

Krishna Ashram: pariahs' paradise

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The busy city life moves really fast, and we are so preoccupied with our regular nitty-gritty that we hardly find any time for animal welfare. Before giving a positive nod to this statement, just think again. For here's a glaring example for us, right here in Delhi – Rita Singh, a successful businesswoman and founder of Krishna Ashram (KA), who in spite being far busier than most of us, has created paradise for our pariahs and pets. Read on to know more about her compassionate tale of love.

Sprawling lush greens extending at lengths in all directions, filled with the cacophony of friendly barks echoing from every corner... welcome to serene yet fairly dynamic dwelling of more than 215 dogs... better known as Krishna Ashram. Situated on the outskirts of Delhi, it is an ultimate refuge to heartbroken, sick and abandoned dogs and cattle. The lady behind this noble cause is Rita Singh, who opened the gates of her home and heart to these mute angels. The roots of this noble gesture are deep and firm; it's been 30 years, since Rita Singh embarked on her journey to make a better world for animals, though, Krishna Ashram was registered under Society Registration Act as an NGO, just five years back.

Since childhood, Rita grew up with unmatched compassion for animals. So what triggered her to start such a welfare organization? On asking about the inception of Krishna Ashram, Rita went nostalgic and shared, "Since childhood, I always wanted to pet a dog, and I got my first pet, when I was six, called 'Champi – a stray'. And once, someone abandoned Champi at a far off railway station and after two days, she came back to me. It was magical moment for me... and since then these animals became an indispensable part of my life."

As a young animal lover, she began tending animals at her home, and gradually it became one big happy family, where all the members love each other's company. She started off with very little money and almost no help. It was Rita's untiring efforts and hardwork that has turned this humble beginning into a full-fledged animal welfare mission. Pets at Rita Villa are never chained or caged, this is something Rita hates doing; they all are free and thence high-spirited souls. But not-so-pet-friendly neighbours have their own reasons to get little upset at times. "I want to give ample space to my pets, thus I moved to a farm house in 1986 with 30-40 dogs. And over the years I provided shelter to all those, who needed help, and today I have 215 dogs," she added.

Rita has helped animals from streets, roads, railway stations, airports etc. Being a busy businesswoman, how does she find time for such a cause? To that she enthusiastically replied, "While travelling, I keep my Hawk eyes on roads to help suffering animals. At times, I have even cancelled my meetings, if I found any hurt animal. Wherever I go I am keen to help them, they are everywhere. Even in our Mumbai office and Orissa Steel Plant, we have many such companions. I feel responsible for them, and always have time for them, no matter what."

Rita has gained sound popularity amongst the locals and villagers, and they are voluntarily associated with the cause. Whenever any dog/cattle is in distress, they rush to Krishna Ashram for rescue. "People come to us with injured and sick dogs, we provide first-aid and medication to them and we keep them with us for a few days before sending them back."

The organization has highly qualified veterinary doctors, including surgeons and resident doctors (available 24x7), office staff (committed to their duties), ambulance drivers (always ready for an

emergency) and several helpers (all committed to their jobs). Sometimes vets have a real tough time, treating bad cases of wounds, maggots, injuries, ticks, etc. “Vets always give their best to save every soul. We have a well-equipped clinic and dog care center and round-the-clock ambulance facility as well, and in case of urgency other cars are also here,” she added.

The people at Krishna Ashram are actively busy with the ongoing sterilization campaign, and Rita herself looks after every animal and comforts them. As she explained, “We have been doing selective sterilization, I mean we prefer to sterilize all females first, because that’s a better way to control stray population. We don’t believe in ‘Catch-neuter-leave,’ we do stress-free sterilization. After sterilizing, we keep them with us for 5-10 days, before sending them back. That way, we assure good health also.”

She fondly compared her compassion for the animals with love, and said, “When you are in love no logic works, this is what implies with me also for my over 200 pets. It’s purely unconditional love.” Seeing doggies basking under the sun, rubbing their backs, sharing camaraderie and enjoying opulence, further affirmed her love for them.

Over the years, her compassion for animals has turned so strong that she has developed a mystic bond with them. “While observing animals, I easily find, which one is sick or sad, which dog will fall sick tomorrow. I understand their actions and gestures completely,” she added.

So far so good, Krishna Ashram still has a long way to go as Rita envisaged, “It’s been going fine till now, but now I want to have a proper set up for that. We have been working hard for this also. Our dedicated team of professionals is giving their best. We have got the support of some of the best vets in towns and we are also vying for international animal welfare support. We are also looking for bigger place, where our pariahs can enjoy more freedom.”

Being responsible for so many lives is not an easy task, and it becomes more difficult, when one fights against all odds alone. But for a person like Rita, it was not an ordeal rather a fulfilling journey. According to her, “It’s really a tough life for any pet enthusiast in India. We all have to go through ups and downs of life; sometimes it becomes very painful. People face myriad constraints; lack of funds and aids are the prominent ones. But thankfully I have my own resources. So, I expect less from others and rely more on my individual efforts.”

Rita’s greatest area of concern is lack of awareness amongst the people. Most of the pets and pariahs fall prey to this. “Kidney and liver problem is the most common ailment and people don’t know how to deal with it,” she grieved. To conclude, she added, “It’s my mission to start a specialized hospital for kidney and liver disorders in animals, which would be second to none. And I hope to substantiate it soon.”

All those compassionate animal lovers, who want to join in Rita’s crusade for animal welfare can contact at Krishna Ashram: D-3A Rita Villa Satbari Farms, New Delhi Ph.:26652449 or e-mail: krishnaashram@yahoo.co.in

Let love be the reason!

“Nothing but true love must be the reason for having a pet. Never keep a pet as status symbol or for security purpose. Only if you have compassion for these furry angels, then have one. It’s really sad to see them suffering. They are living beings, they feel shattered and disillusioned, when we abandon them for strange and silly reasons. We must take inspiration from slum dwellers, cobblers, and rickshaw pullers

etc., who with their minimal earnings treat strays and pets in a better way and shower loads of unconditional love on them. Keep a pet only if you feel responsible for his/her well-being for life, just like our own children.”

– by Smita Mishra