laced with the veterinarian's medication out of disdain. The Inspector said, "What shall we do?" with anxiety. After a little period of silence, the second constable said, "We can shift them to the veterinary hospital. That, in my opinion, seems to be the only solution." As soon as the Inspector was persuaded, he called the veterinarian, informed him of the situation, and told him about the need to relocate the dogs to the hospital for



further treatment. The doctor consented to the idea on the understanding that he wouldn't be wrongly blamed if something bad occurred.

The four canines were left at the station, and a private van was used to transport the ailing dogs to the hospital. The dogs were admitted to the emergency department right away since they appeared to be so senile. The dogs' saline bottles were mended, and glucose was given to them in order to bring them back to life. The canines' senility appeared to fade after an hour, the vet doctor told. After an hour, they oddly opened their eyes and gazed about, but they could not discern any differences. They dozed off. "They require rest. They could get better in a couple of days." The doctor stated that with assurance.



Once again, the animal rights activists flocked to the hospital after hearing about the dogs' condition and began to argue with the Inspector present. "The circumstances are dire. Right now, I'm speechless." He stated it with no remorse. The campaigners left the premises after getting the doctor's assessment of the dogs' health before filing a PIL in the city court. They demanded bail for each dog in the petition. The judge, who was in his mid-fifties and hunched over, listened intently to the argument. "Since the sick canines are receiving medical attention in the hospital, this court is unable to consider the urgency of the issue. Before bail could be granted, the case still needs to be heard on its strengths and weaknesses. As a result, the petition is turned down by the court for lack of conviction." The judge delivered the ruling before leaving the courtroom, boarded his car parked near the portico, and drove away.



In the meantime, the four canines at the station's condition also deteriorated since they joined the demonstration in the absence of their canine brothers. The food that the station constables had provided was rejected by them. As a result, their health progressively declined. At the Inspector's request, they were transferred to the hospital where they received the same care as the six dogs who were treated in the emergency room.

On learning about the health state of the other four dogs, the animal activists filed a quash petition in the higher court to annul or nullify the case filed against the dogs under public nuisance. "The quash petition could not be heard because the case is already being examined in the lower



court. As a result, this higher court rejects it. The lower court, however, has the authority to keep things as they are. Let the lower court determine whether the case is legitimate. If you disagree with the ruling, you may approach this court for review.” The judge, short and plump, seated at the bench announced the ruling and instructed the petitioners to proceed to the lower court. The campaigners stepped out as if defeated after realizing there was nothing more, they could do but wait for the lower court's decision.

One woman activist, who appeared to be in her thirties, advised that instead of going after a quash, they should go back to the lower court and request bail for all the dogs or for its quash since the case did not hold any substance. "It seems sensible," supported by another female activist. "Yes, she is right." After reflecting for a while, the group's leader, fair and middle-aged, agreed to the idea.

They met with the defense lawyer Madan Lal, appointed earlier by the court in person at the court's premises, discussed the situation, and submitted a request for bail on behalf of all dogs. "All the dogs are being treated in hospitals for senility. They reportedly turned down the food that the constables provided. They were transferred to the veterinary hospital for treatment when things got worse. Despite the vet's best attempts, the canines' condition appears to be getting worse." Lal calmly listened to their complaint while he took notes in his own notebook about what happened.



The bail case of the dogs came up for hearing before the judge in the lower court. While the defense attorney enthusiastically argued in favour of it, the prosecutor vehemently opposed it. "There is no criminal substance in it. Therefore, the dogs are entitled to bail. Besides the dogs are senile and refused to touch the food. They were on protest in the first three days of their detention and declined food offered by the police. This has weakened the dogs' health. Hence, they were shifted to hospital for treatment. Even after recovery, the dogs refused to yield to the cajole of the doctor. They desperately need freedom, I understand. I realize how much they want to be free. The dogs haven't committed any serious offenses, like biting passersby, or becoming unruly that would actually call for their arrest and detention. Furthermore, I contend that the prosecutor's claims about the disturbance these dogs are causing are unjustified in light of the noise that cars, trucks, and tractors, as well as loudspeakers in temples cause." The defense lawyer placed his argument



convincingly. He sipped water from the glass and sat quietly. Except the animal rights activists, there were no outsiders present in the court chamber.

"Your honour, I take issue with the defense attorney's position. I contend that these dogs are already unhappy and would act out in an uncontrolled manner if the court releases them on bond." Amid cries and shouts from the activists the prosecutor continued, "There is a good chance that the dogs will attack people in retaliation. It becomes challenging to manage them. I thus ask the court to deny bail."

"Your honour, every living being has the right to exist in freedom. That is a gift from nature. Contravening it is going against nature. Freedom is not the only prerogative of human beings. We must respect the freedom of all living things on this planet. For the peaceful conservation of biodiversity and the coexistence of all living things, this is a must. The dogs are entitled to their freedom in this sense. They have no right to be deprived of it by a judge or another person. I hereby offer my humbling petition for the pets' release."

"Your honour, I contend that having the right to freedom comes with obligations. The dogs no longer possess that sense even as they assert their freedom. Freedom means having the right restrictions in place. Then all creatures can live in harmony. The dogs have broken that in the current situation. The dogs must be punished as a result. The canines will undoubtedly understand their error when they are confined and will quickly apologise for their inappropriate actions in public. Detention is not a punishment; rather, it is intended to aid in the offender's rehabilitation. The dogs cannot be released even after their behaviour returns to normal. I do not support the defense attorney's position, which asks the court to release the defendants."

"Contrary to the prosecutor's assertion, dogs do not experience regret or realization like humans do. Equating their condition to the human condition is illogical and unjustified. The canines have already weakened. Their lives will be endangered by further incarceration."

"I disagree with your honour; canines are just as intelligent as human beings. They might not be quite as cunning and corrupt as humans. There is only a slight difference. The dogs' intelligent protest of not eating food provided by the constables in the police station itself is evidence of this. They possess a sense of reason. I believe they will turn around and recognize their bad actions.



Detention is just a preventative measure, I argued in this court, not a punishment. The dogs must be permitted to remain in quarantine and guardianship for a few more days until their behaviour returns to normal."

"I am beyond all doubt that the death of the dogs, which is going to occur, if further negligence is allowed, will have an indirect impact on their number. There will be no reproduction. This will have a negative impact on their presence in the city. We'll be held accountable for the biodiversity's distortion."

"It has a negligible impact on the population in this area of the city. The planet's biodiversity won't be affected. Nature has a built-in system to correct the imbalance. Consequently, this court need not be concerned about the dwindling number of dogs in the city."

"The court ought to approach the situation differently on sympathy grounds. A small number of dogs being relocated, I say unequivocally, will have a negative impact on the overall population."

"I submit that the court has to examine the male-to-female ratio of dogs in the present case because more dogs are currently vying for a female dog on the YV Street. This might be one reason. Another potential reason is vying for a leadership position."

"There is nothing that can be done. It is not a human error if there is an imbalance in the ratio of male to female canines. It comes from nature itself. We can never restore the ratio by arresting and getting rid of the dogs. Consider the human population as an example. The ratio of men to women is unbalanced. Does this imply that we should get rid of the extra guys to make them equal to the females? It is unreasonable and ludicrous. In support of my claim, I assert that nobody on this earth has the right to trample on another creature's freedom of movement and existence. I therefore beg the judge to immediately grant bail for pets. It is abhorrent to seize and confine the dogs for no heinous crime. Wounding a dog is not a serious crime. It's quite common in a quarrel. Sir, I detest it strongly."

"Do you have anything to add to this argument made by the defense attorney?" The burly judge asked the prosecutor as he turned to face him.



"The defense attorney's case is the result of his fictitious concern. There is nothing to fear about the changing gender ratio of the dog population. I have nothing else to say except fervently plead with the court that the dogs should not be released on bond under whatever justification offered by the defense attorney. They ought to be held in detention until they return to normal. Since they were imprisoned, the colony has been quiet. This matter merits consideration by the court."

"This court carefully considered the arguments made by both sides. Further arguments on this matter have been closed." The judge said that the verdict was reserved and would be announced on Friday as the clock on the wall facing him indicated half past one. The judge exited the courtroom to board his car at the portico. There was some uproar inside the room. The animal rights activists rushed to the defense lawyer and exchanged pleasantries with him. Thereafter, they all dispersed, casting aspersion on the prosecutor.



In three days, the verdict would be delivered. The campaigners were quite anxious as a result. The doctor, however, had to force-feed the dogs because they were feeble. Both the Inspector and the constables kept a watchful eye out. The activists also contributed to helping them. The information began to circulate across the city in the interim. The reporters from daily papers and local television quickly assembled to follow the developments. People showed curiosity in the case.

Finally, the day of judgment arrived, much to the relief of everyone involved in the case. It was eleven thirty. The activists were among the many people who gathered in front of the court. Only a select handful were allowed to enter the compact space.

As usual, the judge showed up dressed in a black robe. All those present rose to their feet in respect as he entered the courtroom. The prosecutor and the defense team, seated around the long ebony table, rose in respect.

"This court heard the arguments from both parties last Tuesday, which is unprecedented in the history of the legal system. Such an extraordinary case came up for hearing for the first time in its history. As you are well aware, the animal courts handle cases involving animals independently from the human courts. This court has been forced to take the matter up since the dogs involved in it



do not fall within the Wild Life Act. The dog is not a wild animal. This court concluded after carefully weighing the arguments of both parties that the traffic noise made by cars, trucks, and other vehicles besides the noise from loudspeakers in temples is much louder than the disturbance the dogs' cause. Their freedom is at stake, not only the annoyances that dogs cause, as alleged by the prosecutor. This court is correct to rule that no particular creature owns the entire planet. Every living thing has the fundamental right to exist in freedom. It is a natural rule. It cannot be contested. The dogs, who have a right to exist in freedom, express their freedom in the same way that we humans do. The natural justice that is applicable to everyone is violated by holding them in detention as though they had committed some extraordinary crime. This court believes that injuring a dog is not a major offense, especially in light of the hundreds of people being murdered nationwide over trivial matters. Additionally, this court has taken note of the dogs' deteriorating health, which has raised a lot of concern among both animal rights advocates and this court. This court has determined that the prosecution's case lacks merit in light of the dogs' declining health and their fundamental freedom to live their lives as they choose. They must not be held in forcible detention as punishment on the grounds of injuring a dog or vying for leadership position, which is a common happening that we witness now and then. Similarly, it is neither the human fault nor the dogs' fault for the disproportionate gender ratio. This so-called imbalance is beyond human correction since it is a gift from nature, or more precisely because it is a part of nature itself. Given this justification, it is appropriate to declare the case to be void and order the dogs' immediate release from custody." After pronouncing the verdict, the judge got up and made his customary exit for his car.

The court's decision represented a significant triumph for the animal rights campaigners who had gathered in the chamber, and soon there was celebration everywhere. The news trickled down to the news broadcasters and press reporters, who gathered in sufficient numbers. The activists, after profusely congratulating Lal on winning the lawsuit and thanking him for his unwavering support, cooperation, and help, they hurried to the hospital, gathered the dogs, decorated them with garlands and marked their foreheads with vermilion, and led them in a procession accompanied by music and dance while setting off fireworks before releasing them where they had been picked up. The dogs merely witnessed this hilarious spectacle in silence.



About the Writer: K.V. Raghupathi, a former academic, poet, short story writer, novelist, critic, columnist, and book reviewer, writes in English despite speaking Telugu as his first language. Widely published and anthologized both in online and print journals in India and abroad. He has so far published fourteen collections of poetry, three novels, and two short story collections. His third collection of stories, *Summer Death* is in the pipeline.

He regularly writes to the Speaking Tree columns of Indian National English dailies, *The Times of India* and *The Economic Times*. He previously taught at the Central University of Tamil Nadu, Thiruvavur, and now lives in Tirupati (India) and is actively engaged in writing. He can be reached at drkvraghupathi9@gmail.com