

**"THE UNSPOKEN GUIDE": AN INTERDISCIPLINARY EXPLORATION OF
CANINE-HUMAN INTERSPECIES COEXISTENCE AND COMPANIONSHIP IN
SOUTH ASIAN LITERATURE**

THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE AWARD OF DOCTOR OF
PHILOSOPHY (ARTS) AT JADAVPUR UNIVERSITY

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By

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Certified that the thesis entitled

" "THE UNSPOKEN GUIDE": AN INTERDISCIPLINARY EXPLORATION OF CANINE- HUMAN INTERSPECIES COEXISTENCE AND COMPANIONSHIP IN SOUTH ASIAN LITERATURE" submitted by me for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Arts at Javapur University is based upon my work carried out under the supervision of Professor Rimi Barnali Chatterjee and that neither this thesis nor any part of it has been submitted before for any degree or diploma anywhere/elsewhere.

Countersigned by the Supervisor:

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Notes

This thesis has been written in the Chicago Manual Style, 17th Edition, footnote and bibliography format for easier reading. The translated phrases, sections, and excerpts of all the Bengali, Assamese, and other vernacular languages are done by me, except those which are specified with their respective translators. I have mentioned both their original vernacular titles as well as the translated ones. Those texts which are originally written in English, have been quoted and mentioned as the same of their original versions. I have attempted to follow the phonetically accurate renditions of vernacular names of persons and characters to the best of my ability.

Contents

- 1. Introduction.....1-30.**
- 2. Our Best Friend: Representation of Disability in Canine-Human Relationships in South Asian Literature.....31-65.**
- 3. Death and His Brothers: Canine- Human Coexistence and Struggling Times in South Asian Literature.....66-109.**
- 4. Strangers, Underdogs and Magical Experiences with Our Canine Companions in South Asian Literature.....110- 164.**
- 5. Dog's Day: The Canine Life Writing in Literature of South Asia...165- 229.**
- 6. Conclusion.....230-244.**
- 7. Bibliography.....245-273.**

Introduction

The relationship between the humans and their canine co-habitants has a wide social, cultural and psychological impact in the history of our civilization. In my thesis, I intend to explore the nuances of these dynamics—specifically how the presence of dogs in the Indian subcontinent has been conditioned, reflected, and to a great extent, shaped by the articulation of authoritarian power on the marginalised, in the context of political and religious identities in India. My doctoral project spans from the 1930s to our present times, focussing on the representations of canines in the fictional literature of South Asia. This thesis aims to be an exploration of representations of canine-human interspecies relationships as an articulation of empathy, shared lived experiences and voice of resistance against the dominant anthropocentric, speciesist mainstream culture of our times.

Our relationships with other animals are dominated with a sense of power. This sense of power is either covert or direct based on various contexts- but it pervades the positions of all the nonhuman beings in respect to humans as the centralised sources of domination and control. From an animal historian's standpoint, nonhuman animals are always reduced to the status of secondary significance to humans, and that is the point which gives rise to speciesism in its most powerful, efficient form.

The nuances of this dynamic between dogs and humans are shaped, constructed and influenced by our relationships with other nonhuman animals, who cohabit and contribute to our lives and civilisation. This doctoral research stems from my own experiences of working with the street animals for over a period of time which has

motivated me to explore critically, why there is a stark polarity when it comes to the public mindset towards our ownerless, free-ranging fellow nonhuman animals in urban Twenty First Century urban India. Essentially rooted in the socio-cultural reality of our times, this thesis intends to bring the issues of living vulnerably with companion canines in physical as well as metaphorical spaces, always threatened with anthropocentric, speciesist invasions, within the academic discussions of this time. There is a particular reason why this thesis starts with the notion of speciesist intrusions in this discussion. More than the representations of canine characters in South Asian Literature, this doctoral project endeavours to discover those little-known literary works, which uphold the empathetic, interspecies camaraderie between dogs and people, against the grain of human-centered narratives of mainstream literature and why these works are so crucial in weaving the individual micro-narratives of interspecies, mutually dependent relationships. The public mindset towards street animals is an expression of centuries old conditioning of perceiving this animal, specifically canine presence in certain ways, ranging from indifference to hostility. The specific socio-cultural positionality of street dogs throws into relief the notions of power onto the animal presence and the hegemonic discourses which operate in multilayered ways to control the animal presence within human habitat, and in this way also controlling our complex dynamics with our fellow companion animals. In an anthropocentric society, the nonhuman animals are always positioned towards the margin. If we trace the attitudes towards dogs before the time of British Colonialism from the 17th century onwards, excluding some sporadic references to the dogs owned and employed by the nobles and established authorities of the times, dogs remained outside of the public interests with scholars and historians. The concept of nonviolence, *Ahimsa*, comes down to us from the doctrines of Buddhism and Jainism.¹

¹ Ian Harris, "A Vast Unsupervised Recycling Plant': Animals and the Buddhist Cosmos," in *A Communion of Subjects: Animals in Religion, Science and Ethics*, ed. Paul Waldau and Kimberley Patton (New York: Columbia

Konrad Lorenz's groundbreaking take on the companionability of dogs and humans initiates a new way of looking at human-animal interactions, from the evolutionary, ethological perspective.²

Street dogs in India share a ubiquitous yet silenced existence. My relationship with street dogs, dates back to childhood memories, not all of which were pleasant as I was a witness of how the majority of the governing agencies like the police and Govt. veterinary departments, and local administrations harbour an indifferent attitude towards street animals and cruelty perpetrated on them goes unaddressed most of the time. In the context of South Asian cultural space, dogs are organically accepted and positioned in our physical as well as societal spaces. Dogs with their special position of 'liminality' is one of the western concepts in animal-human cohabitation within the urban landscape, a concept that has also been seeped into the notions of South Asian animal-human concepts gradually, over a stretch of the last couple of centuries.³ Their cohabitation with us creates a site capable of articulating deep tensions, anxiety, and dichotomy of conflicting emotions like compassion and cruelty, disgust and tolerance. Understanding the dynamics of our co-existence invites a call for interdisciplinary discourses encompassing urbanisation, ethology, prevailing cultural norms, economic and power disparity, ethics, science of zoonosis and public health. India has one of the strongest Constitutional legislatures for the rights of animals, at least preventing animals to be cruelly treated and dealt with. *The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1960* is one of the strongest cornerstones of animal rights in India. It says:

University Press, 2006), 207–17; Lance Nelson, "Cows, Elephants, Dogs, and Other Lesser Embodiments of Atman: Reflections on Hindu Attitudes towards Nonhuman Animals," in *A Communion of Subjects: Animals in Religion, Science and Ethics*, ed. Paul Waldau and Kimberley Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 179–93.

² Konrad Lorenz, *Man Meets Dog* (1975; repr., New York: Routledge, 2002).

³ Arnold Arluke and Kate Atema, "Roaming Dogs," in *The Oxford Handbook of Animal Studies*, ed. Linda Kalof (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 113-134.

An act to prevent the infliction of unnecessary pain or suffering on animals and for that purpose to amend the law relating to the prevention of cruelty to animals.⁴

The Act gives detailed instructions in understanding the degrees, the contexts, and the factors which play pivotal roles in determining an act or the acts of cruelty towards any nonhuman beings. Article 51A (g) of the Indian Constitution upholds the principle of compassion towards living beings and animals and according to *the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023*, there is a section, Section 325, which imposes strict punishment for the killing of the animals. Although 1861 is considered to be the starting point for the animal rights movement with the establishment of the Calcutta Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals by Colesworthey Grant in Calcutta and later in Madras and Bombay in 1877 and 1883 respectively, India has a long legacy of *ahimsa* or the doctrine of non-violence towards every living being from the emergence of Buddhism and Jainism in the past. Buddhism as a philosophy emphasises on the concept of rebirth, which restructured our attitudes towards animals to a great extent. According to this belief system, depending on the individual contribution, animals are reborn as humans and vice-versa. In that way, all the other nonhuman animals are woven with the narrative of human lives in a more filial manner- all other nonhuman beings can hold the potential to be our immediate or distant deceased family members. Jainism rooted itself against any form of violence towards animals and living beings, which even inculcated a complete denunciation from accepting animal-based food, including eggs, and honey. One of the robust as well as widespread religious ideologies, which thrived on the notions of ‘ahimsa’ and ‘karuna’ towards all creatures, Jainism was ‘the most emphatic of the

⁴ *The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960.*

animal-human continuum of any belief system in the world'.⁵ Unlike the ancient principles of *ahimsa* and *karuna*, which taught humans to be tolerant and empathetic towards all animals, Vedic Hinduism was not regulated with this same notion of nonviolence towards animals. The positions of animals within the complex religious systems, as there are multiple influences and subjects even within Hinduism, is ambivalent. Many gods take on incarnations of animals yet animal sacrifices are also practiced, or they used to be in practice until very recently. In this system, dogs were considered as either too degrading or too organic to be documented in serious literature or serious representations of the time. In the sense that their presence has been ubiquitous yet has not been thought to be contextualised in tandem with the developments and changes of societal-physical spaces that were shared by both dogs and humans. They were always treated invisibly, very rarely integrating into distinct, individual identities in literature than mere props to the ambience or general surroundings. It is with the imposition of the western practice that created a long-standing impact in the ways public mindset was reshaped in recognising the unowned street animals as a possible threat to their safety. In the post-independent India, the establishment of the Animal Welfare Board of India in 1962, under the Section 4, of the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960* (59 of 1960) under the leadership of Late Smt. Rukmini Devi Arundale, was a major marker of the animal rights movement in modern India. Indian philosophy, specifically Buddhism and Jainism have had the space to accommodate the living nonhuman beings with humans from the ancient times, but as explained earlier, Hinduism holds an ambivalent attitude towards dogs in general. Street dogs play a crucial part in attending and guarding the underprivileged demography of human population by not only sharing

⁵ Nandita Batra and Vartan P. Messier, "Of Mice and Men: The Aporia of the Animal-Human (Dis) Continuum," in *Of Mice and Men: Animals in Human Culture*, ed. Nandita Batra and Vartan Messier (Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 6.

their living, physical space but also creating a dimension of spontaneous co-dependency, something Haraway succinctly pointed out, and to which point I will continue referring to throughout the entire course of this dissertation.

Donna Haraway explores her own relationship with her dog, Cayenne, to illustrate how humans and dogs share histories and biology. She frames this relationship as one of "significant otherness," a term that highlights both connection and difference, challenging the simple binaries of master/pet, human/animal:

I'm sure our genomes are more alike than they should be. There must be some molecular record of our touch in the codes of living that will leave traces in the world, no matter that we are each reproductively silenced females, one by age, one by surgery (Haraway, 2).⁶

Haraway draws a point of equality and mutual dependence on the basis of the evolutionary aspects of canine-human relationship. It should also be noted how Haraway also posits the notion of gender against the backdrop of speciesism and dominant cultural narrative. Donna Haraway reminds us in *The Companion Species Manifesto*, that it exists in an "obligatory, constitutive, historical, protean relationship with human beings"—a relationship in which "none of the partners pre-exist the relating, and the relating is never done once and for all".

The underprivileged, the homeless people generally share their living space, food and mental bonding in a very organic way with dogs already dwelling in that same space. These habitats are not formally introduced spaces of habitations within the urban landscape; they operate in a ubiquitous way, functioning as the off-shoots of the privileged centres of the metropolis. Hence the narratives surrounding the animal-human

⁶ Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003), 2.

companionships in these specific areas are interconnected with so many factors in multiple gradients, ranging from transactional relationships on the humans' side to that of open hostilities, although most street dwellers share some unspoken yet warm companionship with urban canines. In delineating the outline of 'zoöpolis', Lauren. E. Van Patter brings into the notion of animal presence in the cities, in its variant forms, from 'domestic space' to the 'ambivalent zoo', and the 'liminal urban interstices'.⁷ Van Patter's argument is important here because she stresses on a rethinking of 'ecologies-of-care', that involves a construction of perception that involves individuals or groups of individuals in humans and their companionable relationships with fellow animals within these urban spaces:

Rethinking care for the more-than-human city involves attending both to animals as individuals as relationally-embedded within complex socio-ecological networks. For instance, the intersections between individuals or groups of humans and animals are often ignored when we consider urban animal management policies and their implications (Van Patter, 368).⁸

As a researcher from this developing country, I intend to delve into this intersectionality of individuals with street dogs, as one of the potent areas which unravels with multiple ramifications of legal, societal, and cultural interpretations in their literary projections in the fictional literary works from South Asia. This intersectionality brings out an existence which I intend to call as 'an existence of shared vulnerability'. The reduction of ownerless, semi-domesticated, semi-feral dogs from their status of organic

⁷ Lauren. E. Van Patter, "Encountering Urban Animals: Towards the Zoöpolis," in *Animals in Our Midst: The Challenges of Co-Existing with Animals in the Anthropocene*, ed. Bernice Bovenkerk and Jozef Keulartz (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2019), 366.

⁸ Lauren. E. Van Patter, *Encountering Urban Animals: Towards the Zoöpolis*, 368.

entities within human habitats to mere ‘pests’, their marginalisation as entirely scavenging creatures, is an administrative, and ideological paradigmatic shift.

The extermination of street dogs has a multilayered connotation in terms of class, privilege and the notion of ownership on the animal personhood. A landmark case of *People for the Elimination of Stray versus State of Goa and others, 2003*, sets a tremendous example of the upholding of the rights of stray animals within the Indian jurisdiction.⁹ It is also a crucial verdict that fights to establish the status of street dogs for their legally validated rights of existence within the Indian jurisdiction. This entire thesis is an attempt to explore and negotiate the ideas of this right to existence on behalf of the animals as well as the people, who have fought for them, and the representation of their shared struggles as reflected within the scope of fictional works spanning from the 1930s to 2020s South Asian literature.

Argument

The doctoral project stems from this inquiry into not only the presence, but also the lack of presence of the animal beings in the mainstream literary and cultural representations, and what this lack in reality ends up reflecting, at times even without the dominant intention. The study in this field has informed me about a generalised sense of neglect and marginalisation in the way nonhuman subjects have been represented in the cultural and literary works. Our literature is still centered around the anthropocentric attitude which speaks through the lack of proper representations that we, as a species fail to capture of our fellow nonhuman companions. The impetus of this doctoral thesis stems from my understanding as well as endeavour to acknowledge our animal companions in their deserving depictions in literature and culture. Dogs in the culture of South Asia

⁹ People for Elimination of Stray versus the State of Goa and Others, 2003(4) BOMCR588, (January 7, 2003), Judgement by Justice D. G. Deshpande, <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/1224502/>.

share a very precarious existence. They are always present in our vicinity yet strangely are overlooked by the majority. This lack of proper representation is also reflected in the way so few academic enquiries have been conducted in the literary works of South Asian literature. I intended to capture the activism that literature plays in representing these marginal beings at the intersections of power, agency and subjectivity. When we look at the official and bureaucratic documents registering the animal presence, specifically the dogs, the references to the street dogs come as dangerous beings threatening the safety of urban and rural human settlements. Seen from that angle, the majority of these bureaucratic documents articulate the deep-seated anxieties and fear that surrounded the presence of street canines in South Asian culture. On the other hand, when we shift our focus to the literary works which register these presences and representations of animal lives, especially of canine lives, we find a diametrically opposite message. Most of the literary works that capture this coexistence between humans and canines, focussed on the other aspect of this equation, something that is very much ignored in the mainstream narrative of our cultural representations. This side of the canid-human interspecies interactions and mutual dependence emerges as the dominant factor in these literary works at the initial stage through the lenses of position of urban animals in Indian metropolis. The colonial legacy from the middle of the Nineteenth century created a narrative of polarised animal rights activism within this colonial space. The research on this area considerably covered the scientific as well as historical dimensions of the animal presence in the urban human settlements.¹⁰

I attempted to explore whether the literary works which represented this other side of the canine-human interspecies coexistence can be seen as articulations of animal rights

¹⁰ Samiparna Samanta, *Meat, Mercy, Morality: Animals and Humanitarianism in Colonial Bengal, 1850-1920* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2021); Pratik Chakrabarti, "Beasts of Burden: Animals and Laboratory Research in Colonial India," *History of Science* 48, no. 2 (June 2010): 125–51, <https://doi.org/10.1177/007327531004800201>.

activism through the shared human-canine bonding in these works. So, those specific literary works on canine-human interspecies connections, explore the range of activism that comes out through the lived actual, experiential matrix of a section of population that share their physical, living space in a very organic, affective ways with these nonhuman beings and thus weave a network of alternative, multispecies living experience in the face of speciesist, dominant culture. For street dogs, an already culturally marginalised entity, the consolidated activism centered around their rights and its depictions in literature has always been very sporadic. This is one of the reasons why my chapters may appear to be linked tangentially and episodic in nature. This thesis aims to be an acknowledgement of the marginalisation as well as their presence within the dominant narrative of the anthropocentric, speciesist narrative of South Asia. By emphasising the significance of the interspecies connections, this thesis attempts to establish the importance of intersectionality on this canine presence in our literature and how this specific positionality illuminates the changing dynamics with our nonhuman fellow creatures in this part of the world. Although the locus of my thesis will be centered around the literature of the time to investigate whether dogs occupy a special position in literature, I feel the actual realistic backdrop behind these representations are necessary. The literature of the time whether vernacular or English, do not abound with animal metaphors, but their very absence raises many questions about the public opinion, Governmental Legislation and a lack of general awareness regarding our indifference towards sufferings of animals.¹¹ The representation or the lack of representation of dogs in contemporary literary landscape of India demonstrates a range of critical questions regarding animal ethics, medical science regarding sanitation, urban management and a culture of migration. I will come to this particular point of migration in the latter part of

¹¹ Charles Magel, "Introduction," in *Key Guide to Information Sources in Animal Rights* (London: Mansell, 1989).

this report. A sweeping overview of literature of this period will inform us that, the question of experiencing pain in animal bodies was one of the most important scientific and ethical issues of the time. Beginning from the 1860s the use of animals as experimental objects in potentially dangerous scientific research was a raging issue which gave rise to the several associations of anti-vivisectionist and animal right activists of the time.¹² Towards the late Nineteenth century, the contemporary literature demonstrates an increased interest in the way animals, specifically horses epitomize a heightened sense of consciousness, liberation and the capacity of experiencing authentic life. The historical aspect of this shift is important, as the economic and social scenario was abruptly changing, and our separation from our constant companions, in this case, the horse is done away with the technological development of the time.¹³

This thesis attempts to establish two ideas- the first point is how the literary works on canine-human relationships portray another aspect of interspecies dynamics amidst a speciesist, anthropocentric mainstream body of narratives, while the second point constructs canid-human interconnections as a viable lens which reflects the changing face of India and South Asia's transforming socio-cultural landscape in terms of multispecies living and anthrozootic coexistences. The use of this specific word, "anthrozootic", connects us with the notion of animal's presence as a significant one, in the historical time frame of urban development.¹⁴ Street dogs are embedded at the intersections of multiple discourses, and for this reason the violence on street dogs has a considerable foot-print in the fields of cultural studies intersecting diverse cultural and societal

¹² A. W. H. Bates, *Anti-Vivisection and the Profession of Medicine in Britain: A Social History* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

¹³ Clay McShane and Joel Tarr, *The Horse in the City: Living Machines in the Nineteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007).

¹⁴ Geoff Hosey and Vicky Melfi, eds., *Anthrozoology: Human-Animal Interactions in Domesticated and Wild Animals* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2018).

dynamics. The ownerless, free-ranging dogs from the streets with their complete exposures to all types of external elements with minimal deliberate human interventions yet their dependence on the wastage of human habitats, renders them a unique place in human civilisation. My argument will endeavour to establish that, it is necessary to construct a historiography of the human-canine interactions in Indian subcontinent by following the transformations of legal procedures, history of medical sciences in the context of animal control and a parallel reading of these literary representations which also tells the other side of the narrative. This historiography will be capable of addressing the issues of animal cruelty, specifically on canines ranging from colonial period to contemporary 21st century India and how it has the tenor of a more nuanced justification of the dehumanization of the marginalized in our society. Dogs, in the Indian or larger South Asian cultural context, are very difficult to categorise under the strict demarcations of domesticated/ feral binary. Modernist cultures have reshaped the notions of animal presence within the human habitat, centrally on the concepts of physical space and proximity. As Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka have pointed out the extent of this reshaping in our understanding of animal presence within the human habitat. According Donaldson and Kymlicka:

This high modernist conception of space systematically distorts our understanding of human-animal relations. It recognises the existence of pets in cities (if safely leashed), but ignores the non-domesticated animals around us. And so, liminal animals come into view only when their numbers or behaviour turn them into 'pests'. In other words, they are visible only when they become a problem, but invisible as ubiquitous members of the community. (Donaldson, Kymlicka)¹⁵

¹⁵ Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka, "Extending Animal Rights via Citizenship Theory," in *Zoopolis: A Political Theory of Animal Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 68.

Indeed, when we look at the changing perceptions of dogs in the cultural context, this polarisation between the ignored yet ubiquitous urban animal and the ferocious, scavenging creatures construe their reception in this model in contemporary Indian urban metropolis. In this thesis, I intend to unearth those cultural representations, which question, or counter this mainstream, dominant notion of canine presence in the South Asian context. Donaldson and Kymlicka further draws a fine line between the legally validated citizenship and the exploited or the neglected ‘denizenship’ of the liminal beings:

The invisibility of liminal animals does not just lead to indifference or neglect. Much worse, it often leads to a de-legitimization of their very presence. Since we assume that wild animals should live out in the wilderness, liminal animals are often stigmatised as aliens or invaders who wrongly trespass on human territory, and who have no right to be there. And as a result, whenever conflicts arise with humans, we feel entitled to get rid of them, either by mass trapping/relocation or even through mass extermination campaigns (shooting/poisoning). (Donaldson and Kymlicka, 210)¹⁶

In the contemporary Indian socio-cultural context, free-ranging or semi-domesticated or stray dogs are labelled under the ‘liminal animals’ within the urban human setting.

This thesis is not structured chronologically. But the broad categorisation will mark the earliest literary work selected here from the 1930s while the most recent work would be our contemporary time, 2021. In these few decades, the dynamics amongst humans and nonhuman beings in urban and rural areas underwent several changes, due to multiple

¹⁶ Donaldson and Kymlicka, "Liminal Animal Denizens," in *Zoopolis: A Political Theory of Animal Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 210.

societal, political and environmental changes which have reshaped our understanding of our own coexistence with other beings. The thesis is centered around the two key words, which I feel, should be specified. One is 'intersectionality' while the other one is 'entanglement'.¹⁷ The perspective of the word intersectionality is crucial, as this entire thesis is an attempt to narrativise the unique positionality that the dogs not only occupy and elicit responses in multilayered ways in our cultural field but also create an alternative notion of multispecies living with all its vulnerabilities in contrast to the anthropocentric, speciesist shift. All the chapters are aimed to be the insights into one or more intersectional aspects of the canine-human interspecies relationships, while some chapters focus on the entanglements also. In its entirety, this thesis aims to critically interrogate why a specific canine-angle is necessary in underlining our transformative attitudes towards a more-than-human lifeworld and how integrally that may be integrated in our mainstream, anthropocentric mindset. Seen in this vantage point, this thesis will endeavour to consolidate the role of the selected literary works with canine characters as not only explorations of canid-human interspecies bonding but also as articulations of subdued animal rights activism, without being obvious about it. Although fictional, these texts are the documented testaments of several individual's testaments in struggling, upholding, and registering the concept of tolerant living amongst multispecies existence deliberately by going against the speciesist, anthropocentric currents of the day, which continues to denigrate these other forms of life within the active human habitations. This thesis attempts to unravel this 'ecology-of-care' as specified in one of the earlier passages, through these notions of 'intersectionality' and 'entanglement'.

¹⁷ Lori Gruen, "Expressing Entangled Empathy: A Reply," *Hypatia* 32, no. 2 (March 2017): 452–62, <https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12326>.

Theorists have mentioned that till the Nineteenth Century, almost all the major cities of the West were anthrozootic cities.¹⁸ During the period of British colonialism also, the major cities like Calcutta, Bombay and Madras were heavily populated, sustained and regulated with animal subjects. Although their respective positions within the city limits and the implications of their presence as reflected through their representations articulate in both legislative documents and featuring in the resources related to urban plannings archived in the administrative and judicial sections and also in a more pervading way, in the cultural representations. In the case of dogs, the major cities of colonial India were characterised with a strong anti-canine sentiment both propagated as well as initiated by the colonial administrations. This anti-canine sentiment was so strong in public mind, that towards the end of the Nineteenth Century, we come across municipal records of the systematic extermination of street dogs in the Bengal Division. The archival documents are very important in the way that they consolidate one of the main points in my argument. The Government Proceedings regarding cruelty towards animals emerged from the 1860s with the establishment of the Calcutta Society for the Prevention of Cruelty toward Animals in 1861 in Kolkata. During the 1870s the establishment of the *Society* in Bombay and Madras Presidencies, helped to legitimise the compassion towards animals gaining a stronger hold. But the limitation of this *Society* in intervening actively in public life was solidified. In one of the Proceedings belonging to Judicial Department, there were repeated requests to confer the equal power and authority on the agents of the *Society* as that of the Police, but we are also informed by the consequent Proceedings, that this request was not granted. The correspondence between the CSPCA and the contemporary Police Department, unequivocally demonstrate that the cruelty towards animals was rampant in the suburban and remote

¹⁸ Susan Nance, ed., *The Historical Animal* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2015).

areas. There were regular Proceedings regarding the destruction of homeless, ownerless dogs around the 1900s. It was only at the behest of Mr. Pirkis's letter of enquiry to Government of India, that a formal letter of investigation was conducted in all the Divisions of Bengal Presidency.¹⁹ In his letter of enquiry to the Government of India, Mr. Pirkis stressed the point of the inhumane and unspeakable cruelty involved in the manner how the street dogs were exterminated from these localities. The letters from the police commissioners, magistrates from different districts, of all these Divisions repeatedly emphasised the point that the street dogs ought to be killed and that too in the least expensive manner. In all these letters, the pain and suffering of dogs is a secondary issue, and in certain cases it was not even taken under consideration. There are other instances where the preference for companionship of dogs in certain persons, were regarded as an undesired trait.

The kind of references that we tend to overlook when actively seeking out the animal presence, as these references are not aimed towards the privileged sections of the community; rather most of the times, they hint at the interwoven existence of underprivileged humans and street dogs within the colonial space. This research endeavours to locate this subdued, overlooked presence of animal self through its expressions of canine individuals, as they came in varied ways and remain immersed in the literature of South Asia, from the 1930s to our present times, i.e., 2020s. There are a few specific reasons why I have decided to limit the literary texts with canine characters within this specific timespan. The significant markers of the societal changes were initiated and influenced by certain era defining political transformations which took place within this time, the repercussions of these were felt across several aspects of our public lives, and the coexistence of the animal subjects also takes up a considerable space of

¹⁹ Proceedings 15-16, "Methods employed for the killing of dogs in Bengal" in Judicial Department, Judicial Branch (December, 1901), West Bengal State Archive.

that. The freedom movement which took place during the 1930s and 40s, the Partition of India and Pakistan, the Great Famine of the 1940s, the legalisation of *the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960* as one of the most important legal steps in the independent India, the Liberation War of Bangladesh in 1971, rise of leftism in the position of power in states like West Bengal and Kerala, all these together collectively create a fascinating narrative of people in the flux of massive political, societal and cultural transformations. In my thesis I wanted to look at dogs in their companionable yet mostly ownerless state, from the angles of these anthropocentric scenarios and how the specific emphasis on the intersectionality not only between two different species but also how the coexistent lives of dogs and humans have been truly impacted with these situations. This thesis also wants to create that space for acknowledgement and discussions which would take into consideration the cost of animal lives that each of the demographic, political and socio-cultural changes bring into the animal lives. In that way, this thesis intends to initiate a locus of accountability for our nonhuman, more specifically canine companions.

Methodology

Following the cues of Donna Haraway's notion of shared dependency and mutual significance in the evolution of both these species, I intended to locate the interspecies coexistence in our South Asian culture in the aftermath of two World Wars and the end of British colonialism. The Animal Rights Law and *the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960* in many ways, is a rewriting of the colonial *the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Acts of 1869, 1890 and 1920*, respectively. One of the crucial points in this thesis is how dogs were always relegated towards the farthest ends of compassion even within this colonial structure of compassion to the animals. To bring out the actual importance of these literary canines, it is crucially significant to contextualise them along the lines of the historical markers of animal rights movements in India. I did not intend

to limit this exploration into a philosophical enquiry in nature nor did I attempt to establish the fact that the indifference or hostility towards the dogs, is very similar to the hostility and indifference towards all the nonhuman beings. Rather my point of argument here is to structurally locate the aggression or indifference towards canines in relation with other nonhuman presence in human habitations. The hostility towards other species is not a separate or exclusive from the hostility that has been evidently demonstrated in canine-human coexistence, but rather a symptomatic extension of speciesist, anthropocentric worldview that marginalises most nonhuman beings irrespective of species-specific demarcations.

As a researcher, my intention was to create the pathways for animal historians, who can find the traces of societal and historical changes through the representations of canid-human mutually dependent relationships in the literatures of this time. This thesis attempts to construct a counter-discourse of canine- human interspecies relationships in the line of Arran Stibbe's notion of alternate discourse against the grain of mainstream, anti-canine, speciesist narrative.²⁰ A complete understanding of this significance can only be explored in its full capacity, when the vulnerability, the threats of mounting obstacles faced by not only the dogs, but also the humans who shared and stood side by side with these four-legged companions, were documented and addressed in the narrative. A broad overview of reading in this area has informed me about the works of historians like Samiparna Samanta, and the works of Deborah Nadal, Deryck O. Lodrick, David Gordon, and Hiranmay Karlekar. Rohan Deb Roy's article deals with the force of colonialism at the intersections of animals and empires.²¹ Samanta's work looks at how the condition of the animals and their position as legally validated subjects were directly

²⁰ Arran Stibbe, "Counter-Discourses and the Relationship between Humans and Other Animals," *Anthrozoös* 18, no. 1 (March 2005): 3–17, <https://doi.org/10.2752/089279305785594289>.

²¹ Rohan Deb Roy, "Introduction: Nonhuman Empires," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 35, no. 1 (January 1, 2015): 66–75, <https://doi.org/10.1215/1089201x-2876104>.

linked with the acceptance and implementations of colonial networks amongst judiciary, public health and municipal bodies to regulate and consolidate.²² Lodrick and Gordon White, both of their works in separate ways, expose the marginal, ostracised positions of street dogs even in the ancient periods of India. Their works are important in the ways they chart out the marginal identity of the street dogs always embedded in the cultural fabric of South Asian societies. In contrast to these works, Karlekar and Nadal's insights are rooted in the current scenarios of the canine-human interactions of urban landscapes of South Asia. The mapping of the historical evolutions from the neglected subjects without any references to the legally validated individuals with segregated rights, the animals with their silent yet magnificent contributions to human society has been also explored in the works of Heeral Chhabra.²³ Radhika Govindrajan, Krithika Srinivasan, Yamini Narayanan's works explore the problematic positionality of animal individuals, specifically dogs in the intersections of politics, colonial notion of domination and autonomous agency. Govindarajan's notion of 'relatedness' in terms of interspecies relationships and codependency emerges as one of the pivotal aspects in the third chapter that explores the degree of interconnections amongst lives.²⁴ Srinivasan's argument consolidates the essential notion of street dogs as the subjective sites on which Foucauldian biopolitics enters into the narrative of domination onto the animal bodies.²⁵ Hiranmay Karlekar's seminal work on street dogs in our times, is a penetrative insight into the systemic violence perpetrated by the establishments and in this way, it records

²² Samiparna Samanta, *Meat, Mercy, Morality: Animals and Humanitarianism in Colonial Bengal, 1850-1920* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2021).

²³ Heeral Chhabra, "Animal Labourers and the Law in Colonial India," *South Asia Research* 39, no. 2 (June 6, 2019): 166–83, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0262728019842979>.

²⁴ Radhika Govindrajan, "Epilogue: Kukur Aur Bagh," in *Animal Intimacies: Interspecies Relatedness in India's Central Himalayas* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2018), 176.

²⁵ Krithika Srinivasan, "The Welfare Episteme: Street Dog Biopolitics in the Anthropocene in Human Animal Research Network Collective," in *Animals in the Anthropocene: Critical Perspectives on Non-Human Futures*, ed. M Boyd et al. (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2015), 201–20.

the specific position of the street dogs as the symbolic agents of the anti-establishment.²⁶ This symbolic import of the street dogs in our collective cultural arena, has been interpreted, as well as interpolated in several multilayered ways. This work intends to reiterate Donna Haraway's notion of physicality of the actualised presence of dogs even with the expression and explorations of their symbolic rendition in literature.

This work attempts to establish a connecting bridge between the position of dogs in their socio-historical dimensions with their symbolic depictions in popular culture. For this purpose, I have incorporated the archival documents from the colonial era in reference to juxtapose the attitudes in difference towards our companion animal. Mostly the Judicial and in certain cases, the Municipal Proceedings demonstrate a clear understanding of human sentiments and public mindset towards street dogs. I have taken an essentially interdisciplinary approach as my intention is to locate the seeds of pro-animal sentiments against the dominant discourse of the time, and correlating this with the micro-narratives of ordinary individuals whose lives have been inherently associated, shaped and pervaded in tandem with their animal companions, specifically the dogs, irrespective of their domesticated or apparent ownerless, nomadic existence. The crux of my narrative stems from the deliberate willingness to merge critical animal studies as a movement within the literary forays of South Asia, through the lenses of the canine representations in literature, and how it constructs a narrative of marginality amidst the dominant, ableist, speciesist, mainstream culture.

Each chapter is centered around one aspect of this interspecies narrative and the thesis is starting from a vantage point where the dogs are towards the margin, but as we progress through the chapters, they increasingly come into the centre. The first chapter

²⁶ Hiranmay Karlekar, *Savage Humans and Stray Dogs: A Study in Aggression* (Delhi: Sage Publications, 2008).

titled as *Our Best Friend: Representations of Disability in Canine-Human Relationships in South Asian Literature* attempts to throw into the relief the critical role, the disability or different-ability plays in the fundamental connections between dogs and humans when one of them, or both of them share this very unique space, in a dominant, mainstream, ableist culture. In this chapter, I intended to argue that for our canine individuals, being differently-abled entails certain sensitive understanding and considerations of other forms of lives, a certain level of finer capacities that recognises the equal, comparable connections going beyond the species-specific separations. This chapter intends to argue how crucially it gets even more difficult to go beyond the stereotypical depictions of acute sentimentalism, when it comes to the voices of these differently-abled individuals, both humans and canines. For a country like India, where regular accidents to the stray animals are routinely normalised, these texts construct a narrative of difference through their acute, or poignant representations of differently-abled animals, specifically canine bodies. In that way, these texts can be considered as the alternative side of the interspecies history, which is systemically rooted in silence and oppression of the animal selves. The first subsection of this chapter deals with the cultural representations of sight and blindness, where the dogs play a critical role from the vantage point of affective connection. The second subsection is centered entirely on a short story by Shailajananda Mukhopadhyay, a story named *Kala* which literally translates into English as *The Deaf*, that traces the notions of autonomy or the lack of it, in terms of differently-abled dogs in an under-informed, ableist, speciesist household. The third subsection focuses on the special ability and the depth of experiences that the differently-abled individuals hold from their specific vantage point. The two literary texts, Lila Majumdar's *Manushder Galpa* and *Dugga*, a graphic narrative by Rajiv Eipe, both negotiate these notions of companionships in interspecies relationships from the angle of differently-abled identities.

The second chapter, titled as *Death and His Brothers: Canine- Human Coexistence and Struggling Times in South Asian Literature* is a negotiation between the symbolic representations of dogs in populist imaginations and existential precarity for being at the receiving ends of not only human aggression but also the sufferings of individuals in every political upheaval. This chapter intends to map out a trajectory of deprivation that is perpetrated on the animal, specifically canine individuals in our culture, in this context. These literary texts, especially the three texts, selected in this chapter, expose the degree of denial and silencing of nonhuman existence with their sufferings in a systemic, step wise manner. On one hand, the mainstream, dominant culture paints a stereotypical portrayal of dogs as vicious, reducing them to the mere embodiment of aggression and ravenous hunger. On the other hand, by creating this narrative, it forestalls the dialogue which should have taken place in terms of the collateral damage on animal lives, by human interventions. It urges the audience to look at every political upheaval and historical moments of change, entirely from an anthropocentric perspective, while suppressing the cost of nonhuman lives and the degree of ostracisation they have to go through. The first subsection, Sushil Jana's story, named as *Kukur* or *The Dogs* deals with this aspect of the animal-human relationships in the backdrop of the Famine of the 1950s. The second subsection of this chapter takes place around another story, which is set against the background of The Liberation War of Bangladesh of 1971. Abu Kayser's *Lutfer Rahamaner Kukur* or *Lutfer Rahaman's Dog* throws into the relief the abysmal loneliness of one dog, either abandoned or obstinate to the point of his blind loyalty to his home ground. This story also aligns itself with a larger picture here and contextualises the specific positioning of dogs as politically evocative symbols in South Asian culture. The intersectionality between politics and dogs brings references to the immediacy of politicising animal subjects. I have initiated a study of this politicisation of dogs in our culture through a comparative reading of very few literary texts which also navigate

through this notion. Saadat Hasan Manto's *The Dog of Tithwal* and Nabarun Bhattacharya's *Lubdhak* are insights into these representations of dogs as agents of political change along with the interconnected implications on our notions of control, power dynamics and maintenance of the status quo. The third subsection centres around the notions of John Berger's 'animal gaze' and its poignant repercussions through the articulations of death and canine subjects in literature in the light of Gangadhar Gadgil's poignant short story, *The Dog that Ran in Circles*.²⁷

This representation of dogs as political animals also brings us to the next chapter, where I wanted to explore the links between this identity as agents of superimposed politicisation of the anti-establishment and the legality of their subjecthood from the point of stray identity. The third chapter titled as *Strangers, Underdogs and Magical Experiences with Our Canine Companions in South Asian Literature*, looks at specific points of South Asian literature, which illuminate our notions of nomadic identities essentially centering around the moveable physical space of canine individuals. How does South Asian literature interrogate and negotiate these points of reference in context to the dynamics of human-canid interspecies connections? What types of traces or marks do these specific works leave behind for the enquirers of animal-human contact in the marginal spaces of literature? How does this precarity of stray-hood, if I am allowed to use this word, takes us towards the 'contact zones' between not only the domesticated dogs and humans but also another persecuted species, feral, wild dogs, inhabiting the fringes of human and wilderness? This chapter also documents and unearths the transformative elements of canine-human interrelationships that take place randomly. The dimension of instinctive, mutual understanding between individuals of two separate

²⁷ John Berger, *About Looking* (New York: Vintage International, 1991); Gangadhar Gadgil, "The Dog That Ran in Circles," in *The Penguin Book of Modern Indian Short Stories*, ed. Stephen Alter and Wimal Dissanayake (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1989).

species underscores the existential link we share with our companion beings. In Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay's *Deogharer Smriti* or *The Memories of Deoghar*, we find how the randomness of these interspecies relationships with its authentic sincerity throws into relief that transformative capacity, that this type of interspecies relationships holds for us. Subodh Ghosh's *Sei Odbhut Obhrokhoni* or *That Strange Mine of Mica* is a multilayered narrative that necessitates the shared ground of speciesist oppression and systemic violence in connection with other several species in the threshold of human habitats and the wilderness. It also touches on another crucial area of this interspecies relationships- the shared vulnerabilities of both canine and human subjects under the growing human hostilities, a reality that almost every animal care-giver must have to undergo through in their struggles of compassionate living in accordance with the other forms of lives in contemporary times. This also registers the countless unspoken narratives of individuals who decided to stay with their animal companions in the face of the societal, cultural and administrative pressures and thus paved ways for the actualised forms of activism in the most nuanced and pronounced form. In many ways, this chapter can also be termed as a study of canid-human connections seen from the threshold, as this chapter navigates amidst multiple in-betweenness. From the strangers to the closest companionship, from the human habitats to the wilderness, from the tangible and practical world to that of the dreamy, unreality, this chapter encompasses the expansive range of representations of dogs in South Asian literature. The third subsection focuses entirely on Lila Majumdar's *Haldey Pakhir Palak* or as translated by Kamala Chatterjee, *The Yellow Bird*.

The fourth chapter of this thesis, *A Dog's Day: The Canine Life Writing in Literatures of South Asia* positions dogs as the independent autonomous individuals in literature which also grants them a focality of reference, that underscores the rising

awareness on interspecies cohabitation in our contemporary times. All the three texts selected for this chapter, Bhagirath Mishra's *Amanushnama*, Kunzang Choden's *Dawa*, and one graphic narrative by Shohei Emura, named *Oye! Chhotu*, were published in the recent two decades of the new millennium. I have categorised them under the term canine life writing- a term that has been rarely incorporated in the South Asian literary spheres. This chapter argues how the introduction of *the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960* and an encompassing rise in the awareness of animal rights in general have reshaped public mindset towards street dogs in South Asian urban literature. I intended to argue in this chapter that these literary texts not only reflect this rising pro-canine sentiment in the popular mindset but also perform another critical initiation, the reverse gaze from the animal perspectives. All these three texts manoeuvre their canine characters as extensively from the animal consciousness while resisting the temptations of anthropomorphising them to the best of their capabilities. By tracing the genealogy of the animal biographies and autobiographies, I endeavoured to establish the point that these texts essentially operate on this dimension of representing the animal consciousness and by constructing an alternative narrative of animal presence in South Asian literature.

The capacities of this unique understanding between dogs and humans as explored as well as represented in these various literary works of South Asia within the period of 1930s to 2020s, create an alternative way of looking at human history from the angles of animal historiography and its interwoven presence with human civilisation. The history of spatial migration, the convergence of cultures, have been smoothly possible only through the silenced yet consistent contributions of innumerable, unnamed animal workers throughout the different periods of human history. Seen from that angle, human history is also a history of multispecies existence. The companionship of dogs with humans, specifically in the context of underprivileged people who share their nomadic,

or rootless existence with equally vulnerable stray animal populations of the urban landscape, throws into relief the other side of the progressive urbanisation.

The Review of Literature

A considerable corpus of research on the presence of animals in the socio-cultural matrix has already been conducted and covered by the historians and theorists in the west. A serious concern of this inquiry into the traces of animal presence in mainstream culture resurfaced through theoretical works like Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation* or Tom Regan's *Empty Cages* during the 1970s. The broad spectrum of this specific stance illuminates the way animals have been reflected, represented and analysed in the range of anthropocentric philosophy. From the 17th Century onwards, the western metaphysics has decided a secondary position to the nonhuman beings, changing and reshaping its specific stance depending on the contemporary socio-economic and other scientific advancements of the times. A historiography of this animal question in the west would trace its way back to the Cartesian logic that created not only a divide between the mind and the body but also between the humans and the nonhuman beings.²⁸ The theorists and the animal historians constructed a trajectory of the changing landscape in human-animal relationships from the Early Modern period onwards. Lucinda Cole's analysis of animal-human and creaturely lives, roots itself in the complex matrix of economic, social and political situations during the Early Modern Period.²⁹ Published in 2016, *Cole's Imperfect Creatures* draws on a variety of literary and historical sources to analyse how creatures like rats, mice, and insects were portrayed and understood. She considers how these "imperfect" creatures influenced thinking about ecology, disease, and human-animal

²⁸ Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England 1500-1800* (New York: Penguin Books, 1983).

²⁹ Lucinda Cole, "Libertine Biopolitics: Dogs, Bitches, Parasites in Shadwell, Rochester and Gay," in *Imperfect Creatures Vermin, Literature, and the Sciences of Life, 1600-1740* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016), 111-142.

relationships during this period. It is the poignant acknowledgement and utterance of animal's presence through their sentient identity in the oft-quoted remark of Jeremy Bentham, that the rise of animal rights as a considerable movement has emerged:

Is it the faculty of reason or the possession of language? But a full-grown horse or dog is incomparably more rational and conversable than an infant of a day, or a week, or even a month old. Even if that were not so, what difference would that make? The question is not, *Can they reason?* or *Can they talk?* but, *Can they suffer?*³⁰

According to Monica Flegel it is this notion of compassion for the sentient beings that created the foray of animal rights in England.³¹ The passing of *the Martin's Act* for the cattle and later on for all the domesticated animals in 1822 and 1835 respectively, the establishment of *The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals* in 1824 and later on its renaming as *the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty*, the rise of anti-vivisectionist movement from the 1870s onwards, all of these together construes a historiography of the animal-human intersectionality in the cultural field. Flegel's research contributes to our understanding of how pets became increasingly central concepts of home and family during the 19th and early 20th centuries. Flegel investigates the gendered aspects of pet ownership, particularly how women's relationships with pets were portrayed in literature and understood in society.³²

James Serpell's *In the Company of Animals* is a significant work in the field of anthrozoology, which studies human-animal interactions. Published in 1986, this book

³⁰ Jeremy Bentham, "The Boundary Around Penal Jurisprudence," in *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (London: Batoche Books, Kitchener, 2000).

³¹ Monica Flegel, *Conceptualising Cruelty to Children in Nineteenth-Century England: Literature, Representation, and the NSPCC* (Burlington, USA: Ashgate, 2016).

³² Monica Flegel, *Pets and Domesticity in Victorian Literature and Culture* (New York and London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis, 2015).

has been influential in shaping our understanding of the complex relationships between humans and animals, particularly pets.³³ Ritvo underscores the rise in the interests of pet keeping and touches on the topics of keeping dogs, based on multiple factors, from the sentimental reasons to their symbolic import as class symbols. Ritvo's analysis also underscores the overlapping areas of human-animal coexistence in the Nineteenth Century society, where these different aspects merge with each other.³⁴ According to her, as soon as animals were reduced commodities to be taken and accounted as merely moveable properties, instead of subjective, deciding individuals who were meted out legal punishments for their misbehaviours, they were also pushed towards the margins very paradoxically. Ritvo points out that this shift in the status of animals who coexisted with humans in the human habitats, has been influenced by the shift in the dietary habits of humans, and in this way, the growing changes in the food industry towards the end of the eighteenth century. She also pointed out how rabies preoccupied one of the central positions in human-animal cohabitation in so many levels, from the perspectives of medical bureaucracy to that of legal operatives, and definitely in the literal as well as metaphorical levels of mass psyche. *The Mad Dogs and The Englishmen: Rabies in Britain, 1830-2000* by Neil Pemberton and Michael Worboys explores the history of rabies in Britain and its cultural, medical, and social implications over a span of nearly two centuries. *The Mad Dog and the Englishmen* took forth this issue even further; in this book Pemberton and Worboys attempted to draw an outline of how rabies as a disease and historical marker draw forth the changing attitudes towards dogs in general during the 19th Century.³⁵ Pemberton and Worboys delve into how rabies was perceived

³³ James Serpell, *In the Company of Animals: A Study of Human-Animal Relationships* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986).

³⁴ Harriet Ritvo, *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2005).

³⁵ Neil Pemberton and Michael Worboys, *Mad Dogs and Englishmen: Rabies in Britain, 1830-2000 Rabies in Britain* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

and handled in Britain, a country that prided itself on being rabies-free for most of the 20th century. They argued that rabies became a symbol of national anxieties, particularly about invasion and contamination. The disease was often portrayed as something foreign, which contributed to a broader discourse of xenophobia and imperialism, associating rabies with foreign lands and "otherness." Pemberton and Worboys trace the scientific understanding and treatment of rabies, from early fears of the disease to advances in medical responses, including the introduction of Pasteur's vaccine in the 19th century. Rabies also had a significant place in British literature, popular culture, and public imagination. This seminal work looks at how rabid dogs were depicted as a threat in novels, films, and other media, symbolizing chaos and moral decay.

Carrie Rohman's analysis establishes the impacts of Darwinism in the Nineteenth century culture and in effect maps out a trajectory of its repercussions and triggers our anxieties and aggression regarding the nonhuman animals in modernist literature of the west. Published in 2009, *Stalking the Subject* examines the representation of animals in modernist texts and how these representations challenge traditional notions of human subjectivity. Rohman draws on posthumanist theory and critical animal studies to analyse modernist texts. Rohman argues that the modernist literature often destabilizes the human-animal binary, questioning the assumed superiority of human consciousness. A central argument of the book is that modernist texts often use animal figures to interrogate and reconfigure notions of human subjectivity.³⁶ Rohman explores how these texts challenge anthropocentric views of consciousness and agency.

Donna Haraway's *The Companion Species Manifesto* pushes for a rethinking of human-animal relationships, advocating for an approach that recognizes the shared histories, mutual influences, and ethical responsibilities that come with living alongside

³⁶ Carrie Rohman, *Stalking the Subject: Modernism and the Animal* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

other species. Haraway rejects traditional views that place humans as superior to animals or nature. Instead, she emphasizes the interdependent relationships between humans and animals, particularly dogs. These relationships are co-constitutive, meaning that humans and animals have shaped each other over time through mutual interaction.

Our inherent idea of coexistence is rooted in the multispecies way of life- not the technocentric, privileged, urban landscapes devoid of nonhuman animal presence. In this respect Ananya Roy's notion of 'smart' cities and the subaltern urban animals is specifically relevant.³⁷ I believe my research will serve as an advocate for raising ethical standards by pointing out the issue of collective cruelty and consequential trauma on these subjects and by influencing our attitudes in the broader context of empowering the voice of minority dissent. It will offer novel insights in the field of cultural studies—a unique working-class perspective from India. By applying the multidisciplinary methodology, I will situate this research at the cross section of social narratives, urban ecology, religion, psychology and history of animal management in India. It will help us to understand and perhaps to frame better arguments of how to inculcate the development of moral and civic values in participatory and developing democracy like ours.

³⁷ Ananya Roy, "Slumdog Cities: Rethinking Subaltern Urbanism," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 35, no. 2 (February, 2011): 223–38, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2427.2011.01051.x>.

I. Our Best Friend: Representation of Disability in Canine- Human Relationships in South Asian Literature

The presence of dogs in India as a semi-domesticated animal in human habitats incorporates a range of societal and cultural factors which contribute critically to the animal-human bonding when seen in a larger scale. In this chapter we will look into this specific dog-human relationships as explored in the modern literature from the South Asia from the perspectives of isolated human individuals. This chapter attempts to locate why the isolation born out of various societal pressures plays a critical part in the formation of canine-human relationships, as depicted in modern South Asian Literature. This isolation is rooted in the ableist psychology of the populace or class-conscious narrative, or from a gendered angle, or even from a class-conscious narrative expressed through breed fascination, and it explores the instinctive connection we form with our companion creatures. I would like to argue that these texts, although centre round the human-canine relationships in the basic level, also incorporate a multispecies narrative with the inclusion of other animals and compel us to look beyond the surface of apparent sentimentality

What is the significance of the word 'marginalised' in this context? How far can we correlate this notion of 'marginalised' from a theoretically informed outlook which can encapsulate the intersections of ableism, gender, class consciousness? Why is this intersection between ostracised humans and our canine companion is so important in cultural and literary studies? The literary and physical '*space*' formed out of this empathetic outlook towards our companion animals underlines the broad philosophical understanding from a multispecies narration, which not only acknowledges the

importance and contribution of various life forms in human civilisations, but also drives home the message of different levels of awareness, intent on constructing an 'eco-able' approach towards the world. This chapter functions as a platform for different dynamics, which evolved and shaped our species-specific relationship with dogs as an agent of anthropocentric societal beings.³⁸ This chapter offers an articulation of marginalised identity that has existed beyond the simplistic dynamics of utilities, and reaffirms the necessity of emotive connections formed amongst individuals, who felt isolated from the position of power. In this way, these fictional accounts are also testaments of individuality creating a safe space for interspecies connections. Based on the texts selected in this chapter, I intend to argue that these canine-narratives construe an expression of socio-cultural marginalisation from three different angles- ableism, gendered reading into canine-human coexistence, and discrimination rooted in the class-conscious dynamics. This chapter attempts to form a line of narrative in 'dog-stories' which recount the accounts of isolation and ostracisation in mainstream anthropocentric society dominated by ableist, class-conscious, normative patriarchal prejudices and cultural ethos which shape our ideas of selves and also our perceptions towards other species. The different types of oppression functioning on ableist, patriarchal, and class-conscious prejudices coalesce into a constructed form of oppression on so many levels, aimed at not only towards the animals but also the humans related or associated with the animals as such.

The first section of this chapter deals with human condition that overlaps with the animals who also share the living space in the fringes of the society, namely the condition

³⁸ Anthony J. Nocella II, Amber E. George, and John Lupinacci, "Introduction: Defending and Sharing Space and Place for Eco-Ability Voices for Total Liberation," in *Animals, Disability, and the End of Capitalism: Voices from the Eco-Ability Movement*, ed. Anthony J. Nocella II, Amber E. George, and John Lupinacci (New York: Peter Lang, 2019),1.

of disability and how the subjectivity of disabled individuals are also mutually reciprocative and interdependent within the ambit of a multispecies relationship. The first subsection of this chapter focusses on the nuanced articulation of disabled characters, both canines and humans, in South Asian Literature from the 1920s till our contemporary times. The dynamics of animal-human interactions address crucial questions to the notions of 'animality' and 'humanity' for the intersection of disability studies. This section tries to explore this connection between ableism and animal studies from a perspective of theoretical discourse in two ways. In the first part of this subsection, there are stories which deal with both human and animal disability in Indian literature from an equal, parallel platform. This section starts with a poem by Rabindra Nath Tagore, *Anjana Nodi Teere* or *By the River Anjana* and then proceeds to the Assamese short story, named *Lakhuti* or *The Guiding Staff* by Atulananda Goswami. The second part of this subsection centres around animal characters who are disabled, and asks whether their literary representations hint at any ethical and emotional responses that the stories are supposed to elicit. This latter section starts with *Kala* or *The Deaf* by Shailaja Nanda Mukhopadhyay, published in *Mouchak Boishakh*, 1342 Bengali *Saal* or year, a story that recounts the degree of increased indifference and neglect meted out to a dog, who was losing his auditory capacity gradually. In this section, I have selected this story because of its portrayal of disabled dogs from literature, and through them I intend to explore why the dominant societal trend is decisive in the treatment and attitudes towards animal disability. The third subsection explores the alternative aspects of this disability of both humans and canines from an empathetic yet empowered narratives. This third subsection of his chapter focusses on Lila Majumdar's *Manushder Galpa* or *The Stories of All Beings* and Rajiv Eipe's graphic narrative *Dugga*.

Disability, Ability and Special Ability in the "Canine Narratives" of South Asian Literature

An informed study in the recent studies on disability will centre the theoretical nuances of disabled characters from a position of marginalisation to a position of autonomy and agency. In this section, I will contextualise these texts within the theoretical parameters of disability studies and *critical animal studies*, and will argue why a comprehensive study of these characters necessitates an intersectional approach from multiple discourses. From an etymological point of view, disability studies as a theoretical discourse locates the representation of disabled characters in literature by constructing an acknowledged point of reference which creates a narrative of these marginalised voices within the ableist mainstream societal constructs. In the introduction of the *Reclaiming the Disabled Subject: Representing Disability*, Prasad, Sati, and Bhattacharjee trace back the origin of disability studies in the discourses related to medical science as a constructed viewed, "essentially as a physical, sensory, cognitive or psychiatric deficit that incapacitates an individual from performing one or more of life's normative daily functions."³⁹ They further pointed out that there is a distinct difference between disability within this discourse of medical sciences, and the theoretical approach proposed by Dan Goodley as an alternative perspective, which foregrounds the relevance of disability studies rooted in socio-culturally constructed identity of individuals, who are always positioned at the receptive end of this construction, undermining their own agency and autonomy. Prasad et al further maintains the active initiation inaugurated by Goodley's approach, which makes an interesting study of disability "as a societal and political phenomenon".⁴⁰ In the field of literary and cultural studies, disability as a

³⁹ G J V Prasad, Someshwar Sati, and Ritwick Bhattacharjee, "Introduction," in *Reclaiming the Disabled Subjects: Representing Disability in Short Fiction*, Vol. 1, (Bloomsbury, 2022), 6.

⁴⁰ G J V Prasad, Someshwar Sati, and Ritwick Bhattacharjee, "Introduction," in *Reclaiming the Disabled Subject: Representing Disability in Short Fiction*, ed. Someshwar Sati, G J V Prasad, and Ritwick Bhattacharjee (New Delhi:

significant field emerges from 1990s onwards, as noted by Prasad et al., with the publication of Lennard Davis's seminal text, *Enforcing Normalcy*, and Rosemary Garland- Thompson's *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature*, although it is maintained that both these works study the culture of representing disability on the basis of a comparative approach with *able bodies* as the parameter to judge with. They further argued that Garland-Thomson with her notion of *normate* and Davis's reading of the 'construction of normalcy' are rooted in the "notions of cultural rules" and 'deviation from the norm' with a foregrounding of 'an implicit interrogation of power'.⁴¹ While analysing the appropriation of disabled-child figures, Clare Barker notes that Davis's conceptualisation of disabled bodies is integrally linked with 'a chronotope, a time-sequenced narrative,' that forms around the "individual identity, narrativization, and sentimentality."⁴² As Ashutosh Singh has critically pointed out in his *Representations of Disabilities in Indian English Fiction: A Viewpoint*, that there are four factors or aspects to these studies in disability, and all these aspects correspond to a comparative reading of bodies based on the "distribution of resources, status, and power within a *biased* social and architectural environment."⁴³

In this chapter, I intend to locate how the relationships canine-human companionship gets more complex when we are coming across the representations of disabled characters, both canine and human. I intend to argue here that the presence of these differently abled bodies, initiates a historical narrativization of interspecies communication and coexistence, which is crucial in constructing a multispecies evolution

Bloomsbury India, 2022), 6; Dan Goodley, "The Psychology of Disability," in *Routledge Handbook of Disability Studies*, edited by Nick Watson, Alan Roulstone and Carol Thomas, (New York and London: Routledge, 2012), 310-323.

⁴¹ Prasad et al, 11.

⁴² Clare Barker, "Introduction," in *Postcolonial Fiction and Disability: Exceptional Children, Metaphor and Materiality*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 12.

⁴³ Ashutosh Singh, "Representations of Disabilities in Indian English Fiction: A Viewpoint", in *International Journal of English Language, Literature and Humanities*, Vol II, Issue X, February 2015, 609.

of South Asian Literature. This section contributes to the critical discourse on animal studies and their intersectionality with disability studies. While with a rudimentary reading of these texts can seem to stand for the fundamental experiences for being the marginalised, a more detailed reading into the narratives, will illuminate the problematics even within the matrix of this marginalisation. In a broader perspective, it all culminates into a narrative of disenfranchised individuals within a mainstream, ableist worldview; at the same time, it also renders a deeper reading into the poetics of representation. It will reveal the theoretical complexities of interdisciplinary discourses, which brings into the discussion the politics of agency or autonomy within its focal point. Disability, specifically from the angle of human beings, is a highly contentious zone, which problematises the question of hierarchy, power dynamics and the voices of the truly disenfranchised. Disability in the intersection of the human characters and animal characters brings out the nuanced dynamics which sheds light on the representation of the marginalised in such a special way.

Disability and its representation from the angle of the critical animal studies is a highly contentious argument, as animal activists and theorists have themselves maintained throughout the last few decades. Theorists working in the discourses on disability studies and critical animal studies have maintained that the prime areas where these two discourses overlap, construct, and reorient a 'narrative of difference', are the hierarchical dynamics of society structured around power, a set structure of normalcy, and a mode of autonomy. Not only that both the disabled humans and animals are excluded from the categories of validated, cognizant, individuals but the people who deliberately associate themselves with animals, they are also pushed out from this centre of mainstream societal practice. Jenkins, Montford, and Taylor pointed out that in the moral philosophy, human lives are regarded as "ontologically distinct, and morally

valuable."⁴⁴ They further maintain that people who assertively associate themselves with animals related cause and their rights, such as 'pathologized animal activist or animal lover, the disabled more-than-human animal, and the animalized disabled human', all of them compulsorily have to undergo through this societal stigma and ostracisation.⁴⁵

The section of the chapter is divided into two parts- the first section cites the disabled characters, both canines and humans, in various degrees in literature from the angle of the dispossessed, while the second part will emphasise on the subversion of this hierarchical dynamics constructed through the lenses of the ableist, mainstream cultural ethos of the time. I intend to showcase the works which can articulate these transformations towards the differently abled characters in a contrasting light more accurately.

In the literature of South Asia, mendicant or vagrant characters are more or less always accompanied by one or more animals on their sides. There is something heartwarming yet poignantly realistic that surfaces through these depictions of a homeless human with a homeless dog, something that works at a more intimate and instinctive level. Their rootedness in terms of lack of health, a fixed habitat, and the relatively compromised power dynamics entail them a special position in comparison to the popular notions of ability, and posit these characters in the outskirts of mainstream, which acknowledges, flows around, and celebrates strength and power. The narrative of power gets dismantled gradually, when the disability related discourses take a different turn. My chapter in this way aims to construct a transformative outlook that canine narratives perform in the face of the ableism and mainstream anthropocentric outlook.

⁴⁴ Stephanie Jenkins, Kelly Struthers Montford, and Chloe Taylor, "Introduction," in *Disability and Animality: Crip Perspectives in Critical Animal Studies*, edited by Stephanie Jenkins, Kelly Struthers Montford, and Chloe Taylor, (London and New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis, 2020), 1.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

Guiding Us in the Darkness: Sight, Canines and Companionship in South Asian Literature

Dogs frequent in the works of Rabindranath Tagore in multiple ways; the cues and hints, the probable associations of human characters with their canine companions or vice-versa function as indicative of the mood, underlined messages, or the social commentaries on the mainstream. Ketaki Sarbadhikary, in her *Rabindra Manase Prani Jagat*, notes that in his entire compendium of work, dogs have come or been represented 140 times.⁴⁶ The trope of a physically disabled human accompanied by an equally struggling dog by her or his side is one of the potent images which evoke the pain and struggles of a rootless existence. The lack of a stable place of their own, the precarity of their physical and societal stability underscore the deeper insecurities and vulnerabilities faced by the differently abled individuals on a regular basis.

In a world dominated and validated by ableism, both the disabled humans and animals find a mutually exclusive yet interdependent understanding that transcends the barriers of speciesism.⁴⁷ Many of Rabindranath Tagore's works underscore this interdependence of interspecies understanding on the level of mutually gratifying, emotive interactions that takes place amongst multispecies dynamics.⁴⁸ In the poem named *Agamani*, published in the collection of poems, named *Chitra*, presents such a duo. As the name of the poem goes, it celebrates the advent of the fall along with *Durgapuja* in one of the villages of Bengal. The poem contextualises the theme of marginalisation through its introductory descriptive lines, which underscore the narrative both spatially and socially. In a village named Chandana, situated on the banks of a river

⁴⁶ Ketaki Sarbadhikary, "Poshu," in *Rabindra Manase Prani Jagat*, (Kolkata: Pustak Bipani, 2021), 37.

⁴⁷ Swatilekha Maity, "Women, Nonhuman Animals, and the Notion of Marginalization in Bengali Literature," in *Critical Animal Studies and Social Justice: Critical Theory, Dismantling Speciesism, and Total Liberation*, ed. Anthony J. Nocella II and Amber E. George (Lanham: Lexington, 2021), 155–72.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

called Anjana, there is an ancient abandoned, dilapidated temple- just one corner of this ruined place, lives a blind beggar named Kunjabihari, whose only profession is to chant *Harisankirtan* (chanting the name of God, Hari) twice daily in and around that village. Kunjabihari does not have other human companion- only person he calls and considers his family is a dog, who had also lost his tail in some accident. With just verbally potent words, this person's presence looms and even decides the narrative of the poem. The itinerant routine from this ruined temple by the river banks into the heart of the village of both this dog and his human, with their accompanied sound of *ektara*, a special musical instrument used by *bauls*, and the silent companionship of this steadfastly loyal dog by Kunjabihari's side etches out an articulation of interspecies camaraderie of interdependence and understanding amidst the noisy, ableist, and human centred space and place of the village. The narration follows Kunjabihari with his dog, from morning to night, in all seasons of the year, everywhere they visit- the courtyard of Satkari Bhanja is resounded with Kunja's voice everyday morning. The usual alms given by the landlord Sanjay Sen, are mentioned only its connection as a performed empathy, without which the power and importance will be secondary to all these characters. The central figure of this poem is Kunjabihari, whose voice, as described in the poem as "the songs from the blind singer", inaugurates the season of celebration and festivity. The bullocks pulling forward the carts, and other sounds of sailors, "*paschimi malla'*, business people, of ships and boats, weekly markets, everything gets concocted into a medley of cacophony, except the songs in the voice of Kunjabihari, and his tunings of *ektara*. Although in the apparent outset, this can be regarded as one of the depictions of marginalised characters in literature, yet from the narrative structure, it emerges that these characters, Kunjabihari with his dog are the central figures of the text. With Kunjabihari, the only other central character that emerges from the narrative, is his loyal dog without the tail. Kunjabihari with his loyal companion, are integrated into the matrix of the village and its socio-

cultural ambience as the representative individuals who elicit sympathy and special consideration. Seen from this angle, they were loved and remembered to a large extent because they lacked considerable agency in the social hierarchy which could have made them formidable or acknowledgeable in the serious sense. The sympathy elicited towards them did not cancel out their marginalised status in social spheres.

Atulananda Goswami's *Lakhuti* is another take on this mutual interdependency between a blind human and their companion dog at an existential level. 'Lakhuti' in Assamese means guiding staff or blind man's stick. The story recounts one day from the life of one visually impaired mendicant named Mithai and his canine companion. The story takes place in one autumn evening when the dog was run over by a speeding taxi without knowledge of Mithai, who keeps on waiting for him by the road. This is a micro story comprising only two pages, yet the brevity delivers the poignancy of the irreplaceable significance of interspecies coexistence on multiple levels. The story is divided into two segments. The first part deals with a mundane autumnal evening and a dog, whose apparent ownerless state determined his identity as one of the stray dogs. While crossing the road, the dog was run over by a speeding cab, and within a few moments he passed away, while a few individuals attempted to help him. The second part deals with his human companion, a blind beggar named Mithai, who was waiting for his dog to return to him and the English translation done by me, as follows:

Today, he hasn't come to take Mithai home yet. Mithai doesn't see with eyes per se, but he *perceives*. He can sense that the lights are being turned on one by one. Usually, he does not get to wait a long time at this old bus stand. But today, there isn't any other option. He hasn't felt the tug at his cloth as of now. Usually, his dog always comes before the shops turn on their lights and pulls him by his cloth towards home. Today, he hasn't come yet.

The dog was really the closest to Mithai, his sole companion, his guide. Every day at dawn and at dusk, he used to guide Mithai back home. Today he isn't there anymore. (Goswami, 36)⁴⁹

The socially conceived identity of the dog based on his perceived anonymity and ownerlessness is overlapped and redefined by his enormous significance in the life of Mithai, his human companion. In an urban landscape, which considers the legitimacy of the privileged, able-bodied human individual, the rootless existence of Mithai along with his non-pedigreed dog charts out an alternate narrative of interspecies dependency. The blind singer Kunjabihari with his tailless dog of Rabindranath Tagore's *Agamani*, also underscores these cultural oeuvres where these individuals, both humans and animals are no longer marginalised, rather they are internalised and integrated into the fabrics of socio-cultural milieu of the time. This story positions this nameless yet immensely important canine at the centre of the narrative in multiple ways. The story starts and ends with the dog. The name of the story also, stands for this canine companion; the guiding staff, to this blind beggar is his dog.

Repetitively, we come across these references to dogs in his writings, where they are associated with ideas of innocence, or conscientious, yet the simpler, naïve, or the morally courageous outcasts. Tagore, in many of his works, positioned dogs in the category of individuals who belong to the lower strata of the society, in terms of power, wealth, or agency. Tagore's pro-animal stance becomes vivid in his reference to dogs in many of his works- they become the extension of ideas on self-respect, compassion and overlooked yet magnanimous dignity in multiple references.

⁴⁹ Atulananda Goswami, "Lakhuti," in *Swargarohanor Sangee: A Collection of Assamese Short Story*, ed. Ashim Chutia (Lakhimpur, Assam: Neerikshan, 2012), 35–36.

It is significant to mention here that none of the dogs in these two narratives, belongs to the category of service-dogs. Their social positions are solely associated with their human companions, who are otherwise deeply isolated individuals. Their contributions to their human companions' lives function as the pivotal part in the perceptions of canine-human interrelationships in popular culture, and in this way, construct a narrative of shared space and existence with humans in more affective, empathic ground. The shared vulnerability in this interspecies relationship gets translated into a poetic vulnerability. I would like to argue that in a more poignant level, both Atulananda Goswami's short story and Rabindranath Tagore's poem operate on the equal, comparable to Lori Gruen's entangled empathy:

Entangled empathy involves a process of sharing experiences and perspectives. While being with or even thinking about non-sentient nature may evoke a variety of deep and meaningful experiences in sentient beings, they aren't experiences that are shared with the non-experiencing part of the world. (Gruen)⁵⁰

In discussing about the affective responses from a baby chimpanzee named Emma, Gruen reveals the degree of experiencing from the other side. Entangled empathy, as described by Lori Gruen, is a multifaceted process of caring perception that blends emotion and cognition. It entails refining one's perception to accurately attend to the well-being of others, recognizing our relationships with them, and understanding the responsibilities these relationships entail. This process extends beyond mere emotional resonance or feeling-along-with, encompassing a deeper understanding of another's interiority and circumstances. The unique understanding and mutual reciprocation of affective bonding between two individuals of different species underscores the

⁵⁰ Lori Gruen, "Chapter 3: Entanglements," in *Entangled Empathy: An Alternate Ethic for Our Relationships with Animals* (New York: Lantern Books, 2015), EBook.

encompassing capacity of emotive reciprocations across the species barrier. These two texts here also articulate this depth of instinctive, interspecies bonding between dogs and humans in an ableist cultural trend.

Disabled Body of the Animal and the Normalisation of Cruelty

Neil Carr begins with an important question his analysis on 'disabled animals' and their position in the culture of leisure:

The first question we must answer is 'do disabled animals exist?' The simple answer is 'yes'. Physically disabled domesticated animals include cats and dogs who are missing at least one of their limbs, or whose tails are wholly or partially missing. Blind and/or deaf cats and dogs are also clearly examples of disabled animals. (Carr, 5)⁵¹

In our lives also, we come across this type of disabled animals in our surroundings. Carr points out that the medical and societal constructions of disabilities and features are defined by humans for humans. He argues that both 'non-able bodied' animals and humans are also defined by humans.⁵² in this subsection of this chapter, the emphasis is on the representation of these disabled animals in South Asian literature. The ableist cultural emerges through the lack of considerable data on the representation of disabled animals in literature. It is easier to find differently abled humans accompanied by dogs, irrespective of their own physical, or psychological conditions. But when we see this canine-human relationships from the other way, what stands out is our degree of response to partially impaired or differently abled dogs within our community or social space. What kind of interspecies dynamics take place between a differently abled dog in an

⁵¹ Neil Carr, "Disabled Animals and Leisure: Casting Light on Those Left behind in the Shadows," *Leisure Studies* 41, no. 1 (July 2021): 5, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02614367.2021.1942523>.

⁵² Ibid. 4.

ableist social space of humans and within the purview of another differently abled humans, respectively? The oppressive ableism that pervades interspecies relationship with a disabled animal individual is reflected through a sheer level of indifference or irritation directed at those non-able-bodied persons around us, when people will just push these animals out of the zone of visibility in public or community spaces. In this section we will explore the former interspecies relationship, while the next section will look into certain representative texts on where disability is seen through the lenses of a special ability that breaks the normative, ableist narrative of power hierarchy.

From this mutually interdependent relationship when we move towards story by Shailajananda Mukhopadhyay's *Kala* or *The Deaf*, we find us dealing with an animal character whose presence and depiction in the story addresses the notions on disability towards companion animals in a crueller and value-centered way. *Kala* or *The Deaf*, is a study in the ableist, cruelty perpetrated attitude exercised on the level of speciesism. Shailajananda Mukhopadhyay was one of the Bengali writers of 1930s and 40s whose stories regularly came out in various Bengali magazines of the time. His works are important in creating a trajectory of animal centered empathetic stories in Bengali literature. At a time when the animal rights were in its nascent state in India in popular culture, these works paved a significant ground for empathy towards animals. His works were published regularly in various Bengali magazines like *Mouchak*, *Rongmashal*, *Bichitra*. His works were mainly aimed for children. His stories on feral cats, like *Porarmukhi*, and *Pushi* were heart wrenching in their vivid depiction on the rootlessness of stray existence in urban landscape and the baseless prejudices allowed and perpetrated against stray animals in the contemporary popular psyche. The specific story I selected here centres around a deaf dog, whose deafness allows him to be on the receiving end of systematic indifference and tortures over a period of time in his adoptee's household. This

story was published in a Bengali children's magazine named *Mouchak*, in April-May issue of 1935 (*Boishakh*, Bengali year 1342).

The dog was bought by Anil, whose decision of 'buying' this puppy seemed to be motivated by his breed fascination. The writer did not specify the particular breed, but it is implied that he is not one of our own indigenous, street dogs. Small in stature, with long furs, physiological characteristics implied that he might have belonged to one of the foreign breeds. His exotic appearance, and distinctive features made him adorable in the eyes of his human family during the initial days:

For a long time, Anil has wanted to get a dog- they should have a dog at their place. But he wasn't finding the right one! In their village, where the cobblers stay, one mother dog has a litter of puppies, very adorable and so plump. But Anil does not consider them suitable for their house. After all, they are just some stray, pariahs. Who would want to take them home?

So, when one day Anil was returning from the city, he saw one. Right outside the station, a bearer of some Englishman, has brought a puppy, a very cute, furry, white puppy. (Mukhopadhyay, 5)⁵³

Initially, he became the centre of attraction in Anil's house. He was also named *Johny*, an evidently English name to underscore the intended breed superiority and demarcate his difference to our indigenous breed. The story documents the gradual deterioration and neglect that Johny faced at the hands of his human companions. The first incident was definitely when he was tied in the rooftop without water during the summer, as the preparations of wedding were taking place in the household. His presence in that house at the time of celebration is rendered transgressive not because of his actions

⁵³ Shailajananda Mukhopadhyay, *Kala*, 5.

or associations. Rather, this complete exclusion and indictment was rooted in the deep-seated revulsion against his species:

So many people will come, Anil's family have organised the wedding in a massive scale. So much pomp, food, and gifts are spread across everywhere in the house. But one serious problem is there. This is an upper caste Brahmin family- people aren't willing to take it in their stride, if they find a dog roaming freely, touching everything. There may be some brahmins too, in the groom's side, who follow very strict rules regarding contacts with untouchable animals. If Johny touches any of their things, they may not even drink in this house. Johny has to be kept out of this place, somehow (Mukhopadhyay, 6).⁵⁴

Dogs were considered transgressive in religious and cultural rituals in most South Asian cultures. Their decision of excluding Johny from a festive environment is underscored by the socio-cultural construction of dogs as inferior, transgressive beings in South Asian culture.⁵⁵ It is noteworthy, that Anil did not leave any water with Johny not because he wanted him to suffer; it is because he completely forgot basic biological necessities of his canine companion. The sheer amount of neglect towards Johny throws into relief, the degree of importance ordinary individuals sincerely reserves for their impulsively adopted companion animals. The loss of auditory faculty is revealed by Anil's sister, Nihar, but nobody arranged the required medical check-up or veterinary diagnosis for Johny. This revelation of the loss of his auditory faculties, provides the important marker in this narrative, as after this realisation of Johny's deafness, his human family members including his primary human companion, Anil grew very indifferent

⁵⁴ Ibid., 6.

⁵⁵ Deryck O. Lodrick, "The Sacred and the Profane: The Dog in South Asian Culture," *Man in India* 89, no. 4 (October 2009): 497–523.

towards him. His constant barking was interpreted as irritating, attention-seeking noise, when in reality he was desperately thirsty and was trying to find a normal, stable shelter from the sun.

The transition of Johnny from an abled, healthy dog to an auditory impaired, dependent subject, is shown through the changing of his names from Johnny to *Kala*, the descriptive adjective in Bangla for the deaf in English. This name functions as an indictment of ableist imposition on the disabled individuals, more so, because this individual also suffers from speciesism. After this impairment, Johnny became more vocal and his behaviours also changed drastically. His vocal protestations in the forms of constant barking, his territorial aggression towards other dogs, and later towards the dacoits and other human strangers in the household, make his presence intolerable towards his own human family, although at no point in the entire narrative, he was shown to be violent towards them. Sunaura Taylor connects the 'embedded ableism' in animal rights discourse, and traces back to the cultural origin of one of the most popular phrases by animal rights activists. Taylor notes that the popularisation of Ella Wheeler Wilcox's famous 1910 poem, *I Am the Voice for the Voiceless* and how the activism had taken on this self-proclaimed ableist narrative as one of the theoretical approaches of animal rights activism.⁵⁶ Lauren Corman also establishes the centrality of this voice-dominated discourses. Corman succinctly enumerates the multi-pronged way this voice- centrality captures the animal rights activism by positioning animal's own subjective reactions as 'internal rhetorical inertia' of the animal movements.⁵⁷ Corman links language and systematised communicative mode as extension of power and agency.⁵⁸ Johnny's incessant

⁵⁶ Sunaura Taylor, 'Ableism and Animals,' in *Beasts of Burden: Animal and Disability Liberation* (New York: The New Press, 2017), EBook.

⁵⁷ Lauren Corman, 'The Ventriloquist's Burden: Animal Advocacy and the Problem of Speaking for Others,' in *Animal Subjects 2.0*, ed. Carla Jodey Castricano and Lauren Corman (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfried Laurier University Press, 2016), 483.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*,

barking is routinely ignored or misinterpreted. By deciding to ignore or interpreting them as either aggressive or happy barks, human characters in this story complete the first step of oppression, which as Taylor quotes Arundhati Roy's incisive commentary, "There's really no such thing as the 'voiceless'. There are only the deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard".⁵⁹ To deliberately ignore the voice of the animal, also underscores the erasure of animal presence from the cultural narrative and deciding not to leave any trace of them in cultural memory, as Sarat Colling explains:

Since voice is equated with self-assertion, to recognise animals' (symbolic or literal) voices, acknowledges their agency. Instead of positioning human animal advocates as the defenders of voiceless animals we can identify as allies of animals, whose role is to amplify and elevate their voices by exhorting others to make the efforts to listen, hear, and understand what is it they're saying. Listening to animals' voices is the first step towards replacing savior narratives with solidarity. (Colling, viii)⁶⁰

Johny's spatial relegation from the house to its threshold, his punishment at the hands of Anil, his untreated ulcerous wound caused by the burglars, his eventual displacement to a different household during another wedding ceremony together construct this narrative of discarding the animal subject as exercised in socio-cultural circumstances, because of their loss of performance and serviceability or utility. Being a deaf dog and being unable to protect his owner's family from the burglars despite his own brave attempts at the cost of severe injury fails Johny to validate his importance in that household. The story's last image of Johny's lifeless body being drawn by some amusing

⁵⁹ Taylor, *Ableism and Animals*, 76.

⁶⁰ Sarat Colling, "Preface," in *Animal Resistance in the Global Capitalist Era* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2020), viii.

children underscores the potent symbol of discarding an animal body devoid of basic dignity in a speciesist, ableist society.

His gaze, his abject body being taken by unfeeling humans, evokes the notion of Anat Pick's 'vulnerable corporeality' which is rooted in physicality yet creates a sublime, poignant take on animal existence in an unfeeling, insensitive, dissociative worldview, where this specific corporeality creates an alternate manoeuvring to counter anthropocentrism:

It is important to add that it is not a matter of taking the body out of discourse as some pure precultural entity, but of looking at how notions of embodiment- the material, the anonymous, and the elemental- provide a powerful antidote to anthropocentrism. (Pick, 6)⁶¹

On the surface level, the story's name *Kala* or *The Deaf* may seem to stand for the auditory impaired dog, Johnny. But at a deeper level, it can also refer to the utter insensitivity and sheer indifference of the people in Anil's household, including Anil himself. Although that interpretation would throw into relief the prejudiced attitudes of the ableist mainstream culture towards the deaf community itself. Lennard Davis in defining the categories and nuances of the deaf community, notes that disability interpreted in the narrative structure follows a notion of temporality- that some form of impairment *happens to the individual*, and the journey of this individual post his/her impairment is traced back to that 'disabled moment'.⁶² Davis explains that:

I use the concept of the 'moment' in its philosophical context to allow us to think of blindness or deafness, say, as modalities not disabilities... When one

⁶¹ Anat Pick, "Creaturely Bodies," in *Creaturely Poetics: Animality and Vulnerability in Literature and Film* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011),6.

⁶² Lennard Davis, "Introduction," in *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body* (London and New York: Verso, 1995), 1-23.

speaks of disability, one always associates it with a story, places it in a narrative. A person became deaf, became blind, was born blind, became quadriplegic. The disability immediately becomes part of a chronotope, a time-sequenced narrative, embedded in a story. But by narrativizing an impairment, one tends to sentimentalize it and link it to the bourgeois sensibility of individualism and the drama of an individual story, as we have seen in so many films treating the subject of disability. (Davis, 3-4)⁶³

This particular story can also be seen in that light, where we can interpret that this narrative of Johnny treats disability in animals in light of this idea of 'disabled moment', recording the increasing indifference and cruelty faced by the eponymous character, Johnny in the hands of his human companions. Seen from another angle, this story stands as a direct contrast to Sunaura Taylor's theorisation on disabled animals. In discussing about the human projection of disability onto animal individuals, Taylor points out that we, as human beings, have no way of understanding what and how animals actually feel regarding their cognitive or physical difference?⁶⁴ Taylor explains that for more-than-human animals, the difficulty in performing or functioning with a lack physical capability enables them for a condition; she explains that the primatologist, Frans De Waal, coined a specific term to describe this conditioning- it is called '*learned adjustment*', which Taylor even quotes in her argument regarding animal's perception towards physical or cognitive difficulty:

⁶³ Ibid., 3-4.

⁶⁴ Sunaura Taylor, "Animal Crips," in *Beasts of Burden: Animal and Disability Liberation* (New York and London: New Press, 2017). EBook.

Healthy members do not necessarily know what is wrong, but gradually become familiar with the limitations of their less fortunate mates. (De Waal)⁶⁵

Taylor maintains that despite our very rudimentary knowledge about empathy in animals, 'cognitive empathy is not some quality exclusive to humans'.⁶⁶ Seen from this angle, this story paints a very grim account of humans' perception towards animal companions, where they are deprived of even the basic dignity and integrity required to maintain a proper interspecies relationship. But the story is unlike a very simplified expression of speciesism; rather the manoeuvring of speciesism is aggravated with the ableist cruelty. The stories like *Kala*, exemplifies speciesism in its rudest form, a particular type of mindset where anyone runs the risk of being dispensable. I would like to argue that *Kala* or *The Deaf* functions as an articulation of the systemic normalisation of cruelty perpetrated doubly, both in the perspective of ableism, and also from the point of view of speciesism. The graphic, minutiae description of every wound inflicted on his body and always by some human, literally renders this aggressive, brutal speciesism a vivid colour. By representing the humans in their full exposition of cruelty and indifference, this story actually creates an incisive message on the selfish aspect of anthropocentric culture. The loud presence accompanied by constant barks, irritable, unruly behaviour functions in two ways- one is definitely related to the biological condition that Johny was undergoing; the second role can be, how his presence defies at the symbolic level, the anthropocentric expectation of complete domination on animal subjects. Seen from that way, the reward or the punishments meted out to these animal

⁶⁵ Frans DeWaal, *Good Natured: On the Origins of Right and Wrong in Humans and Other Animals* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 48; Sunaura Taylor, "Animal Crips," in *Beasts of Burden: Animal and Disability Liberation* (New York and London: New Press, 2017). EBook.

⁶⁶ Taylor, "Animal Crips," in *Beasts of Burden: Animal and Disability Liberation* (New York and London: New Press, 2017). EBook.

companions from their human acquaintances underscore the way power works in a speciesist relationship.

Differently Abled Individuals: Narratives of Ability, Autonomy, and Empowerment in Interspecies Relationships of South Asian Literature

In Lila Majumdar's *Manushder Galpa* and Rajiv Eipe's *Dugga*, we are confronted with another unique take on this canine-human relationship. These texts bring out the picture of the world seen from alternate lenses, that from the survivalist and the resilient. I would like to argue that these two texts also touch upon one of the crucial pointers in canine-human or, in a broader scale, human's interactions and mutually sustaining relationships with other-than-human animals from the angle of longstanding care and its ethical parameters. These two texts are taken from two different periods, belonging to two different genres; while both are intended for children, one is written in Bengali, and the other is a graphic narrative without any written dialogue. These two texts perform the position of disabled individuals, both nonhuman animals and humans, in an ableist society, but on a different level. Instead of focussing on the shared vulnerability, these texts alter the narratives by creating an alternative outlook which acknowledges, explores and celebrates this different way of life with the unique gifts that their special abilities bestow upon these individuals. Two predominant perspectives emerge from these narratives- the first is the empowering account of differently abled individuals who overcome the normative assumptions of limitations of mainstream, ableism, while the other is the mutually reciprocative interspecies canine-human relationship within the ethics of care.

Lila Majumdar works abound with animal characters in multiple levels. Her stories present a myriad variation of animal characters in all their splendours- their independence and mischievous energy are contagious. What also stands out in the animal

representations in Lila Majumdar's works is the emphasis on the autonomous agency of animal individuals. The seamless bonding between human children and animals pervades the narratives of most of her works. Unlike the usual children's stories, Majumdar's animal characters are not anthropomorphised- they are depicted with their own species-specific ethological features and affective responses. In her stories, mother monkey thanks the human for taking care of her baby, cats gather a gang of feline hooligans and take on the neighbours, two brothers get on a new adventure with their adopted puppy. In Majumdar's stories, we do not find animals teaching children on lessons of life, or morally upright tasks; rather, animals are behaving and working as they do in real life, creating a space spontaneously which thrives with multispecies interactions. This specific story, *Manushder Galpa*, is taken from a collection named *Kishor Rachana Sangraha*. The name of the story literally translates as "Stories of People", although I feel it should be more apt if we can translate it into "Stories of Beings", as the plotline extends far beyond the humans in its ambit. Lachhmi had an accident when she was only twenty-one days old. After that, her right leg was shorter than the other one. The intersectionality of the specially-abled humans and nonhuman is woven into the plotline of this story, which centres around not only people like Lachhmi and Abbas but also a group of differently abled nonhuman characters like Bhulo, Pyankpyank, Phonsphons. When Lachhmi grew up, she was routinely shunned by other children and adults of that area alike. The story touches upon the prejudices that cultural mores inculcate in the grassroots level of the society. Lachhmi's physical deformity was never given the due medical attention in that remote region- it was seen as a curse by one of their folk supernatural entities. These systems of superstition and prejudices could be tracked into the folkloric mores and cultures in various parts of India, something that I will explore in the third chapter of this thesis.

In a remote village, Shaligaon, probably at the fringes of Birbhum, this girl used to stay. She had found a stray puppy, and named him as Bhulo. This Bhulo also suffers a similar problem- his right front paw was crooked because of an accident that he had suffered when he was very young. It also hampers his regular gait- Bhulo's speed is slower than the other puppies of his age. In looking for the place where celebrations took place, Lachhmi and Bhulo came to know another fellow named Abbas. The first interaction between Lachhmi and Abbas is important in multiple levels, as it demonstrates a safe space, both spatial and emotional within the mainstream ableist, speciesist construct. I am quoting the passage which underscores the acknowledgement and also the validation of the autonomous agencies of both differently abled humans and nonhuman animals:

By that time, Lachhmi and Bhulo have reached the limit of Shaligaon, near that wall in Adompara. Bhulo is trying to sniff if there is any food nearby. At that moment, Lachhmi finds something highly interesting. A few bricks had already come out from the wall, making a medium-sized hole in it. The size is round and small; it makes one think that only dogs, cats, hens or ducks use that hole to come out or go in. Yet, Lachhmi is seeing now how an entire human, even smaller than her, coming out of it. First, he gets his head out and then crawls through the round hole. This boy is so young, junior to even Lachhmi herself- he has a pair of black shorts and striped t-shirt. His left hand is crooked from the elbow. A cat has also come out after him- blind in one eye, with parts of one of the ears missing, the cat has some feisty look about him, and after the cat comes out a brown duck, limping in one leg. The boy lifted his eyes and was taken aback by Lachhmi and Bhulo. There is something hanging from his neck, black and white, striped and very thin

yet moving. Goodness, it is a snake! The pair of green eyes are looking at Lachhmi right now.

Lachhmi asks him, "Hi, who are you? What's your name?"

The boy replies, "I am Felna. I stay in this village."

"Do you know uncle Alam. He also stays in this village too," replies Lachhmi.

"He is my father," Felna replies. Lachhmi has thought for a few seconds something, and then says suddenly, "Hey, listen. If uncle Alam is your father, then it makes me your *didi*.^{67*} This is Bhulo, my dog. Only Bhulo and my grandfather love me. Others don't even tolerate me. Let's explore this place more. What's your name again?"

"Felna."

"Humph! Nobody has names like that."

He replies, "I do, *didi*. Though I also have another name, it is Abbas." Lachhmi replies, "Really? What does it mean?" Abbas says, "I don't know. Although my uncle says that my name should have been *Ubbish!*" "What's *Ubbish?*" asks Lachhmi. "Don't you know? It is an English word. It means the useless things that people discard. It means what we call in Bengali, *Felna*." And his eyes are filled with tears. Lachhmi hurriedly tells him, "Hey, people are bad. Why don't you introduce me to *them?*" pointing towards that cat, duck and the snake. Felna passes a quick chuckle, and says, "Oh, they are my friends. This is Myaow. He is really fearless. You just need to see him when he fights. He has lost

^{67*} In Bengali, *didi* means elder sister. All the translations are done by me.

one eye and a part of his ear in fights, yet hasn't lost a bit of his spirit. And that, that is Pyankpyank! He is another one. You know, Amu uncle was chasing him to kill. They had some plan to cook him. What a courage he has! He flew on top of Amu uncle and pecked his head with his beak. In that ruckus Amu uncle broke his leg. I had to intervene. From that time onwards, he stays with me. And this one here, hanging around my neck, I call him Phonsphons. Our gardener Rahim uncle hit him with a rod, and trashed him in the bins, his head was badly injured. I took him in, and gradually he has recovered. Actually Rahim uncle isn't that bad, you now. Now he feeds Phonsphons frogs every day. Now, all of them stay with me in the warehouse with me. Myaow catches mice there, Pyankpyank and Phonsphons stay with me, they follow me wherever I go! (Majumdar, 69)⁶⁸

The status of differently abled individuals is subtly articulated through the process of naming them. As I also I have explored in the previous section, that naming plays an important role in categorising the individuals in segregating them based on their differences in abilities. In this text, Abbas introduces himself to his nickname *Felna*, in Bengali, which roughly stands for an adjective that means as either discarded or useless. Lila Majumdar sensitively explores the notion of the mispronunciation of English words in the utterances of socio-culturally backwards children of a remote village, keeping intact the repercussions of their societally marginalised positions. Abbas explains that one of his relatives derides him to call himself as 'Ubbish', an English word, which means discarded, wastage. This *Ubbish* is probably hinting at the word rubbish, directed at Abbas, a differently abled individual. By citing Mel Y Chen's notions of animacy and the importance of language in it, Agnes Trzak argues that language is deeply disabling:

⁶⁸ Lila Majumdar, "Manushder Galpa," in *Lila Majumdar: Kishor Rachana Sangrah*, ed. Kartick Ghosh (Kolkata: Nirmal Book Agency, 2008), 69.

Linguistic objectification denounces the Other as not-humane-enough, an inanimate thing without desires, an *it*. This robs the marginalized individual of the ability to self-identify as well as of the capability to (not) consent.⁶⁹

Language plays pivotal roles in designating the socio-cultural positioning of the individuals as well as the construction of their identities through the act of naming each of them. The aliveness in the terminology of Chen is stripped of Abbas with his imposed names of *Felna* or *Ubbish*, which insists on the dehumanised *it-ness* imposed by the prejudiced ableist, speciesist mainstream on his real, authentic identity. But the story takes an alternative course when Abbas narrates his multiple rescues of nonhuman animals, most of whom have undergone through impairment as a consequence of human cruelty. Through the acts of curing as well as rehoming them with him, Abbas creates an alternative life narrative within the speciesist, ableist societal construct. This same autonomous agency is also palpable in the dynamics between Lachhmi and her dog Bhulo. In their daily explorations, they came to a place, where a hospital was being constructed. It was only later, after the completion of the hospital, they came to know that, this hospital would be a veterinary hospital, where small animals would be treated. In the story, Abbas and Lachhmi were taken under the wings of the founders of this institution, along with their animal companions.

Dugga, a graphic narrative, is based on a true incident, on the life of a former stray dog, who suffered a major car accident. She was picked up by a woman, and had a difficult and long journey towards normal life. The word 'normal' may be slightly

⁶⁹Agnes Trzak, "Disability and the Ahuman: A Story about a Dog, a Duck, and the Woman Who Cared for Them," in *Disability and Animality: Crip Perspectives in Critical Animal Studies*, ed. Stephanie Jenkins, Kelly Struthers Montford, and Chloë Taylor (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis, 2020), 79.; Mel Y Chen, "Language and Mattering Humans," in *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2012), 27.

problematic here, as she has developed some physical problems after her major surgery and amputation of the hind leg; the accident changed her life so drastically that living on the open streets would be highly risky for her. In the fourth chapter of this thesis, I will discuss on the theoretical ramifications of canine representations in graphic narratives from South Asia. In this chapter, I will limit my discussions on the implications of a rendition which focusses on an impaired dog living on the street.

In a predictable, sentimental narrative, this story would have easily taken on the aspect of helplessness and utter vulnerability of the dog in question. But, instead of taking the expected pathway, *Dugga* sheds lights on issues of street animals, their impacts on the lives of their human caregivers, the struggles in the aftermath of life-altering accidents, the struggles in the visceral level, and the long and patient journey towards healing. This book is intended for children, yet its affective repercussions are far-reaching. Published in 2021, it deftly captures the gritty aspects of interspecies relationships between street dogs and their human caregivers. Street dogs, their precarious physical habitats, their camaraderie with their human companions, the elemental vulnerabilities to which they are regularly exposed to, all these have been beautifully captured in this graphic narrative. This graphic narrative is clearly divided into two segments- the first half focusses on Dugga's life before her accident, while the latter half constitutes her personhood through her journey of recovery after the traumatic, life-altering injury. In a fast-evolving interspecies relationship, the changing notions of care and empathy is exposed to a newer dimension through narratives of wounded animals and their human companions- *Dugga* is a prime example of that. Accounts like *Dugga* narrativises the life altering capacity of not only the dogs, but also their human caregivers, and in this way, creates a trace of empowering life narratives. This text also

articulates the dynamics of care across the species boundaries. Though Rachel Adams has pointed out the nuances of care when it comes to interspecies relationships:

Care is work, an attitude towards others, and an ethical ideal. I define it as the intimate and necessary labor required to sustain those who are dependent, but also the action needed to sustain the lives of vulnerable others more distant in time, space, and identity. care is almost always characterized by asymmetries of power, ability, and resources. Twhe individuals and groups most in need of care, and those who provide it are relegated to the margins of a society that prizes independence, autonomy, and productivity. (Adams, 695-695)⁷⁰

In a country like India, where street animals lead a ubiquitous yet unrecognised existence, stories like *Dugga* insist on parallel accounts which counter the usual narratives of indifference and neglect. Lynda Birke and Lori Gruen have succinctly pointed multiple impacts that these accounts create in mainstream culture. Birke and Gruen emphasised on certain characteristics of these 'rescue narratives'; they have narrowed down to three main aspects of these narratives, namely the rendition of disabled animals as heroes or victorious, who transcend the obstacles of their disabled condition, the mutual interspecies love and empathy, and thirdly the human caregivers' own histories of disability or illness.⁷¹ In this same article, Gruen and Birke also have touched upon how this 'triumphant narratives' can be counterproductive according to some theorists like Hamilton, who regards 'trope of 'being exceptional' as 'inspirational porn', a mechanism that emphasises on the capability centred outlook of the ableist mainstream.⁷² The other kinds of responses that these narratives elicit in the popular

⁷⁰ Rachel Adams, "The Art of Interspecies Care," *New Literary History* 51, no. 4 (2020): 695-696, <https://doi.org/10.1353/nlh.2020.0043>.

⁷¹ Lynda Birke and Lori Gruen, "Mutual Rescue: Disabled Animals and Their Caretakers," *Animal Studies Journal* 11, no. 1 (2022): 37, <https://doi.org/10.14453/asj/v11i1.2>.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 45.

mindset which attempt to construct anti-nature tendency in the decisions of long-term treatments or cures of these animals. Birke and Gruen point out that these responses usually stem from the preconceived ableist notions on ideal 'quality of life', which inadvertently draw on the issue of euthanasia or mercy killing. *Dugga* does not walk in that direction of attempting Dugga, the eponymous canine character in her return to the previous, completely abled self. The text also deliberately refrains from white washing the gritty details of hit-and-run accident in the lives of street animals- their long, uncertain journeys to recovery and partially dependent existence, which may not be possible for a majority of these wounded or injured animals are subtly highlighted in this graphic narrative. *Dugga* as a text depicts one of the marginal cases which successfully gets materialised in spite of severe obstacles; in that way this text performs the construction of animal welfare narratives regarding the street animals in India, with their own human infrastructure and networks. It is noteworthy that in this text, other than Dugga, no other characters, human or canine have been represented with individualised names; neither there has been any implication of Dugga's rehabilitation as better than her previous life experiences, one of the tropes that is usually manoeuvred in these rescue narratives. The singularity of naming the canine protagonist, the realistic depiction of her altered life qualities, lack of references to human's own personal subjective life, all these factors cumulatively construct this text as a 'canine-centered' performative account, focussing on the differently abled experiences of animal consciousness.

I would like to argue that in Lila Majumdar's *Manushder Galpa*, corresponds to the third factor of mutual interspecies dependency of Birke and Gruen. The shared physical difficulties and the societal ostracisation, from both ableist and speciesist perspectives factors that play the deciding role in contextualising the affective attachment and bonding of Lachhmi and Abbas with their fellow nonhuman companions like Bhulo, Myaow,

Pyankpyank, Phonsphons. In their series of interviews of caregivers to disabled animals, Birke and Gruen came across multiple people who have clarified their own affective solidarity in either their own lives or some people closely related to them:

One striking feature of these interviews, however, is how many spoke of personal experience with disability, long-term illness, or stress, either their own or in the family. This enabled, some felt, deeper understanding and something akin to entangled empathy (Gruen); in particular, they emphasized how much mutual support and understanding there was in their relationships. One visitor to the disabled animal rehoming centre in Wales had adopted disabled children; so gemma asks her: 'if you have several kids in wheelchairs, why not pet?' (Birke and Gruen, 49)⁷³

Abbas and Lachhmi's own subjective experiences of societal stigma and marginalisation enabled them to empathise with the animal outcasts in the speciesist society. The story also goes beyond this predictable cycle of marginalisation and sentimentality, by revealing a sustaining social structure that not only integrates them into the mainstream social structure but also asserts their unique subjectivities and their contribution in understanding and serving specially-abled nonhuman. Stefan Dolgert maintains that one of the ways to transcend the ableist assumptions of futility or deficit in the narratives of disability is to locate and explore 'a certain independent value to their difference'.⁷⁴ Their integration as individuals directly contributing to the society has a far-reaching impact exceeding the utilitarian based understanding of their positions in the society.

⁷³ Birke and Gruen, *Mutual Rescue*, 49.

⁷⁴ Stefan Dolgert, "Species of Disability: Response to Arneil," *Political Theory* 38, no. 6 (November 2010): 862, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0090591710378976>.

Created in different decades, languages and mediums, both Lila Majumdar's *Manushder Galpa* and Rajiv Eipe's *Dugga* are also instrumental in contextualising another aspect of canine-human relationship in South Asian culture. These two texts position the interspecies relationship in the intersection of animal service as Nik Taylor would have intended.⁷⁵ These two texts bring into the mainstream, populist culture, the relevance and capacity of animal welfare as a viable means of existence, not only from the perspective of livelihoods but also as an empowering stance to integrate and incorporate the special abilities which the differently abled subjects, both humans and nonhumans hold in their power. *Manushder Galpa* does this directly through the trope of veterinary hospital and then taking the readers into the consequent changed identities and lives of Lachhmi and Abbas as the main staff in that veterinary hospital, while *Dugga* does this indirectly, by pushing the invaluable importance in saving lives of nonhuman animals.

Conclusion

I am suggesting not that nonhuman animals and disabled humans are uniquely similar, but rather that we must begin to examine the systems that degrade and devalue both animals and disabled people-systems which are built upon, among other things, ableist paradigms of language and cognitive capacity.⁷⁶

Sunauro Taylor, "The Chimp Who Spoke," in the *Beasts of Burden*

In these lines, Taylor urges us to think beyond the rationality as a measure to validate the existence of animals in society, which also denigrates the intellectually unique humans with equal disrespect. This chapter attempted to explore the

⁷⁵ Kendra Coulter, "Introducing Animal Work," in *Animals, Work, and the Promise of Interspecies Solidarity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 2.

⁷⁶ Sunauro Taylor, "The Chimp Who Spoke," in *Beasts of Burden: Animal and Disability Liberation* (New York: The New Press, 2017), EBook.

intersectionality between disability and canine-human relationships. I intended to explore the different facets of canine-human relationship and their interdependence through the lenses of uncommon ability. From the locus of mutually experiencing vulnerabilities to the speciesist oppression that is combined with cruelty towards disabled bodies, canine or humans alike, and from there to the narratives of empowerment, this chapter throws into the relief the various gradations of disability and interspecies companionship in a critical perspective.

Following the cues of Kelly Oliver, I argued that vulnerability is not exclusively limited within humans; rather vulnerability should be studied and explored across the species barriers too.⁷⁷ The scarcity of academic investigations into the ethical and societal mores related to animal disability is one of the major pointers in the degree of importance given to status of disabled animals in our mainstream ableist, speciesist societies.⁷⁸ The unique abilities explored and contributed by these unique individuals, both humans and canines or nonhumans, open a more expansive horizon into the understanding of multispecies awareness. The way dogs have assisted Kunjabihari or Mithai in Rabindranath Tagore's poem or Atulananda Goswami's *Lakhuti* respectively, underscores the way canines have always guided humans from the early stages of civilisations. The elemental, intuitive bonding cannot be reduced to the mere dyad dynamics of humans versus canine narrative. In this connection, Cary Wolfe's poignant observation on the companionship between canines and humans is crucially relevant. In discussing the unique perspectives that differently abled humans form with animals, Wolfe brings into the discussion the reference of an advertisement- the photo of a 'tall,

⁷⁷ Kelly Oliver, "Service Dogs: Between Animal Studies and Disability Studies," in *Disability and Animality: Crip Perspectives in Critical Animal Studies*, ed. Stephanie Jenkins, Kelly Struthers Montford, and Chloë Taylor (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis, 2020), 119.

⁷⁸ Birke and Gruen, *Mutual Rescue*, 38; Neil Carr, "Disabled Animals and Leisure: Casting Light on Those Left behind in the Shadows," *Leisure Studies* 41, no. 1 (July 2021): 5, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02614367.2021.1942523>.

slender, female model, dressed in evening gown for a night on the town, but accompanied by a German Shepherd service dog, Wolfe specifies:

But rather to suggest that, instead of seeing the nonhuman animal as merely a prop or tool for allowing the disabled to be mainstreamed into liberal society and its values, wouldn't we do better to imagine this example as an irreducibly different and unique form of subjectivity- neither *Homo sapiens* nor *Canis familiaris*, neither "disabled" nor "normal," but something else altogether, a shared trans-species being-in-the-world constituted by complex relations of trust, respect, dependence, and communication... (Wolfe, 140-141)⁷⁹

This shared trans-species mutually empathetic interspecies dependence is crucial in mapping out the rendition of canines in South Asian literature. The stories of rescue, which occurs in two ways, the life altering perspectives of multispecies survival and empowerment captured in Lila Majumdar's story or Rajiv Eipe's *Dugga* underscore the immense cultural significance of subjective, interspecies empathy, that Marty Kheel's commentary on Munro Leaf's *The Story of Ferdinand*:

Children's storybooks also hold great potential for challenging patriarchal modes of thought, and for promoting care. (Kheel, 248)⁸⁰

Kheel maintains that the traces of these compassionate narratives in the mainstream, actively create as well as promote a multispecies, ethics of care in the populist mindset. I would like to conclude this chapter with Kheel's significant comment

⁷⁹ Cary Wolfe, "Learning from Temple Grandin: Animal Studies, Disability Studies, and Who Comes after the Subject," in *What Is Posthumanism?* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 140-141.

⁸⁰ Marty Kheel, "Ecofeminist Holist Philosophy," in *Nature Ethics: an Ecofeminist Perspective* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008), 248.

on *Babe*, the 1995 movie about a pig and real-life story of a cow named Emily that these narratives, very similar like Lila Majumdar's *Manushder Galpa* and Rajiv Eipe's *Dugga*:

can inspire humans to deepen their connection to other animals. Stories such as these help people to recognize that the lives of other animals follow story lines, representing a subjective identity. One way in which we can come to appreciate their subjectivity, therefore, is through telling their stories as best we can. (Kheel, 249)⁸¹

These subjective stories of deaf dogs or survivor street dogs even after life-threatening accidents, inculcate a deeper understanding of humans' own relations to the other forms of lives in all their beauties and vulnerabilities.

⁸¹ Kheel, *Ecofeminist Holist Philosophy*, 249.

II. Death and His Brothers: Canine- Human Coexistence and Struggling Times in South Asian Literature

A cursory search on the relation between fear and dogs will give us numerous examples in the cultural field, which capture so perfectly the fear and panic people feel towards our companion beings. The immense contribution that dogs have continued to impart to human society is easily overlooked and is appropriated with a speciesist, particularised fear against these animals. This thesis should establish a counter narrative of this speciesist ideology that mainstream literary and cultural influences have built so far. It is attempting to take note and represent those works which, in their little yet significant way, have made a more empathetic, inclusive and multispecies perspective in their ideology. This chapter is an attempt to look at the other side of fear, the fear that dogs as urban, semi-domestic yet free-ranging animals have to face almost every day, the fear that is pervasive in their companion humans as well. This chapter also endeavours to look at this canine-human coexistence from the socio-cultural, and historical perspective. How life experiences for these humans alter or are shaped with their shared existence with dogs in urban areas, in volatile political scenarios? Do they stand with their canine companions or are they forced to abandon in the midway? The footprints of abandonment, fear and death, how that is captured in some select texts of our contemporary literature?

One of the major reasons behind my decision to write a thesis on dogs in our literary and cultural lives, has been, my intention to capture and explore how the involvements of humans with semi-domestic, semi-feral canines within their communities, have affected both their lives; what kind of our understanding and acceptance would relegate

to our fellow canines in larger societal scenarios to a palpably vulnerable, precarious existence? The precarity or stability of both humans and other-than-human animals' lives are far more contingent on their status as social beings validated and approved by the existing politico-social parameters. This chapter will analyse this precarity of dogs in South Asian society from this angle of acceptance or ostracisation during periods of political unrest and its repercussions on humans associated with them at the emotive and societal levels. The acceptance of animals in society depends to a great extent on their degree of legitimised identities. This chapter endeavours to locate dogs in the intersection of their association and presence in human lives, politico-legal scenarios, and the intense emotional depth of fear and death in select stories from contemporary South Asian Literature. The first subsection of this chapter will focus on the representation of our canine companions in the grey zone between the validated legitimised beings and the social outcasts almost verging onto the outlawed beings within human habitats. The second subsection will locate canine characters in the narrative on death in its multilayered repercussions.

Dogs and their Legitimised Identities in Societal Space

Most of the free-ranging dogs have always been considered as scavenger animals thriving on the wastes at the fringes of human habitats. Their relegation to the 'creaturely' vermin standard has already been accepted widely in our cultures.⁸² Following the footsteps of Colin Dayan in her pathbreaking analysis of canine-human intersections in larger cultural, societal and legal perspectives in *With Dogs at the Edge of Life*, I intend to begin this section with a real incident that took place in January, 2019.⁸³ In Calcutta,

⁸² Lucinda Cole, *Imperfect Creatures Vermin, Literature, and the Sciences of Life, 1600-1740* (Ann Arbor University of Michigan Press, 2016).

⁸³ Colin Dayan, "They Killed My Dog," in *With Dogs at the Edge of Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 43–50; Tamaghna Banerjee, "2 Nursing Students Arrested in Kolkata for Killing 16 Puppies," *The Times of India*, January 16, 2019, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/kolkata/2-nursing-students-arrested-in-kolkata-for->

at Nilratan Sarkar Medical College and Hospital, 16 puppies were killed by two nursing students; the brutality of this incident can be summed up in just one sentence. The puppies were killed in such a manner, that their entrails and internal organs came out. This entire incident was recorded by two individuals. For the time being, this incident created quite a massive repercussion in social media and real life; petitions were filed and animal rights activists came together in protest, they also held long walks and procession. But the two nursing students, who killed them, were allowed to roam freely without any punishment. With just 50 INR, these two killers were allowed bail and they were allowed to continue their studies in nursing, in quite an ironical way. With this reference, I am bringing into the discussion another recent event that took place, last year in Delhi. In the month of January, last year in excruciating winter, an 80 years old woman named Pratima Devi, who used to dwell on the streets of footpath with a pack of dogs, whom she used to feed and take care of regularly, was pushed out of her shanty while the dogs too were pushed out of their familiar territories by state appointed construction workers.⁸⁴ These two incidents, when taken together, distinctly draw a map of the legitimised identities in the urban space for its animals and 'animalised humans'. These two incidents also draw a map of animal deaths in our socio-psychological mechanism. In this chapter, I will attempt to locate the two types of death which is depicted through the dying of canine characters in South Asian Literature- one is state sponsored, direct, violent killing and the other one is the indirect yet systemic perpetrated deaths, which are summarily dismissed. Lippit has shown in his analysis of Carl Jung's incorporation and exploration of animals in our psychological and cultural reception. He maintains that the

killing-16-puppies/articleshow/67549776.cms#:~:text=KOLKATA%3A%20Police%20on%20Tuesday%20arrested,of%2Dthe%2Dmoment%20act..

⁸⁴ Somrita Ghosh, "Delhi: Woman Known for Sheltering Stray Dogs Left without a Roof over Head," *The Times of India*, January 4, 2023, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/delhi/woman-known-for-sheltering-stray-dogs-left-without-a-roof-over-head/articleshow/96719877.cms>.

‘dehumanization’ of animals, an attitude which tends to be the cultural, and psycho-social erasure of animals from our mainstream, popular socio-cultural axis, has its roots in the Western metaphysics. Lippit also draws the evolution of this concept in the philosophical ideology of Adorno and Horkheimer, who have categorically established the pervasive and sinister impact of this human supremacy over other beings and the exclusive, speciesist outlook most monstrously articulated in the concentration camps of Auschwitz.⁸⁵ The extension of this separatist, supremacist ideology had already undergone through a gradual yet certain developmental stages in the last few centuries. Marjorie Spiegel in her seminal work, has established the correlation between the speciesist and racist ideologies- both aim not only to de-humanise racially or biologically ‘others’ but also ensures the complete erasure of integrity and basic fundamental rights to their ontological identities. Spiegel cites the analysis of Sterling A. Brown in his longer essay ‘*Negro Character as Seen by White Authors*’, and Spiegel quotes him to demonstrate the nuances of racist and speciesist oppression in literary fields.⁸⁶ According to Spiegel, animals and blacks were placed at the lowest strata of white supremacist dominant culture. Let me quote Spiegel here, in explaining the correlation between racism and speciesism:

Sterling cited the work of Thomas Nelson Page as an example of the metamorphosis which occurred in people’s minds in reaction to the transition of blacks from slaves to free individuals. When the person in question was still a slave- a ‘good slave’, mind you- he was portrayed as a ‘docile mastiff’, in Sterling’s words. When no longer enslaved, authors turned him into a ‘mad dog’. Sterling

⁸⁵ Akira Mizuta Lippit, Introduction: Remembering Animals," in *Electric Animal: Toward a Rhetoric of Wildlife* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 10.

⁸⁶ Marjorie Spiegel, "Oppression in Language and Literature," in *The Dreaded Comparison: Human and Animal Slavery* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1988), 31.

comments that when ‘in their pace, loyally serving and worshipping ‘ole Marse,’ slaves were portrayed as ‘admirable creatures, but in Freedom they are beasts’... When obedient and subservient, an animal is a loyal companion, a ‘good slave’. When independent, an animal is suddenly transformed in our eyes to an uncontrollable beast (Spiegel, 33).⁸⁷

In another chapter, Spiegel draws direct connection between the master/slave narratives and pet animals’ relationships with their human companions. The complete subservience to the animals was instilled in them through a series of routine disciplinary measures, characterised through its inherent brutality. Spiegel cites a commonplace adage which is both literal and symbolical in the linguistic level- ‘the domestication of a wild horse’, is only possible in reality, by ‘breaking the horse’- literally breaking the animal’s spirit, ‘bending her to our will, and make her a subordinate and subservient servant’.⁸⁸ The parameters of determining a pet, specifically a dog’s character depends upon the degree of her subservience to her human caretaker. Although I am writing the word ‘caretaker’, but according to the context, the more appropriate word that fits into this domination and commodity lexicon, is Spiegel’s use of human ‘owner’ or ‘master’. As long a dog behaves according to the wills of her human ‘owner’, she will be regarded as the ‘good dog’. This ‘good conduct’ or behaviour ascertains ignoring their own species-specific behavioural patterns, like barked, or socialising with other dogs, or being independent in their own agency:

Many dogs spend their entire lives in isolation, chained to a slab of concrete or a tree in their master’s backyard. If a dog wishes to do something other than what pleases her master- play with other dogs (socialise), for instance- she may be

⁸⁷ Spiegel, *Oppression*, 33.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 33.

beaten or otherwise punished. All independent actions are thus discouraged, and the dog learns that she will win approval- and thus avoidance of future beatings or her very survival suppressing her own desires and conforming to those of the omnipotent human who legally owns her. (Spiegel, 37)⁸⁹

The conditioning of the animal on the basis of repeated negative reinforcements, triggers the celebrated Pavlovian experiment, while underscoring the secondary importance or the insignificance that Western Enlightenment granted the animals from the Eighteenth century onwards.⁹⁰ Theorists noted how the acute sufferings in the animals experimented upon, are swiftly dismissed.⁹¹ This dismissal of animals' capability to feel pain and their sufferings, dismissal of their own independent ontological and psycho-social agency as unique beings, summarily constructs them as the illegitimate or intervening, disruptive subjects in anthropocentric, speciesist, ableist societal centre. There is a particular way that speaks for the process of illegitimising animals and a certain section of humans on the basis of power structure and exploitative dynamics. Spiegel in her book, categorically discussed this complex yet intricately linked process of speciesism and racism. Lippit explains that in premodern Europe, there was a conviction that animals are as rational as humans, even in some cases more rational than us. Citing the analysis of Georges Boas and his *Theriophily*, Lippit asserts that premodern philosophers like, Pliny, Plutarch, Montaigne, Rousseau, had maintained the animal's capacity to learn and communicate spontaneously with a hold on rationality in their own

⁸⁹ Spiegel, "Slaves and Masters," in *The Dreaded Comparison: Human and Animal Slavery* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1988), 37.

⁹⁰ James Felton, "Pavlov's Dog Experiment Was Much More Disturbing than You Think," *IFLScience*, October 13, 2022, <https://www.iflscience.com/pavlov-s-dog-experiment-was-much-more-disturbing-than-you-think-65729>; Linda Johnson, "Animal Experimentation in 18th-Century Art: Joseph Wright of Derby: An Experiment on a Bird in an Air Pump," *Journal of Animal Ethics* 6, no. 2 (October 1, 2016): 164–76.

⁹¹ Matthew Senior, "The Animal Witness," in *A Cultural History of Animals in the Age of Enlightenment*, ed. Matthew Senior (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2009), 1–23.

species -specific ways.⁹² It is from the Eighteenth Century onwards, that animals were relegated to the hierarchically inferior categories within the matrix of the Enlightenment philosophy. It is also during this time, that a systematic separation took place between human and animals in general, not only from the purview of philosophy but also in our quotidian lifestyle. It was very prominent in the way, Western civilisation formulated a structure which rendered the animals 'killable' and it also erased these *killable* animals and their process of slaughter entirely from the purview of the populace.⁹³ In that informative article, Piers Beirne notes this displacement from visibility to the invisibility was done systematically in both spatial dimension as well as in the linguistic medium.⁹⁴

Beirne explains that:

Spatially, a two-pronged strategy of invisibilisation has been at work in the development of slaughterhouse regimes: one external, the other internal. On one hand, the massive scale of the animal killing has been and is deftly hidden from the citizenry...On the other hand, because of the division of labour within the slaughterhouses, then and now, it appears that only a tiny fraction of workers participates in or even see the actual moment of an animal's death. No publicity attends an animal's death. No one stands accused. No one is deemed guilty. Forgiveness is not needed (Beirne, 53).⁹⁵

The status given to other-than-human animals differs distinctly from their pre-Enlightenment status, when they were thought to possess some rational power and could be considered culpable.⁹⁶ The post-Cartesian philosophy positioned animals as

⁹² Akira Mizuta Lippit, "Philosophy and the Animal World," in *Electric Animal: Toward a Rhetoric of Wildlife* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2000), 39.

⁹³ Piers Beirne, "Theriodicide: Naming Animal Killing," *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy* 3, no. 2 (August 1, 2014): <https://doi.org/10.5204/ijcjsd.v3i2.174>. 49-66.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*,

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁹⁶ E P Evans, *Criminal Prosecution and Capital Punishment of Animals*. (S.L.: Outlook Verlag, 2020).

extensions of property to human beings. In explained the etymological origin and interpretation of this particular word, ‘theriocide’, Beirne notes that, in 2007 “the rabbinical scholar Christophe Nihan used ‘theriocide’ as his translation of the Hebrew phrase for the ‘wrongful animal killing’”.⁹⁷ The notion of ‘theriocide’ is linked with planned or unplanned killing of dogs in a multilayered level. This chapter attempts to explore how the process of legalising or illegitimising a group of animals can be seen through the informed lenses of legality and political power structure. In India, street dogs occupy a place of precarious vulnerabilities within the complex urban ecosystem and cultural acceptance. There has been a legacy of mass killing of street dogs seasonally by the administrative authorities. This was accepted to such an extent that this killing was completely 'legal according to the purview of the existing socio-legal system in the contemporary time. The status of the urban animals, specifically dogs, carries within itself a multilayered implication of class, gender and the contention of legitimised identity. From ancient time, dogs always have shared this precarity of legitimised existence.⁹⁸ In western civilisations too, we come across these highly ambivalent positions of dogs and cats in urban areas.⁹⁹ Arluke and Atema have clarified the uncertainties rooted in the societal and cultural acceptance of free-ranging dogs in urban human habitats:

As is often the case, these dogs occupy a liminal position; they are considered out of place and to not be in their prescribed role in society. Roaming dogs are perceived as neither domestic nor wild and as quite separate from and foreign to the human community, occupying a status that defines them as problematic,

⁹⁷ Beirne, *Theriocide*, 55.

⁹⁸Wendy Doniger, *The Hindus: An Alternative History* (New York: Penguin Press, 2009).

⁹⁹ Mark S. R. Jenner, "The Great Dog Massacre," in *Fear in Early Modern Society*, ed. William Naphy and Penny Roberts (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 44–61; Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre: And Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Basic Books/Perseus Books Group, 2009), 75–104.

outcast, sometimes illegal, whom residents should avoid, control, or regulate, and perhaps even kill, because they are seen as disorderly, dirty, dangerous, and not part of a fixed social relationship. (Arluke and Atema)¹⁰⁰

This 'liminal' status of Indian free-ranging dogs has been explored from this culturally dense yet ambivalent angles in the analysis of Narayanan. The liminality of dogs in our culture also, is articulated through colloquial proverbs that literally translates into, the washerman's dog belongs neither to home, nor to the river banks (*Dhobi ka kutta/ Na ghar ka na ghat ka*), consequently rendering his presence and existence on the threshold zone, neither fully domesticated nor completely feral or wild, but a bit of both. This liminality is expressed even more how most of our abusive words are associated with dogs and other scavenging animals.¹⁰¹

The administrative documents, in their registered records demonstrate this illegitimisation of Indian street dogs in multiple ways. The repeated dog pogroms carried out even till recent times, underscore this ambivalent status of street dogs in Indian urban space. Yamini Narayanan defines the free-ranging street dogs with an important temperamental factor- these "Indian street dogs are widely noted to be friendly and alert, usually submissive in their relations to humans, and highly independent."¹⁰² The dogs are positioned in an intersection of changing attitudes towards urbanisation and dynamics of animal-human coexistence. Their bodies emerge balancing between two different

¹⁰⁰ Arnold Arluke and Kate Atema, "Roaming Dogs," in *The Oxford Handbook of Animal Studies*, ed. Linda Kalof (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 126–50.

¹⁰¹ Shoaib Danial, "Why Dogs and Puppies Are Swear Words in India: A Short Guide to Hindi Profanity for the BJP," *Scroll*, October 22, 2015, <https://scroll.in/article/764132/why-dogs-and-puppies-are-swear-words-in-india-a-short-guide-to-hindi-profanity-for-the-bjp>; Peden Doma Bhutia, "Why Being Called a Dog Is a Royal Insult," *The Times of India*, January 25, 2009, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/why-being-called-a-dog-is-a-royal-insult/articleshow/4026729.cms>.

¹⁰² Yamini Narayanan, "Street Dogs at the Intersection of Colonialism and Informality: 'Subaltern Animism' as a Posthuman Critique of Indian Cities," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 35, no. 3 (October 6, 2016): 475–94, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263775816672860>, 484; Srijoni Sen Majumdar and Anindita Bhadra, "A Dog's Day with Humans – Time Activity Budget of Free-Ranging Dogs in India," *Current Science* 106, no. 6 (March 2014): 874–78.

notions- the locus of animals as mere metaphor and the corporeality of animal existence in a society increasingly growing intolerant towards other forms of life. This chapter endeavours to locate dogs in South Asian literature in their specific positionality, through their representations with primal emotions like death and fear and how these evocative significance hints at the deeper layers of animals' coexistence with humans in a worldview, increasingly hostile towards them. I intend to argue that, these specific texts construe an alternative angle in our cultural psyche, which emphasises on the underrated yet significant presence of our companion canines in our quotidian lives. All of these collectively form the animal presence of a society, which customarily downplays its other-than-human companion beings. In this chapter, in the first subsection, I will focus on two stories of Indian literature, which are poised on the fine balance between dogs as an independent with agency, and dogs as politicised entity. The second subsection will focus on the correlation between normalisation of cruelty, free-ranging dogs and the 'grievable' quality of these narratives as commentaries on animal's death.

Canine Bodies in the Intersection of Socio-Political Contention

Sushil Jana's *The Dogs (Kukur)* and Abu Kaysar's *Lutfer Rahaman's Dog (Lutfer Rahamaner Kukur)* inhabit different time zones, when contextualised in historical timeframe. Both these stories are originally written in Bengali, and all the translations cited here, are done by me. Published in August, 1963, Sushil Jana's *The Dogs* is an unusual take on the metaphorical rendition of dogs in mainstream literature. It is inherently rooted in the anthropocentric perspective on animal lives and their entanglements with humans.¹⁰³ Although the text does not mention anywhere explicitly, yet following the cues of the both despairing and desperate scenarios rendered in this

¹⁰³ Justyna Stępień, "Unfolding Human/Nonhuman Animal Entanglements," in *Posthuman and Nonhuman Entanglements in Contemporary Art and the Body* (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis, 2022), 43–68.

bleak story, the narrative is assumed to be set against the backdrop of the Bengal Famine of 1943. The dominant themes of hunger and violence merge with a visualisation of ruthless competition of existence in a multispecies angle. Abu *Kaysar's Lutfer Rahaman's Dog*, is set during the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971. These two stories capture crucial moments of political upheavals and zoom in onto the repercussions of these volatile socio-historical ruptures in animal lives. Through these two stories, I argue that politically volatile situations not only affect human lives but also intrudes into other forms of life with its unconscionable aggression and cruelty. Animal subjects, here specifically canine subjects, are reduced to either a mere externalisation of human violence or fall prey to it. But in both cases, they are relegated to a position of forced violence.

The 1940s was a politically violent period in the history of India. The famine of Bengal, the communal riots and the Independence of India, collectively created a social scenario which was fraught with massive transformation and intense political struggles. During this time of the Great Famine, and the consequent communalism and Partition, there are a few stories in South Asian literature, which shed light on the plight and sufferings of the animals, caught between their geo-political space and human violence. *The White Horse (Shada Ghora)* by Ramesh Chandra Sen, Sadat Hasan Manto's *The Dog of Tithwal (Tithwal ke Kutte)*, are the most notable ones in this topic. Both these stories are narrated where the animal characters are the ones being observed; their vulnerable position is accentuated with their own lack of comprehensive understanding of the cruelties surrounding them.

The Dogs (Kukur) by Sushil Jana, gives a distinct rendition of free-ranging dogs. In its treatment, dogs transition from free-ranging 'community animals' to that of violent, feral ones comes in full circle while underscoring the degree of violence and systemic

deprivation of human very subtly with the background of story. *The Dogs (Kukur)*, as a story, presents the equable, parallel condition that not only humans but also urban animals would face in an extreme scenario. In many ways, my first reading of this particular story reminded me of the iconic first few shots from that animated film, *Waltz with Bashir*.¹⁰⁴ In a culture that had nurtured a longstanding negative sentiment towards street dogs, it is the easiest to demonise them in a terrible light. Sushil Jana's story is rooted in this anti-animal sentiment and anchors it with the contemporary desperate situations which emerged out of the Great Bengal Famine of the 1940s. In this story, the narrative performs two purposes simultaneously; one is dehumanizing the human characters and the other is sketching the nonhuman subjects in an extremely ruthless presentiment. The title in the symbolic level, erases the species-specific boundary line between canines and humans. In an unconventional narrative strategy, the readers are made to witness experiences which evoke very primal, instinctive and violent aspects of the characters. The visual image of a pack of hungry dogs is a cultural and societal construction. Our linguistic system is fraught with a subdued yet pervasive hatred towards animal individuals. Dogs have always been associated with transgressive, emotionally violent aspects of human characters. In our cultural stereotypes, the colloquial proverbs or expressions of transgressive adjectives articulate this subversive construction of dogs within human society. Cur, mongrel, 'gone to the dogs', 'boot-licking dogs', 'being chased or hunted down by dogs', all these expressions articulate the deep-seated fear and propensity towards violence in human nature superimposed onto canine bodies. Following the explanation of Kayleah Farist's construction of 'stigmatised identities', I intend to reappropriate Ervin Goffman's definition of 'stigmatised

¹⁰⁴ *Waltz with Bashir*, directed by Ari Folman and David Polonsky (Culver City, California: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2009).

individual' onto the strategic construction of aggressive canine characters in Jana's story.¹⁰⁵

An informed reading of dog's cultural representation always hinges upon these polarised notions between cruelty and aggression on one side of the scale, while balancing the intuitive empathy and faithfulness on the other side of the spectrum. The great Nineteenth Century was the high time which expressed this polarity with a proliferation of canine characters in literature and cultural media.¹⁰⁶ In this South Asian Cultures also, we find a distinct ambivalence in the perception of canine image. David Gordon notes that dogs used to be represented with the purity of the sacrificial animal, at the same time were relegated to the socially unacceptable transgressive strata. But they were always connected with death and afterlife.¹⁰⁷

Sushil Jana was one of the influential writers in Bengali literature during 1940s and 1950s. He also had a warm relationship with Manik Bandyopadhyay. Sushil Jana's own active participation in the Communist Party and deeply informed empathy with the farmers and peasants of 40th and 50th decades in the Indian political scenario, have influenced his works to a great extent. Most of his stories centre around the ugly, nightmarish reality of 1940s in Bengal. His first collection of stories *Padachinha (The Footprints)* was published in 1944. The other notable works of Sushil Jana are *Sheola (Algae)* (1946), *Gram Nagar (Village and City)* (1953), *Dwitiya Jiban (Second Life)* (1957), *Chirodiner Kahini (Eternal Saga of Everyday Life)* (1957), *Shreshtha Galpa (Collection of Best Stories)* (1963) and *Nagare Prantore (From Urbanity to the*

¹⁰⁵ Kayleah Alicia Farist, "Zoomorphic 'Others': The Animalization of Stigma in Modern Literature", Masters' Diss. (Emory University, 2018), 2; Erving Goffman, "Stigma and Social Identity," in *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (London: Penguin, 1963), 5.

¹⁰⁶ Grace Moore, "Beastly Criminals and Criminal Beasts: Stray Women and Stray Dogs in *Oliver Twist*,"; Harriet Ritvo; *Victorian Dogs Victorian Men; Dogs and Genre in the Nineteenth Century literature*

¹⁰⁷ David Gordon White, "Dogs Die," *History of Religions* 28, no. 4 (May 1989): 283–303, <https://doi.org/10.1086/463162>.

Wilderness) (1983). This story, *The Dogs (Kukur)* originally published in the collection named *Padachinha*, is taken from the collection of stories, *Shreshtha Galpa*, later published in 1963.

Sushil Jana's *The Dogs* is the first story in his collection of short stories. It centres around three human characters who are trying to eke out their survival against the backdrop of The Great Bengal Famine of 1943. The character of Ismail is that of a corrupt, efficient, and ruthless inspector, who hoards rice in the godown adjacent to the local police station. Madhab, one of the countless protesters, who actively participated in the extremist Swadeshi movement by setting fire in his local police stations and in the armed guerrilla wars against the colonial Britishers in his own native village, came to Ishmail asking for some extra menial work, to support him and his family. The story starts with the barking of dogs, stray dogs who were feeding on the bodies of starved humans on the open streets during night. In the course of the story, there is a pervading presence of street dogs, but not in a canine-human mutually, cohesive, friendly interspecies way. Madhab had a difficult life- he lost one of his legs during one of those armed uprisings, fled from home for a considerable time and came to a different village to survive. His wife, Mayna also had to leave their native village in search of food with their only child. The story recounts a series of narratives which weaves on the notion of mutually transactional exploitation in every way. Mayna allows herself to be exploited in the hands of Ishmail under the illusion of a limited safety. Madhab and Mayna scheme a plan of stealing rice from this strictly guarded godown. The first shocking moment arrived with the rendition of silently waiting Madhab while their child was bitten by dogs, in his full knowledge. The climax of the story takes us, to the stumbled figure of Madhab under the attacks of a pack of street dogs in the night. The narrative of the story has a circular curve; it starts with a very graphic description of street dogs feasting on dead

humans on the open streets. At the end also, we find Ishmail, standing spellbound under a poignant ethical question- whom he should shoot, the dogs or the humans who would try to steal his hoarded food. Canines and humans, they exist together, fight for their survival together and also with each other.

The story repeatedly hints at the animalised appearance of human characters. In the light of the torch, in the darkness of the night, the bodies of humans and of dogs are inseparable:

Light from their torches pierced the deep darkness. Light fell on some moving bodies; some dogs quickly shifted from light to darkness. A woman's half-eaten corpse was lying there. Ishmail and his colleagues could recognise here. Wasn't it that mute old woman, who used to sit in front of the police station, and let out a peculiar shriek time to time. "That old hag just had to die here!"(Jana, 9)¹⁰⁸

In a dystopian world, ragged with everyday violence, and constant pangs of hunger, humans and animals, their perception gets limited to the basic mode survival:

Ishmail's voice rings with contempt, "From tomorrow, my duty will be to kill these dogs! SDO gave the order today. Just Kill these DOGS!"

Truly, these dogs are getting dangerous every day. There is no food, no rice anywhere in villages. Cities are always very tough anyway- people are not wasting even a morsel. Who will give them food now? The malnourished, starved bodies of people! Now, they have become the food for these beasts. May be the taste of human flesh is making these dogs really rogue- they roam everywhere now. If deprived off the dead, they can even pounce on the living ones too. (Jana, 11).¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Sushil Jana, "Kukur," in *Sushil Janar Shrestho Galpa* (Kolkata: Bookmark Prakashan, 1963), 9.

¹⁰⁹ Jana, *Kukur*, 11.

The dogs becoming vicious and uncontrollable is an image that is culturally potent. But, one aspect of this image always gets overlooked. These dogs, the street dogs of India, are usually friendly and submissive in nature.¹¹⁰ The degree of extreme hunger and cruelty bring this type of behavioural changes in them. In this connection, I also intend to bring another point of reference. In analysing the entanglements of cultural perceptions, racism and animal's presence in the cities, Efe Khayyat gave a detailed socio-historical observation on the mass extermination of dogs of Istanbul in 1909. Khayyat succinctly cites the evocative illustrations of Georges Goursat's aka SEM's essay *L'île aux Chiens*, which captured the extremely harsh conditions that the deposed dogs were exposed to in that barren island of Hayirsiz Ada in the middle of the Marmara Sea where, "they suffered extreme exposure to sun and dehydration, most of them slowly starving to death after eating each other for a while".¹¹¹ The deprivation of fundamental necessities of life for these animals is vividly portrayed in Goursat's book. This book also narrates in great detail when Goursat went to visit them in a boat, an episode, which Khayyat directly quotes in her article:

A pitiful horde looking for rescue jumps into the water when Goursat's boat approaches the island. The dogs even follow the boat in the sea as Goursat and his company leave, an English woman on board screaming: "Those poor dogs ought to be killed! Kill them, I beg you!" (48, 56). Goursat tells us that the dogs followed them at the sea, most of them ending up getting killed by the propeller of their boat. (Khayyat, 80).¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Narayanan, *Street Dogs*, 484.

¹¹¹ Efe Khayyat, "the Turks that Therefore I Follow," in *Postcolonial Animalities*, ed. Suvadip Sinha and Amit R. Baishya (New York: Routledge, 2020), 77.

¹¹² Khayyat, *the Turks that Therefore I Follow*, 80.

One can counter argue that in this historical narrative, dogs are the passive ones, they are reduced to recipient side of the human intolerance towards any other forms of life within human habitat. I intend to respond to it by pointing out that there is a basic human tendency to mark any other individual human or canine, who are palpably different, as intruders in cultural politics. In terms of same species, it can be racially others, or the discriminations based on ability, gender or sexual preferences. In terms of other forms of life, it can be dogs, cats, foxes or sparrows, a person on whom the onus of intrusion and illegitimisation of their presence can be ascribed.¹¹³ The victimisation of both ordinary human individuals and the starved canines in a hunger fraught cityscape blurs the species-specific demarcation. Human beings' innate distrust and superiority complex figures most profoundly in 'animalistic dehumanisation' of human beings. Quiamzade and Lalot have noted the intrinsic correlation between animalisation, dehumanisation and racism:

From the colonisation of Aboriginal, Native Americans, or African lands before the 20th century, to the direct extermination of the Jews before and during the Second World War, examples of animalistic dehumanisation of those who were displaced or eliminated are manifold. (Quiamzade and Lalot, 02).¹¹⁴

The animalisation of human beings is constructed on the foundation of human superiority over other species of beings. In the portrayal of Madhab, who lost the functionality of one leg, the silhouettes of his disabled body with unkempt hair are outlined with an animality, which is utterly palpable yet indescribable in words. He

¹¹³ Thomas P. Berstein, "Mao Zedong and the Famine of 1959-60: A Study in Wilfulness," *The China Quarterly* 86 (June 2006): 421–45, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20192620>.

¹¹⁴ Alain Quiamzade and Fanny Lalot, "Animalistic Dehumanisation as a Social Influence Strategy," *Frontiers in Psychology*, January 11, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.999959>, 2.

himself is far too aware of his own deprived personhood in the hands of powerful men like Ishmail:

Right at this moment, Madhab is taken aback with sounds of bullets. Looking up, he is seeing dogs are falling one after another on the ground, oops, sorry not on the ground, on the half-eaten corpses of people, and one of those guards whom he saw in the morning, seems to be coming towards him with a gun. Ishmail is also coming with a few other guards. What if they kill him right now? What if Madhab also gets murdered like *these dogs* by these people? For a few moments, he keeps looking at them. A strange despair engulfs him from within- he is not capable enough to save himself from these people. But he started limping again- a blind, dogged hunger for life pushes him to move forward. A life which is not worth living, yet which must be lived. (Jana, 14) ¹¹⁵

Madhab is completely aware that people like him are as expendable in the eyes of the established law and its keepers, as dogs of the streets. And here the story transcends the superficial animal symbolisation of speciesist cultural construct, and questions the supremacist, speciesist, racist ideology of the mainstream culture. In the oft-quoted words of Winston Churchill, the animality of Indians of this time, is materially realised in this story. Winston is said to have spoken, "I hate Indians. They are beastly people with a beastly religion. The famine was their own fault for breeding like rabbits".¹¹⁶ The typical depiction of Indians as unrefined sensualists may be taken as a humanised version of public detest for unwanted canine populations in several major cities. Narayanan, Khayyat, Srinivasan each, in their own distinct ways have emphasised on this

¹¹⁵ Jana, *Kukur*, 14.

¹¹⁶ S D Choudhury, "The Bengal Famine of 1943: Misfortune or Imperial Schema," *Cognizance Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies* 1, no. 5 (May 30, 2021): 15–21, <https://doi.org/10.47760/cognizance.2021.v01i05.002>.

supremacist, speciesist attitudes taken against urban canines. The constructed narrative of a racially inferior race of humans is interlinked and appropriated with the construction of illegitimisation of urban canines in the mainstream cultural ethos. Madhab's depiction in this story verges on that type, which I intend to call as 'vulnerable animality':

After scampering through the dustbins, Madhab stealthily roams around the godown. His mind is completely disoriented- so many thoughts, so many fears haunt him always! Oh, God! If only he could enter inside the godown. So much food, so much rice! His ribs could be seen clearly, even in this darkness. They are getting prominent each day. With the wild unkempt, unshaven face, he looks like a wild animal, some type of beast. Suddenly, one night, his eyes also flashed like those of the animals. He was standing in the dark- he saw Ishmail's torch flashed on Mayna's face. His gaze followed them, when she was laying their three years old sleeping child under the shade of a shop. His eyes also followed them in stealth when Mayna and Ishmail went inside the room together (Jana, 15).¹¹⁷

Vulnerable animality is pervasive in this story. Here the street dogs are equally vulnerable in the hands of humans, who consider them as illegitimate, unwanted entities in the human landscape. Likewise, Madhab, Mayna and underprivileged people like them are also victimised in the complex power dynamics of established social hierarchy. Ishmail is also caught in this web of power when he finds himself in a professionally and socially inferior position of people like the Sub-Divisional Officer and Ganesh Prasad. Madhab's unimaginable silence and the decision not to intervene while his child was being mauled by the dogs, or Mayna's decision of involvement in a sordid exploitative relationship with Ishmail, all these actions could be explained through the lenses of excruciating survival mechanism, a specific yet dire condition, that Primo Levi termed

¹¹⁷ Jana, *Kukur*, 15.

as 'gray zone'.¹¹⁸ I would like to argue that this extreme survival mechanism should be seen considered not only within humans, but it can also be as expansive and as inclusive amongst other-than-human animals too. For this purpose, I cited Goursat's record of canine behaviours in the island of dogs before. The story makes the readers ponder over a bleak dilemma, which also underscores the sinister trajectory of the human tendency to treat vulnerable beings, irrespective of their species in an equally expendable manner:

Holding the gun in one hand, Ishmail moves forward towards the street. A sack of rice is lying by the side. And? For a few moments, an official instruction flashed in his mind. Growls of a few dogs and an individual, a human caught between their teeth. Their shrieks and growls are merging. SDO's instruction... dogs and humans... and death! Bodies...corpses...cadavers. Ishmail feels dizzy for a moment. It freezes him. He stands there, holding the gun. Whom should he shoot? Dogs or that guy? Truly, *whom* he should shoot right now? *Should* he shoot anyone at all? ...Nope, this time too, he finds himself wrecked in this chilling indecision. (Jana, 18)¹¹⁹

The evocative visceral violence parallels the invisible violence in the cultural politics, which functions as a sovereign force, by insinuating, materialising, and enabling a discrimination and deprivation in the mass scale. This proliferation of actual bodies, humans and canines both, reminds us of the visual depiction of etchings and sketches by artists and activists of this time. The story captures the visceral desperation in the graphic yet precise description of Madhab's stumble to the ground and being attacked by the stray dogs; something in this scene, some imageries from this short story remind us of the sketches on famine by Chittaprosad Bhattacharya and Zainul Abedin. This story almost

¹¹⁸ Primo Levi, "The Grey Zone," in *The Drowned and the Saved*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal (London: Michael Joesph, 1988), 22–51.

¹¹⁹ Jana, *Kukur*, 18.

becomes a literal articulation of one of the most haunting lines penned by an artist, who was capturing these moments of abysmal darkness in the history of civilisation:

Bodies that yesterday fought for our freedom and today are being literally eaten by dogs and vultures. Is this the tribute a nation pays to its fighters?
(Bhattacharya)

These lines are written by Chittaprosad Bhattacharya in his *Hungry Bengal: A Tour through Midnapore District*, which came out as a series of visual testament to the famine-stricken lands of Midnapore of November, 1943, as pointed out by Natasha Ginwala.¹²⁰ One of the most unforgettable sketches is that of a child named Kshetramohan Naik, whose body was lying amidst a pack of vultures and stray dogs, captioned by the above line written by the artist himself.¹²¹ In a few of his sketches of *Famine Series* by Zainul Abedin, we come across bony, extremely impoverished figures of humans, sharing their physical space with equally malnourished figures of street dogs and other scavenging birds, like crows or vultures.¹²²

I would also intend to point at another aspect of these striking images. The predominance of physicality in these works. Both this particular short story and these sketches, underscores the inescapable nightmarish reality, which is all too real and unutterable in linguistic medium. The repeated harping on the word, 'corpse', 'dead bodies' and the killing of dogs bring into the context another coeval short story. Saadat Hasan Manto's *The Dog of Tithwal* that centres around a stray, nameless dog coming in the border area of India and Pakistan, at the time of partition. Extension of political

¹²⁰ Natasha Ginwala, "So Many Hungers," *Documenta14: South Magazine*, no. 8 (2017), https://www.documenta14.de/en/south/888_so_many_hungers.

¹²¹ "Depiction of the Bengal Famine in the Nationalist Art: Chittaprosad Bhattacharya," *Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav: Govt of India, Ministry of Culture*, October 23, 2023, <https://amritmahotsav.nic.in/district-repository-detail.htm?25179>.

¹²² Ginwala, *So Many Hungers*.

identity that humans were coerced to carry with them also falls on this canine character. Initially nameless, the naming of the dog also becomes a political irony. An affectionate, rootless dog is alternately given Indian and Pakistani names, as a living venting ground for humans with their own political identities. The death of the dog also carries an intrinsic duality- whether it can be considered a dog's death or a martyr's sacrifice. Amit R Baishya contends that dog's death in this text becomes an articulation of Agamben's *homines sacri*, 'an entity that can be killed but not sacrificed.'¹²³ The characters, both canines and humans of Jana's story too, are pushed into this abysmal 'ungrievable' status, where they are killable, expendable but not to be mourned. The dead child of Madhab and Mayna, and later on Madhab himself, along with all those dogs hunted down by Ishmail, all together share this strange philosophical no-man's land, where they are alive beings, persons, yet without having the capacity to expect mourning and integrity from others. I intend to reassert Baishya's argument here that dogs in literature should be viewed in complete literal physicality instead of reducing them to the mere allegorical representation of human condition.

In their acute portrayal of aggression and hunger, the dogs in this story would remind one of the scavenging characteristics at its metaphorically extreme angst. But when interpreted in the deeper level, dogs represent the external projection of the exploited humanity at its utter extreme, a point where the species-specific dimensions break and merge into each other. In an anthropocentric world, as a catastrophe created by humans, these dogs have been forced into this extreme point of life. Street dogs of Bengal became another site of colonialism during the British Period. The regular, annual dog pogroms pushed their cultural perception towards the relegation of illegitimate

¹²³ Amit R. Baishya, "Ethics and Politics of Postcolonial Animalities," in *Postcolonial Animalities*, ed. Suvadip Sinha and Amit R. Baishya (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis, 2020), 50.

beings.¹²⁴ In the superficial level, this story can appear as a literal and visual representation of hungry dogs against humans in their metaphorical embodiments. But by presenting humans and dogs in same level, fighting for their survival, pitted against each other in both spatial and symbolical dimension, this story weaves a narrative subversion; this subversion is not only limited towards the established status quo, between the privileged and the dispossessed, but also the more sinister ramifications of multispecies violence and deprivation, which takes place in a dystopian scenario.¹²⁵ The fear coercing to silence the voice of Madhab even at the moments of his child's death, articulates the state of absolute necessity of survival, which robs of humans from their animalistic instinctive characteristic and reduces dogs into an unrecognisable, ubiquitous extended metaphor of humanity, in its inherently cruel form. My use of the word, 'animalistic' here is deliberate, as nonhuman beings react and respond to extreme situations with instinct, hence a mother animal would have immediately jumped to the rescue of her child, unlike Madhab here.

From the socio-historical context, the story is located at a juncture of colonial biopower and the reduction of people into mere numbers. Michel Foucault coined this term 'biopolitics' as 'the stabled management of life, death, and biological being a form of politics that placed human life at the very centre of its calculations'.¹²⁶ Foucault explained that biopower is simply the ability of 'exposing someone to death, increasing

¹²⁴ Swatilekha Maity, "Footprints in the Mud: Animal Presence, Metropolis and Rise of Animal Rights in Colonial India.," in *Situations and Contexts: Narratives on Nineteenth Century Bengal*, ed. Prasanta Ray (Kolkata: Hyphen, 2022), 27–54.

¹²⁵ Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, "Introduction: Zoocriticism and the Postcolonial," in *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis, 2010), 136.

¹²⁶ Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, and Population. Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-1978* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

the risk of death for some other people, or simply, political death, expulsion, rejection and so on'.¹²⁷

Both humans and canines are exploited and relegated to a such a degree of deprivation that aggression becomes normalised. Nicole Shukin notes the correlation between the 'racialised other' in human with the instinctive animal individuals within human society.¹²⁸ The story presents a heterogenous yet highly contented space by narrativising the multispecies competition for food in a poignant stroke; it emerges as a palpable visualisation of Giorgio Agamben's 'bare life'.¹²⁹ While analysing the ancient Greek notion of life, Agamben pointed out two distinct notions of life. To quote Agamben here:

The Greeks had no single term to express what we mean by the word "life".

They used two terms that, although traceable to a common etymological root, are semantically and morphologically distinct: *zoē*, which expressed the simple fact of living common to all living beings (animals, men, or gods), and *bios*, which indicated a form or way of living proper to an individual or a group. (Agamben)¹³⁰

The power dynamic operates in such a level, that a section of humans along with other-than-human animals are coerced into a lifestyle which engages them with security and struggle for survival and thus entrap them in that 'bare life', incapable of experiencing the *bios*. By pushing a section of humans or a section of other species of animals into that bare form of existence, the hegemony exercises an absolute power. This exercising and executive power transcends and governs across species-specific boundary. In this

¹²⁷ Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the College de France, 1975-76*. (New York: Picador, 2003), 256.

¹²⁸ Nicole Shukin, "Introduction: New Life Forms and Functions of Fetishism," in *Animal Capital: Rendering Life in Biopolitical Times* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 10.

¹²⁹ Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, "Introduction: Zoocriticism and the Postcolonial," in *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis, 2010), 136.

¹³⁰ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

connection I intend to cite another example of this acute form of hunger, that animals and humans irrespective of their species, had undergone through during the Bengal Famine of 1943. In one of the stories, named *Harh (Bone)* by Narayan Gangopadhyay, the narrator after a futile conversation with an elite upper class, privileged individual, notices an extremely malnourished abject silhouette of a mother dog with her puppy sucking a dry, old bone in the dustbin.¹³¹ By positing side by side the abject, utterly nightmarish life situations of both canines and humans, these stories draw a contour of the multispecies impacts of the famine in the history of South Asia. They function as representative narratives which demonstrate the visceral cruelties perpetrated by the hierarchical dominant culture on the ones, who are deemed to be non-citizens within this geo-political space.

Death is an Obstinate Dog: *Lutfer Rahamaner Kukur* and Loyalty in the Times of Strife

Death is the intersectional motif that threads all the texts in this chapter. In the previous subsection, I have discussed on the comparable, crucial situations of humans and canines, and how both their lives and survival get intricately linked with each other in a dystopic world. This section will focus on the death of the animal, more specifically, death of the dog from a varied perspectival angle, which can recognise the influences of cultural repercussions, societal conditioning, scientific awareness on canine behaviours and the metaphorical angles which are embedded in those narratives. South Asian literature is fraught with animal-human ambivalences. In this regard, what do these stories constitute separately as well as together in the canonical structure of South Asia? In this subsection, I intend to locate these texts within the ambit of our understanding of

¹³¹ Narayan Gangopadhyay, "Harh," in *Bangla Sahitya Net*, n.d., <https://banglasahitya.net/%E0%A6%B9%E0%A6%BE%E0%A6%81%E0%A7%9C-narayan-gangopadhyay/>.

'natural' death and enabling of deathlike situations, which we, as a species, have decidedly perpetuated over a long period of time. I intend to see why canine characters in most stories fit so well with this narrative of death?

When we look at the cultural representation of dogs in South Asian Literature, at least a major section of that, is pervaded with an underlying notion of dying. These two texts approach the death of dogs in literature from two different angles. One exposes how animals are perceived not only from an essentially speciesist perspective, but also carries within their presence the 'traces' of associative human identities. To simplify this situation, it would be better to put the specific position of animal in the first story in the context. Most animals, who appear and are represented in literature, appear in connection with some form of human association. For our canine characters, excluding 'animal writing', readers are not invited generally in independent animal representations in literary and cultural fields. In my search for exclusive animal lives, most of the times we come across a cursory reference to the animal characters, linguistically, thematically and culturally towards the margin. In such an anthropocentric structure, how do these stories deal with representations of animal's death? What kind of significance they may hold for academic, theoretical, and the discourses of affection and emotion? Why these stories are significant in their relevance to the notions of history of emotion, interspecies relationship, and the spectrum of critical animal studies?

This section intends to function as an investigation into these questions through its explorations of these two texts. Abu Kayser's *Lutfur Rahaman's Dog* is a direct articulation of the ambivalent section of canine-human coexistence during the times of political upheaval. On the other hand, Gadgil's *The Dog Who Runs in Circles* is a take on the death of a dog from a very unique, and strange perspective. I would like to point out that both these stories operate on an individual level, rather than magnifying on the

species-specific issues in a broader parametres. Yet, through the record of these canine individuals' deaths, they construct a paradigm of 'micro-narratives' of animal lives as well.

Abu Kayser's story tells us about an incident which occurred during the Liberation War of Bangladesh in 1971. Against the backdrop of a war torn, traumatised, small town of Bangladesh, the story focusses on a specific day. The significance of the date transports the sense of its historical and political importance, but it also, simultaneously, the date only becomes important when it is commented along with the incident itself. The story constructs spatial aspect of this small town named Padmapukur as a representative of 'zoöpolis'.¹³² This precise short story exposes the moment of a killing, the killing of a dog, who was left behind. The narrative introduces this canine character in the very beginning of the story as a 'faithful' companion and then throughout the entire course the story, the plot details the build-up of the societal pressure, and violence. It culminates with the dying of the dog, followed by a journalistic commentary on the people who killed the animal. In one of the most vicious genocides in world history, how did the animals fare? The ones who were abandoned, or left behind? Shahriar Kabir notes that:

Between March 25, 1971 and December 16, 1971, Pakistani occupation army and their local collaborators killed 3 million innocent, unarmed people, violated more than a quarter million women; destroyed most of the factories, roads, bridges and culverts, burned houses, engaged in indiscriminate arson and plundering and created such an unbearable situation that 10 million people were forced to leave their country. (Kabir)¹³³

¹³² Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka, *Zoopolis: A Political Theory of Animal Rights* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

¹³³ Shahriar Kabir, "Bangladesh Holocaust of '71," *The Daily Star*, December 5, 2014, <https://www.thedailystar.net/bangladesh-holocaust-of-71-53555>.

The unimaginable cruelty perpetrated at that time, does not stay within the species-specific barriers exclusively. Famines, floods, or man-made calamities like wars or communal riots along with women and children, a majority of domesticated and community animals undergo through a tremendous degree of sufferings. Yet, most scholarly works would exclusively focus on the repercussions in human lives, excluding nonhuman animals within interspecies bonding, out the academic and philosophical inquiries. The records of these other-than-human animals undergoing through massive deplorable living conditions created and enabled by humans, their deaths alongside their human companions or acquaintances, are almost obliterated from the cultural memory. One of the fundamental purposes of this theses is to locate and represent the animal, especially canine presence in the memory of the South Asian literature and culture. The imprints of animals were integrally linked to so many humans, in a multilayered way. The people who were forced to migrate or displaced from their own original places, they had to abandon some of their own domesticated animals. The farm animals, dogs, ducks and other beings who shared spaces and comforted in their own life times with humans. Hilda Keane in her poignant study on the impacts of wars on companion animals during the Second World War, has succinctly pointed out that:

These unremembered events do demonstrate the utter disposability of companion animals in what become constructed as times of human crisis. This war act is "forgotten"- but so too are the subsequent animal-human relationships that grew and developed during the war in which the distinction of killer and victim become blurred into common beings sharing hardship and proving mutual support. (Keane, 5)¹³⁴

¹³⁴ Hilda Keane, "Introducing Animals, Historians, and the 'People's War,' "" in *The Great Cat and Dog Massacre: The Real Story of World War Two's Unknown Tragedy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 5.

Lutfer Rahaman's story is not only a story about the inclusion of the animal lives in the times of political transformations. It is also a story which poignantly puts in place, the loops within the mainstream cultural memory, the part that is allowed to be forgotten. In this very brief story, almost the major part of the plot depicts the ravages perpetrated by the militant group of Pakistan, in a small town outside Dhaka. Kayser strategically starts the story not with human lives, but with an unnamed dog. In the length of five and a half pages, four pages are entirely about the disorienting, violent circumstances of this small town. The story captures the degree of panic and utter confusion, that the inhabitants of this town, that is, the people belonging to or sharing the progressive community as well as ordinary individuals experienced during this time. Overnight, they left their homes, belongings and also other-than-human companions. The military and extremist people from Pakistan Punjab, targeted the inhabitants of this place. While plundering the Bengali people of this town, when they reach a particular person's shop, they had an encounter with this dog. The anthropocentrism of the text exposes itself by denying an individual specific name of this dog. The dog is introduced by one of the local goons, who was familiar with his human companion. Lutfer Rahaman, the original shop owner to whom the dog belongs to, remains physically absent from the story. He is introduced to the reader, as one of the richest individuals in that town of Padmapukur. It was also narrated that he had an active political involvement in the contemporary turbulent milieu. He shared a very strong anti-Pakistani sentiment, and thus inevitably marking himself in league with the liberals, intellectuals and the progressive group of people, who were against the dictatorship of Pakistan in Bangladesh, erstwhile, East Pakistan.

The dog is not described in minutiae details, yet that lack of description is compensated with the observations of temperament:

Suddenly a loud bark reached them!

From nowhere a very feisty dog jumped into the balcony of the shop and let out a thundering bark! His commanding position made it very clear that he was not going to grant them an iota of this space without a good fight. Initially, the captain of those Punjabis didn't take it as a serious threat at all; he chuckled a bit. Whistling to the dog, he tried to lure him. But, to no avail- the dog is determined in his fixed loyalty. He was not letting anybody pass this place, he was not moving from here either. Captain's whistles and luring was only enraging him more. Moti, the prison-returned goon explained to them in his broken Urdu, "This dog belongs to that Lutfur Rahaman. Remember, that one with pro-liberation sentiment. He left in panic. But I guess, he forgot to take this dog with him. What a situation, bro! his owner is afraid while his dog fears none. But I am telling you! This one is very dangerous. Look, how he jumps and barks. What a terrible beast!" (Kayser, 31)¹³⁵

The shooting of the dog happened within seconds from this moment. The story in an extremely concise form, only constructs the narrative of canicide as the focal range of the repercussions that impacted lives of nonhuman animals in the absence or abandonment of their human companions in times of crisis. From the affective point of view, the story evokes a visceral vulnerability, with its capacity to encompass true vulnerability of these animals' existence. This dog is not like Jhun Jhun of Manto's *The Dog of Tithwal*, neither this was a dog actively engaged in military service. S/he was a domesticated dog, with an unambiguous and crystallised loyalty for his human care giver.

¹³⁵ Abu Kayser, "Lutfur Rahamaner Kukur," in *Muktijuddher Sera Kishor Galpa*, ed. Hasan Hafiz (Dhaka: Siri Prakshan, 2019), 31.

The canine right to live and occupy their own domestic, familiar space is intruded and ruined by humans, who were integrally focussed on the material, and profitable aspect of that space.

From the naming of the story to the description of the central nonhuman character, this story is entirely written from an anthropocentric angle. Yet, the central character demands to be in a direct contrast against the anthropocentric, speciesist backdrop. In spatial- temporal zone, where humans are escaping from their areas, he physically and emotionally occupies the space, and refuses to leave. His instinctive obstinacy in refusing to abandon his physical space, also construes his position as emotionally intuitive yet materialistically immatured narratives of loyal dogs in literature. The story allows several lacunae in structuring this narrative. The readers are not informed whether the dog was temperamentally always feisty or he developed this behavioural pattern due to long term training and cohesion. The story also does not dwell on whether he was intentionally abandoned by his human family or he was forgotten, due to sheer panic and stress. Would he have been dealt in the same way, if had the dog belonged to this military group? Would his position alongside his fellow canines on the street, enable him to survive and stay hidden from these humans?

I intentionally would not limit the narrative in only its symbolical representation of dogged faithfulness and loyalty to the land, Courage. The death of the dog in its acuteness foregrounds the actuality of animal's presence in flesh and blood in our world. The inevitable shape of increasing vulnerability of nonhuman animals, the aggravating anger and cruelty of humans towards these other-than-human animals on the basis of human superimposition of politicisation on animal individuals, underscores the extent of human encroachment into animal lives. In this connection, two other stories are relatable here. One is a Punjabi short story named *I Am Feeling Fine Now*, written by Waryam Singh

Sandhu, while the other is an Assamese story by Arupa Patangia Kalita's *Bonjui* (*Wildfire*). In the first story, the readers are shown a moment of crisis that involves the lives of animals and humans in an increasingly suffocating political unrest. Written during the Khalistan unrest, a Sikh farmer, Joginder shared an intense filial affection towards his family dog, Tommy, whom he had to kill. The other Sikhs in his community, whose nocturnal activities were interrupted by Tommy's loud bark, were forced into endorsing this killing actively, despite their individual personal affection for him. To the state-sponsored surveillance against these sections of people, thus made Tommy a target of both these community members as well as other administrative bodies. The story also links how family dogs, community dogs had to be '*put down to sleep*', a euphemism of killing them to keep humans safe from another section of people.¹³⁶ Suvadip Sinha, in his penetrative analysis rightfully placed Tommy's physical existence woven in the quagmires of human politics:

If the figure of *homines sacri*, or lives reduced to the level of bare life, as Agamben theorizes it, gets thrown out of the realm of the political, the body of Tommy, living and dead, in Sandhu's story is squarely located within the immediate realm of politics...For days after Tommy's death, Joginder is haunted by the stench of Tommy's rotting dead body. He would often fail to distinguish that smell from that of "burnt dead human flesh" (97). The use of this spectral olfactory register, triggered by the stench of dead human and nonhuman animals alike, provokes us to mourn death of Tommy and of those perished because of state-sponsored atrocities simultaneously. Taking Tommy's life as grievable prevents us from rendering it as simply bare life. (Sinha, 114)¹³⁷

¹³⁶ Waryam Singh Sandhu, "I Am Feeling Fine Now," in *The Fourth Dimension and Other Stories*, trans. Akshey Kumar (Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2005), 46–99.

¹³⁷ Suvadip Sinha, "Pariah Dogs- Precarious Cohabitation," in *Postcolonial Animalities*, ed. Suvadip Sinha and Amit R. Baishya (New York: Routledge, 2020), 114.

Taking cue from Sinha's argument, I intend to reassert that *Lutfer Rahaman's Dog* also engenders a counter narrative against the anthropocentric mainstream literary current, by pushing into the centre the notions of unrecognised, uncountable loss of animal lives, caught at the juncture of political atrocities, speciesist supremacy and human tendency to obliterate their memories. Both stories of Kayser and Sandhu are written from an anthropocentric angle. On the other hand, *Bonjui (Wildfire)* is entirely from the animal's perspective. The story is narrated by an omniscient, third-person narrator. A nameless, stray, free dog finds himself in the forest regions of Assam, and as his life progresses, he would come to assist people in uniform, the militaries. Being unable to comprehend the differences between extremist terrorist groups and militaries, he would serve and stay loyal to two sides equally; even came to save one team eventually. The story ends with this dog catches fire in an explosion, which also killed his current human companions. Dhurjyoti Kalita mentions in his analysis of this story that it creates the intersectional space between Foucault's biopolitics with Mbembe's necropolitics, in the boundary between nonhuman lives with human lives.¹³⁸ Following Sinha's analysis, I would like to point out that, the dog of Lutfer Rahaman, an absentee human care-giver, his identity has shifted into the category of individuals, who are denominated in a specific legal terminology according to Dayan. Colin Dayan mapped the 'disabling capacity' of law in making slaves, animals, criminal, and detainees:

Legal thought relied on a set of fictions that rendered the meaning of persons shifting and tentative: whether in creating slaves as person in law and criminals as dead

¹³⁸ Dhurjyoti Kalita, "Non-Human Vitalities: Necropolitics and Interspecies Relationality in Arupa Patangia Kalita's Fictions," *Academia.Edu*, n.d., https://www.academia.edu/39650461/Non_human_Vitalities_Necropolitics_and_Interspecies_Relationality_in_Arupa_Patangia_Kalitas_Fictions.

in law, or in the perpetual re-creation of the rightless entity. The medieval fiction of civil death lives on in the present. (Dayan, xii)¹³⁹

The dog by virtue of being associated with Lutfur Rahaman, a person belonging to the political opposition, inadvertently is rendered within the corpus of '*negative personhood*' in the terminology of Dayan, in the eyes of the colonising Pakistani militant group, and hence the dog was outside the limits of the exercising, totalitarian authority law, consequently culminated in an illegitimate being, who must be put to death. The countless urban canines, who were victims of mass slaughter in different cities of Bangladesh, India, Bhutan and in other South Asian countries, all of them can be considered under the lenses of this '*negative personhood*', deprived from the rights to live in human habitats.¹⁴⁰ Nabarun Bhattacharya in his *Lubdhak* had articulated this aspect of urban canines' lives.¹⁴¹ Sinha while exploring *Lubdhak*, also posits them under these illegitimised beings within a system that only regards humans as legitimised entities in urban landscape.¹⁴² By positioning these dogs with their vulnerability of existence in the hands of humans, these stories construct a pattern of canine-human relationships from

¹³⁹ Colin Dayan, "Preface," in *Law Is a White Dog - How Legal Rituals Make and Unmake Persons* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), xii.

¹⁴⁰ Sajjad Hossain, "Dhaka's Canine Conundrum," *The Daily Star*, October 1, 2022, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/dhakas-canine-conundrum-3132141>; Masud M A et al., "Dog Rabies in Dhaka, Bangladesh, and Implications for Control," *Processes* 8, no. 11 (November 21, 2020): 1513, <https://doi.org/10.3390/pr8111513>; "The End of Dog Culling in Dhaka, Bangladesh," *CABI Digital Library* (blog), January 23, 2012, <https://www.cabidigitallibrary.org/do/10.5555/collection-news-22063>; "It's Men vs Dogs in Kerala as Incidents of Dogs Bite and Culling Go Up," *Livemint*, September 16, 2022, <https://www.livemint.com/news/india/its-men-vs-dogs-in-kerala-as-incidents-of-dogs-bite-and-culling-go-up-11663300220961.html>; Donita Jose, "CCTV Footage Reveals How 150 Dogs Were Culled in Cold Blood," *The Times of India*, June 2, 2023, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/hyderabad/cctv-footage-reveals-how-150-dogs-were-culled-in-cold-blood/articleshow/64357038.cms>; Basant Sharma et al., "Reemergence of Rabies in Chhukha District, Bhutan, 2008," *Emerging Infectious Diseases* 16, no. 12 (December 2010): 1925–30, <https://doi.org/10.3201/eid1612.100958>;

¹⁴¹ Nabarun Bhattacharya, "Lubdhak," in *Dashti Upanyas* (Kolkata: Dey's Publication, 2017), 381–416.

¹⁴² Suvadip Sinha, "Pariah Dogs- Precarious Cohabitation," in *Postcolonial Animalities*, ed. Suvadip Sinha and Amit R. Baishya (New York: Routledge, 2020), 116; Suvadip Sinha, "Toward a Stray Manifesto," in *Entangled Fictions: Nonhuman Animals in an Indian World* (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis, 2023), 120–47.

the affective perception in the intersections of interspecies understanding and politicisation of animal lives.

All Those Dogs that Nobody Remembers: Canine Gaze and Death in Gangadhar Gadgil's *The Dog Who ran in Circles*

I said to his teacher, "the fault entirely is mine,
Were those poems written by someone from his world,
Someone who could hold the rhythms of beetles in his lines,
He would have known those poems by heart.
Have I ever been able to write a confession of a frog,
Or even to articulate the sublime tragedy of that street dog?"

Chheleta (That Boy) by Rabindranath Tagore.¹⁴³

I intend to begin this section of the chapter, with the reference to this sublime tragedy of a street dog. What kind of importance South Asian Literature reserves for the treatment of death of animals in its corpus? How it is treated in popular culture? And why it is related intrinsically to the fundamental argument of this thesis? I argue that by tracking the points of the evolution of canine-human relationship, one can draw a trajectory of a tolerant, multispecies ethnography in South Asian culture. Unlike the other two stories of this chapter, Gangadhar Gadgil's story articulates this crisis of animal lives in their utter vulnerability within an indifferent societal conditioning with acute poignancy. *The Dog Who Runs in Circles* narrates the incident of one day, when the

¹⁴³ Rabindranath Tagore, "Chheleta," in *Punashcha* (Shantiniketan: Shantiniketan Press, 1932), 40–46.

narrator had a chance encounter with an injured dog on the street. The story documents the responses of random people and the residents of the place to this injured dog. The unknowability of an animal's experience is an area which has been explored from multiple perspectives before. The story takes a subversive stance by registering the injury suffered by a random street dog and positioning that in the midst of moving crowds of humans and making them actually *witness* it. I will argue that in an understated manner, the story's subversive animal poetics hinges on its insistence on the notion of becoming the witness and the governing take of visibility. The crux of the narrative is embedded in its emphasis on this visibility of animal suffering within an anthropocentric space, and thus it forms a different kind of ground towards acknowledging and respecting the 'animal space'.

With the representation of canine deaths and that too making it as the central theme of a work, this story necessitates a space of acknowledging their active presence and relevance in dominant culture. The accident occurring to street animals and subsequent deaths to a great extent, is still perceived as a common occurrence. In public psyche, when a dog or a cat or any animal has an accident in public spaces, one of the most common responses is indifference. It is even more prominent in cases with ordinary street dogs, for their ubiquitousness and ready visibility, renders them a 'dispensable existence' in speciesist narratives. One of the common responses becomes- the utter insignificance of the accident sustained by a street animal. This process of making the sufferings insignificant, is the very first step in making their presence as invisible, and thus creating a forced absence of these animal presences in our culture. Their merging presence in urban South Asian landscape has been in such a level, that only a few people invest any special interest in them, if not out of annoyance or despise. Even a majority of the news media also structure their storylines in a specific manner which would emphasise the

human repercussions of these urban animals, and rarely human impacts in their lives. Just to establish my point here, let me cite some recent headlines which covered the accidents and confrontations between animal and man in urban landscapes. "10% of deaths in road mishaps involve stray animals," "One to two road accidents daily due to stray dogs," - stories like this, including the policy making articles and theoretical, academic investigations into this aspect will prioritise the animal's impacts into human lives and rarely from the other side.¹⁴⁴ A closer look at these stories will underscore the subterranean insistence on not *only* focussing on the human centered narratives in them, but along with this, a deliberate intention of obliterating the animal traces from popular psyche. By not considering the other side of the narrative, these records perform a deliberate, subtle yet effective method of silencing a part of multispecies lineage in the developments of urban cultures. Animals are placed outside the dialogic interactions of common concerns which continue to affect both animal as well as human lives.

The very first reference to the injured canine in this story is also introduced through visual representation. The narrator minutely recounts the memory of this incident through the dog's physicality:

I was seeing a shape, although I did not in the least want to see it. It was out there in the street. A brownish shape- a dog, faded and limp, lying on the street. I

¹⁴⁴ Nitin Jain, "10% of Deaths in Road Mishaps Involve Stray Animals, Says Study," *The Tribune*, November 23, 2023, https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/ludhiana/10-of-deaths-in-road-mishaps-involve-stray-animals-says-study-563702#goog_rewarded; Nida Sayed, "One to Two Road Accidents Daily due to Stray Dogs: CM," *The Times of India*, September 30, 2023, http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/104052003.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst; Dipak K Das, "Stray Animals Second Biggest Reason for Road Accidents, Dogs Account for 58 % of Them Insurance Company Report," *The Times of India*, August 27, 2022, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/stray-animals-second-biggest-reason-for-road-accidents-dogs-account-for-58-of-them-insurance-company-report/articleshow/93812664.cms>; Prakash Kumar Sasmal et al., "A Study of the Pattern of Injuries Sustained from Road Traffic Accidents Caused by Impact with Stray Animals," *Journal of Emergencies, Trauma, and Shock* 14, no. 1 (2021): 23, https://doi.org/10.4103/jets.jets_29_20; Gautam Aredath and Abi T. Vanak, "Navigating the Streets Examining the Legal and Policy Dimensions of Free-Ranging Dog Management in India," *Indian Public Policy Review* 4, no. 6 (November 30, 2023): 66–87, <https://doi.org/10.55763/ippr.2023.04.06.004>.

couldn't take my eyes off its starved and heaving belly. It heaved in quick spasms, as if it wanted to get the whole thing over and done with. The dog lay still in the midst of the endless scribble of traffic and movement on the street. Possibly it had bumped against a passing car and had fainted. (Gadgil, 40)¹⁴⁵

It is noteworthy that the story is not starting with a conscious intention of making the animal visible. The narration is dispassionate and cursorily sympathetic. An intricate web of references is unintentionally woven within that phrase, its 'starved and heaving belly', a significant pointer on so many aspects of the canine-human interrelationship in that particular locale. The narrative does not answer why the dog's physical health deteriorated in such an extreme condition of malnourishment; neither it allows to glorify this utter poverty, of both physical nourishment and interspecies compassion to a convoluted veneer of sentimentalism. The story anchors our attention to the physical reality of the moment. The crowds are gathered around the gasping body of a random stray dog, some are evidently distressed, some try to help, one of them is asking others to find some arrangements to help the dog. Yet, in the midst of all this, our dispassionate, apparently nonchalant narrator observes the dog's eyes. Here at this particular point, the story creates an intersection of multispecies communication through the exchanges of gaze that transcends across species-specific barriers:

It was a starving, dishevelled dog. It had a pitifully meek expression- the kind of dog that gets in everybody's way and is always kicked. But for its eyes, I wouldn't have looked at it twice. The eyes were moist in a queer way. It wasn't the kind of moistness that calls forth pity, but different. The eyes asked for nothing. In fact, nothing had any meaning for them anymore. They expressed no hunger, no fear.

¹⁴⁵ Gangadhar Gadgil, "The Dog That Ran in Circles," in *The Penguin Book of Modern Indian Short Stories*, ed. Stephen Alter and Wimal Dissanayake (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1989), 40–45.

They had nothing to do any longer with the world of dogs. if they expressed anything at all, it was compassion- the kind one sees in the eyes of a saint...there was something else present, something more substantial and compelling. (Gadgil, 41-42).¹⁴⁶

Looking is intrinsically related to power and agency, and here when the readers are elicited to feel in all its material physicality as well as the import of philosophical significance of a street dog's gaze, the story subtly veers into the active registering of animal presence in our culture. Throughout this subsection, I will continue to address the central canine individual as the 'street dog' or 'a stray' in order to invite the analysis into the construction of stray animal representation in a literature that hardly pays its tribute to them. If we again go back to the dog's strangely expansive yet poignant gaze in connection with the narrator's own subjective rendition of it, it reminds us of Adorno's poignant commentary, which is quoted by Kuzniar and Claussen, "Philosophy actually exists in order to redeem what is to be found in the gaze of an animal".¹⁴⁷ The redemptive poignancy in the gaze of this particular dog's life, whose own subjective experiences regarding humans could have a wide spectrum of affective intensity, speaks of a substantial realisation of our quintessentially multispecies contribution in human lives. In recognising this ineffable redemptive aspect in the gaze of a street dog, whose existence rarely gets registered with their due respect, the story unfolds an acknowledgement of this inherent dignity of animal's existence in our world. When the dog was able to get up and started moving in circles, the dog elicited a cluster of multiple responses from the watching crowds. Some wanted to signal the cars to slow down, some

¹⁴⁶ Gadgil, *The Dog That Ran in Circles*, 41-42.

¹⁴⁷ Alice Kuzniar, "Where Is the Animal after Post-Humanism? Sue Coe and the Art of Quivering Life," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 11, no. 2 (2012), <https://doi.org/10.1353/ncr.2012.0006>, 17; Detlev Claussen, "Adorno as 'Non-Identical' Man" in *Adorno: One Last Genius*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Massachusetts: The Belknap of Harvard University Press, 2008), 255.

intended to help but caught between the uncertainty and inexperience, while there was a group who enjoyed dog's movements as an entertainment. The acute physical symptoms concurrently shown after the immediate accident, necessitates an emergency medical intervention for the animal, yet in the human eyes belied no urgency to help in this acute condition. It was not a straightforward, deliberate act of cruelty- it was more like the cruelty which stems from profound indifference towards silenced subjects in our society. This indifference gets embedded in our socially conditioned attitudes towards those who are already in a more vulnerable position and are different from us. The erasure of this dog's presence from the physicality as well as from the collective memory of this space is recounted the responses from the surroundings:

The huge, red bus hesitated for a moment on its ponderous wheels, and then moved on with a jerk that was very much like an indifferent shrug...

The rest of the crowd walked away in a hurry, brushing the whole incident off their minds with little impatient gestures. (Gadgil, 45)¹⁴⁸

The only time, when the dog lets out a cry, was also the last moment of his life. The abrupt, quick yet expected death of this canine individual, underscores the collective, unspoken, unmourned, ignored deaths of her fellow canines who pass their entire lives in open with or without human assistance. In some way, the story can be seen with another intertextual reference to another dog's death described in South Asian Literature. In Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*, before the final section of the last chapter, May and Tridib with the narrator had a chance encounter with an injured dog on the street. May and Tridib had to euthanise the dog instead of leaving the dog alone on the open road.¹⁴⁹ The individual, lonely death of an animal open on the street, imparts a part of

¹⁴⁸ Gadgil, *The Dog That Ran in Circles*, 45.

¹⁴⁹ Amitav Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines* (1988; repr., London: John Murray, 2011).

that unknowable aspect of life in its expansiveness, and by ascribing that profound quality on this unknown, unnamed street dog, the narrator prioritises the instinctive and existential realisation that transcends the limitation of human language and its incapacity to translate this poignancy.

The visual registering of this profound experience, creates a moment of transcendence for this dog in stark contrast with the grimacing, moving, transient human figures. It is not only the visual sensory perception that punctuates the narrative; the physical centrality of this dog in actual busy street during the busiest hour of the day, its capacity to initiate the fast-moving crowd to a standstill, literally underscores the active, pervasive yet subdued impact of death in cultural psyche. Naisargi N. Dave in the incisive article on Animal Rights activism in India, notes that the:

The centrality of sight and of human witnessing of acts of violence against animals in activist narratives is a standard trope. Similar to a coming-out story, animal rights activists in India (and perhaps elsewhere) stake their commitments to a way of life based on one critical moment after which nothing can ever be the same.¹⁵⁰

Dave further explains that the mutual glance shared between a nonhuman animal with a human during the time of crisis, is 'an intimate event', that 'inaugurates a bond demanding from the person a life of responsibility'.¹⁵¹ This story as a work of fiction, instils this understanding of responsibility as a consequence of affective bonding between random interspecies interactions, where both sides in spite of their lack of previous,

¹⁵⁰ Naisargi N. Dave, "Witness," *Cultural Anthropology* 29, no. 3 (August 2014): 433–56, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48579334>, 434.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 434.

familiar interactions, come to know each other in an instinctive, intuitive bonding and empathy.

The story's insistence and emphasis on this animal gaze comes back to us in other animal centered stories too. I intend to reiterate the immense significance of this animal gaze in stories and cultural studies as John Berger explained. He argued that with the cognizance of this gaze, "a power is ascribed to the animal, comparable with human power but never coinciding with it."¹⁵² The comparable yet parallel lines of human lives and animal lives can only merge together in death According to Berger.¹⁵³ In this story, by positioning the dog in the centre of the narrative and her powerful profoundly poignant gaze, the writing targets to another possibility. The species-specific barrier, the unseen, unfelt sides of dog's life does not determine any kind of hierarchical structure; the dog in its superficial 'passivity' can and does urge humans to elicit responses from the affective bonding of mutuality. Rebecca Krasner in her analysis of Laferrière, has discussed how the prioritisation of affective sympathy over intellectual sympathy is more valuable in understanding and experiencing the full grandeur of multispecies life. She maintains, and here I quote her, "Intellectual sympathy relies on the de-othering of the animal", which this particular story by Gadgil attempts to negotiate from the very beginning.¹⁵⁴

Conclusion

In the first two stories of this chapter, we find dogs in an intersection of vulnerability in their contemporary socio-political circumstances. Being a social animal and an urban animal, the lives of dogs are intricately linked with political and societal

¹⁵² John Berger, "Why Look at Animals?," in *About Looking* (New York: Vintage International, 1980), 5.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁵⁴ Rebecca Krasner, "Beyond Bare Life: Revitalizing the Animal in Dany Laferrière's American Autobiography," in *Postcolonial Animalities*, ed. Suvadip Sinha and Amit R. Baishya (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis, 2020), 174.

factors, as the lives of human beings too are connected with them. This chapter is an exploration in the notion of vulnerable animals, whose own precarity of existence leaves its traces onto human lives. All these three stories selected in this chapter constitute collectively a narrative of canine-human coexistence in times of crisis, the mutual shared vulnerability of discarded identity that fails to legitimise itself against the hegemonic, hierarchic power dynamics in a speciesist, racist, cultural narrative. These stories also demonstrate how the politicisation of animal individuals interrogates the failed negotiations of dog's secure place in anthropocentric accounts. The repercussions of human-led violence is not contained within the ambit of anthropocentric trajectory, it always 'spills over' onto other lives, and these 'spilling over' intrudes into the lives of animals. The hunger ridden dogs of Sushil Jana's story should be seen in that aspect of human creation itself; their aggression and viciousness is manmade.

These stories also create a pathway to navigate between Groeneveld's the grievability of the unmourned animal lives towards the politics of Srinivasan's canine citizenship.¹⁵⁵ All these stories function through their manoeuvring of sufferings-sufferings of humans and canines; the visualisation of sufferings with its immediacy of consequent death problematise the apparent, seeming superficiality and the deep-rooted anxiety of existence that traverses in a more instinctive way across inter-species connection. An analysis from a different angle, will also validate how crucially death is another connecting thread in these stories. Dogs and death, they become symbolically linked in the accounts which deal with man's most intimate or extreme experiences on life. In South Asian cultural context, dogs share an expansive position in terms of death with its associative contexts. One of the significant ancient Indian classics, *the*

¹⁵⁵ Sarah Groeneveld, "Animal Endings: Species Necropolitics in Contemporary Transnational Literature," PhD Diss., (University of Wisconsin- Madison, 2014); Krithika Srinivasan, "Remaking More-Than-Human Society: Thought Experiments on Street Dogs as Nature," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 44, no. 2 (February 21, 2019): 376–91, <https://doi.org/10.1111/tran.12291>.

Mahabharata starts and ends with dogs which is also indicative in such an important way.¹⁵⁶ David Gordon White points out that the inherent duality in dog's contribution and involvement in human society, allots them a precarious context in South Asian culture:

The dog's liminal position in its roles of house guardian and herding and hunting animal, as well as its notorious battlefield and burning ground necrophagy should account, to a certain extent, for its symbolic connection with death in India and all over the world. (White, 287)¹⁵⁷

Dogs in literature encompass the range of subjects on whose body death is articulated as a visceral, sensory, transcendental experience. Seen from this angle, canine individuals in our literature cover the articulation of ungrievable subjects to that Agamben's *homines sacri*, the ones who can be killed yet cannot be sacrificed. I intend to conclude this chapter with the comparable mass slaughter of humans and animals as Nicole Shukin had put it:

The power to reduce humans to the bare life of their species body arguably presupposes the prior power to suspend other species in a state of exception within which they can be noncriminally put to death. (Shukin, 10)¹⁵⁸

The cultural narratives should be more attentive in locating and recognising the nuanced representation of our companion canines. Their presence in our quotidian lives also undercuts our basic needs for interspecies communication transcending the extreme life situations, something that these stories so succinctly articulate.

¹⁵⁶ Nanditha Krishna, "Dog," in *Sacred Animals of India* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2014), EBook.

¹⁵⁷ David Gordon White, "Dogs Die," *History of Religions* 28, no. 4 (May 1989): 287, <https://doi.org/10.1086/463162>.

¹⁵⁸ Nicole Shukin, "New Life Forms and Functions of Animal Fetishism," in *Animal Capital: Rendering Life in Biopolitical Times* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 10.

III. Strangers, Underdogs and Magical Experiences with Our Canine Companions in South Asian Literature

The previous two chapters focus on two different aspects of how dogs have been represented in South Asian literature- one as an extension of the marginalised humans and canine-human relationships in that context, the other one as their cultural receptions depicted in the times of crisis. This chapter will attempt to foreground how the culturally constructed identities of free-ranging dogs have been rewritten and explored in their random interactions with humans, and how certain works of literature have upheld a subversive, counter argument to the mainstream notions of man's relationships with free-ranging dogs. Dogs are not really strangers to our daily lives, yet they are, specifically those dogs on the streets, are not profoundly depicted the mainstream culture of South Asia. Their 'liminal status' has been explored in the previous two chapters from different angles entirely. In this chapter, I intend to explore how the chance encounters between two species have been rendered in such a multifaceted way, in certain texts in non-anglophone literature of India. This chapter will attempt to constitute this 'liminality' in its symbolical poignancy in three ways in these three texts. The first narrative, Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay's *The Memories of Deoghar (Deogharer Smriti)* gives a beautiful rendition of this exploration of 'liminality' in terms of authorial perception towards the dog changing from a stranger to that of a very trusted friend. The second subsection of this chapter deals with the unusual, random encounter between a man, and a hunted down stray dog in the wilderness of mining regions of Bihar, an interaction that will transform both of their lives in such a strange yet magical way. Subodh Ghosh's *That Strange Mine of Mica (Sei Odbhut Obhrokhoni)* is a wonderful take on the mutual understanding and reliability in the instinctive, interspecies relationships, between dogs

and humans under the backdrop of wilderness and human hostility. Both human and the canine individuals of this story, enter this account as the marginal individuals, treading this notion of ‘liminality’. The third subsection focusses on the mysterious yet temporary disappearance and subsequent reappearance of a dog in the lives of two siblings and their confidante in Lila Majumdar’s *Haldey Pakhir Palok*, which was translated by Kamala Chatterjee as *The Yellow Bird*. The latter two texts are also crucially significant in this thesis as they outline the pervading awareness of other forms of life woven in the local, folkloric cultures of our society. In that way, these two texts also underscore a strong foregrounding of haunting ‘animal past’ in popular imagination, the animal presence which is receding from the mainstream, speciesist, monolithic culture of human supremacy. I will argue that these texts articulate the liminality between haunting absence and palpable presence in terms of animal subjects in the face of growing anthropocentrism. The dogs in these stories not only stand for the canine presence but also as a more tangible representative of animal, more-than-human world, something that the anthropocentric literature and culture is not always prepared to acknowledge in its truest sense.

In the previous chapters we have analysed how the stray status of the free-ranging dogs has been articulated in the literatures of South Asia. Their emblematic presence of ruthlessness to vulnerabilities, the marginalisation of especially abled individuals to the representations of disability of animals in literature. All these points are distinctly structured to posit their presence in a range of literary works, that encapsulate a wide variety and a scale of subject matters. In this chapter, I intend to locate the presence of dogs in literature by tracing the interspecies relationships as formed through the random encounters and momentary interactions between dogs and humans in various situations of their lives. I would like to argue that these texts upheld a kind of our understanding

about the permanence even within these fleeting transient moments of interspecies camaraderie, that stands in stark contrast against the mainstream, anti-animal rhetoric of the populist notions. The first subsection will centre around Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay's *Deogharer Smriti or The Memories of Deoghar*, and the permanence of an apparently fleeting canine-human relationships in its nascent stage, while the second subsection will focus on the transformative significance of the underdogs to a position of power through the lives of one adventurer and his random acquaintance, interactions and lasting relationship with another wounded, stray dog in the fringes of human habitat. The third subsection will explore the repercussions of an absent beloved dog in the lives of one sibling duo and their attempts to navigate through the sense of loss and with that a dive into the lives of other animals intricately linked and influenced by human lives. All these three texts navigate the notion of animal presence either through addressing them via an advancing separation and disentanglement from the veneer of constructed propaganda, or through a lingering presence of an absent animal subject in the minds of his human companions.

Subhadip Sinha has read the representation of stray dogs in the Indian literature through the concepts of Freud's demarcation between familiar, or the homely, *heimlich* and its opposite, uncanny, the unfamiliar or strange, *unheimlich*.¹⁵⁹ Sinha views the status of these dogs in their unknowable depth with strangeness. In this chapter, I would intend to posit these three texts at the other end of the spectrum, which articulates a lasting familiarity that takes place in all these canid-human interactions and emergent relationships. Each of these stories addresses a unique understanding of stray identity of the pye-dogs or pariah dogs and their coming into the domesticated space called home. I will argue that their coming into the domesticated space, their recognition, and re-

¹⁵⁹ Suvadip Sinha, "Toward a Stray Manifesto," in *Entangled Fictions: Nonhuman Animals in an Indian World* (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis, 2023), 123-124.

emergence only construct a narrative which prioritises the instinctive, intuitive bonding which has evolved through the coexisting, migrating companionship, commensality, and the cycle of disappearance- unfamiliarity and reappearance in these three stories are articulated in biological, ethological, and psycho-social ways, in that order. These three texts in multidimensionally loaded narratives, negotiate this construction of interspecies bonding through the trope of perambulation, the gesture of sharing food, and extra-linguistic, nonverbal ways beyond the scope of human, linguistic system.

***The Memories of Deoghar* by Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay and the
Ephemerality of Canine-Human Random Interactions in Bengali Literature**

I got the blues.

I got the blues.

that dog loved and

trusted me and

I let it walk away.

- *White Dog* by Charles Bukowski.

Some works articulate a unique sense of gloom when an individual forms a lasting bond in a few fleeting moments with other nonhuman beings, in their walks of life, both literally and metaphorically. This chapter is not structured chronologically, although the first story of this subsection may probably be the earliest amongst these three stories. It must have been published during the colonial period of India. In our anthropocentric society usually there more are stories on these fleeting interactions between two humans than the ones which take place across species-specific separations. In a country like India, dogs have always been present in our space. Seen from that angle, dog's coexistence reduced their presence to the level of either a silenced or an overlooked being within

human habitats. This specific story by Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay dwells on one of the random canine-human encounters and captures the depth of this bond with poignant details. Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay's works are centered around ordinary people and their struggling existence in a casteist, elitist, mainstream society. The exact date of publication of this story is unknown, but it should be written during the pre-independent, colonial India.

As quoted by Narasingha Sil, Nirad C. Chaudhuri commented on the literary style of Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay that he "was a Bengali young man of the late Nineteenth century and never grew beyond this benchmark."¹⁶⁰ Well-known for the high flung emotional repercussions of most of his works, the counterargument of sentimentalism cannot be entirely denied. However, it is also true that in his works, he always voiced the tremendous hurdles that ordinary or the underprivileged people underwent through during his times in multiple ways. His works, even with that acute sentimentality emerged as a testament to the true underdogs of the society. Most of his works have come under the academic scrutiny because of their humanitarian concerns, predominantly from the anthropocentric purview. Although it is true that in his own distinct ways, he also dwelt upon the crucial interspecies relationships at a time, when animal rights in India was in its nascent phase. In the list of his works and their publication date, the exact publication date of this story could not be found. He was one of the very few writers who first demonstrated the serious intensity of interspecies entanglements in his works. His *Mahesh*, which has been translated by a number of writers several times, as *The Drought*, or *The Sacrifice* or *Kurban*, recounts a heart-wrenching story between a bull named Mahesh and his human companion Gafur. My own analysis of this story as an intersectional narrative located between the interspecies dynamics, agrarian society of

¹⁶⁰ Narasingha Sil, "Sharatchandra's Caste and Gender Consciousness: A Reassessment," *Sage Open*, January 2015, 7, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244014564360>.

the contemporary time, and the gendered angle, positions *Mahesh* as one of crucial narratives of interspecies bonding in the literature from the South Asia.¹⁶¹ This entanglement is also tangibly present in another of his work named *Bilasi*, a story which throws into the relief the casteism of the contemporary society and the lives of humans whose existence revolved around serpents.¹⁶² The intersectional literary space amongst speciesism, casteism and elitism is explored in a very nuanced way in that story with a tragic twist at the end.

In his own personal life, Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay was deeply interested and involved in not only the plights of underprivileged, socially ostracised human beings, but his wide sense of compassion also extended beyond these species-specific barriers. His stories on compassion towards poor, homeless, lower-caste or marginalised humans were widely known. However, his animal related activism and literary works were not granted sufficient space and recognition in the mainstream, popular literature and hence they have been deprived of their proper circulation in the public minds. As usual, a typical discrimination has been practised and silently encouraged in this mainstream literary culture of the time, thoroughly articulated through this indifference to these animal rights activisms in both literature as well as in his real life. This story was not even included in most of the compilations of his greatest works, neither, as I have mentioned before that, its publication date is specified. In his real life, his dedication and deeply felt compassion and responsibility were rarely discussed from an academic, sincere consideration. Some of his admirers recorded these events sporadically, and mainly through these threads of separate narratives, we, in this present time, come to know about his active involvement and activism in his own lifetime. It is literally those footnotes here and there, which

¹⁶¹ Swatilekha Maity, "Women, Nonhuman Animals, and the Notion of Marginalization in Bengali Literature," in *Critical Animal Studies and Social Justice: Critical Theory, Dismantling Speciesism, and Total Liberation*, ed. Anthony J. Nocella II and Amber E. George (Lanham: Lexington, 2021), 155–72.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*,

constituted a history of Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay's lifelong dedication, and immensely active involvement in the animal rights movement in India, at a time, when this movement was really in minority in India in every way. One of his pet dogs, an indie or a mongrel, whom he adopted, was named as Bheli or Bhelo, who was introduced in one of the news mediums as 'an ugly dog, he adopted from the street'.¹⁶³ One of his biographers and friends, Sri Kalidas Roy noted his filial affection for this dog:

When he started staying in Shibpur steadily, we used to go to his place- he used to bring his pet dog Bhelo with him to his office at Jamuna Publishing House. Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay used to love this Bhelo as his own son. He used to pamper him so much that almost every day Bhelo had to be given various snacks, whose daily expenses were almost rupees one at the time...

After a few days, Bhelu passed away. After his death, in one of his letters to Charu Bandyopadhyay, Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay wrote, "One thing I have realised Charu that, there is nothing as objective feeling or experience. Everything that we feel is highly subjective. For others, he was just some mere dog, but for me, he was a part of my own very soul! Well, you know. It reminds me of the narrative of Bharat."¹⁶⁴ (My translation)

In another article, we also come to know the personality of this Bhelu or Bheli or Bhelo (because he was mentioned under all these names) and his attachment with Chattopadhyay. Partha Chattopadhyay, one local historian recounts this warm bond between the writer and his Bhelo in an article:

¹⁶³ J. N. Sinha, "The Mortals of Devdas," *The Frontline*, November 24, 2014, <https://frontline.thehindu.com/arts-and-culture/the-mortals-of-devdas/article6719027.ece>.

¹⁶⁴ Sri Kalidas Roy, *Sharat Sannidhye*, Page 111. Sri Kalidas Roy, "Jeeban O Charitra," in *Sharat- Sannidhye* (Calcutta: B. Bhattacharya & Bhattacharya Co. Publishing House, 1957), 111.

Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyaya found his one of the most deeply loved animal companions, Bhelo, while residing in Baje Shibpur, Howrah. He was always extremely sensitive towards birds, animals and other beings. Even during his several visits to Varanasi, he preferred feeding the street dogs rather than giving food to the Brahmins, which used to be one of the widely held common customs of his time.¹⁶⁵

Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay's protective attitude and prioritisation of his animal companion was demonstrative of his deeply devoted affection for these animals, whom he used to see as his children:

When one day, another celebrated writer and his friend, Shailesh Bishi came to meet Chattopadhyay at his home, Bhelo barked at him, but nobody was allowed to admonish the dog. When one Vaishnav once came to visit him, Bhelo was chewing away his rosary beads stealthily with relish. Hearsay says that the Vaishnav was very angry at Bhelo, but Chattopadhyay was rumoured to be even angrier. It is said that he argued with him saying, "Are you really a Vaishnav? If you haven't learned the fundamental criteria of Vaishnavism, i.e., the doctrine of merciful kindness towards all species, don't even dare to call yourself as one!"¹⁶⁶

Bhelu's death in his absence left a considerable repercussion in his life. Chattopadhyay gave a stately burial in his own garden, and built a *tulsi mancha*, basil tree with a pedestal of prayer on top of it. He also performed the last rites in the customary ways by arranging the rituals like *shraddha* for this Bhelu. At the time, when dogs, specifically mongrels or free-ranging pariah/ pye-dogs were relegated to the further

¹⁶⁵ Partha Chattopadhyay, "Bhelor Samadhir Pashe Pray E Kandten Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay," *Anandabazar Patrika*, January 16, 2024, <https://www.anandabazar.com/west-bengal/howrah-hooghly/sarat-chandra-chattopadhyay-use-to-shed-tears-beside-the-grave-of-his-pet-dog/cid/1489115>.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*,

extreme of ostracisation in the Indian culture, when the British colonialism established the annual dog pogroms as mandatory and thus by legalising the killing of these animals, Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay in his own way, in his own life, integrated these beings from the neglected animals into the recognisable autonomous, animal presence to the mainstream culture, both within his family as well as in his literary works. One of his contemporary activists, Mahatma Gandhi practised and preached nonviolence towards every being. Yet, Gandhi's own personal stance against street dogs was extremely aggressive, often voicing in favour of mass destruction. When Gandhi was approached by the Ahmedabad Humanitarian League to comment on his support for a certain mill owner, who killed some 60 dogs in his mill premises, Gandhi unambiguously placed street dogs at the farthest extreme to the human kindness. Unambiguously, Gandhi commented in the favour of this specific mill owner saying that:

When the state does not care for the stray dogs, nor does the *mahajan*, and when one is not prepared to take care of them oneself, and if one regards them as a danger to society, one should kill them and relieve them from a lingering death.¹⁶⁷

It is noteworthy, how Gandhi immediately brings a counter-productive view on the cohabitation of canine-human existence in urban human habitat and in his biased support for the dog-killer, he channelised the focal point towards a seemingly wider version of animal welfare, which actually in reality, undermined the pro-animal stance, that his nonviolence seemed to inspire:

If he kills the dog, he commits a sin. If he does not kill it, he commits a graver sin. So, he prefers to commit the lesser one and save himself from the graver. Even

¹⁶⁷ "Gandhi on Stray Dogs, Ahimsa and Society," *Civil Society*, June 22, 2022, <https://civilsocietyonline.com/cover-add-ons/gandhi-on-stray-dogs-ahimsa-and-society/>.

if those who feed stray dogs consented to pay a penalty for their misdirected compassion, we should be free from the curse of stray dogs.¹⁶⁸

I would draw the attention to the phrases such as 'curse of stray dogs', 'killing dogs is a lesser sin' and how writing them in a popular medium of that time, Gandhi played an instrumental part in continuing and aggravating the anti-canine sentiment, already established in the public psyche. As quoted by Yamini Narayanan:

A roving dog without an owner is a danger to society and a swarm of them is a menace to its very existence. If we want to keep dogs in towns or villages in a decent manner, no dog should be suffered to wander. There should be no stray dogs even as we have no stray cattle... But can we take individual charge of these roving dogs? and if we cannot, can we have pinjrapoles [sanctuaries] for them? If both these things are impossible, there seems to me to be no such alternative except to kill them. Connivance or putting up with the status quo is no ahimsa [nonviolence]; there is no thought or discrimination in it. Dogs will be killed whenever they are a menace to society. (Narayanan, 479)¹⁶⁹

My intention of bringing this version of Gandhi and his anti-canine stance towards the street dogs will accentuate what a critical role Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay's love for these animals played coevally in the socio-cultural milieu.

Bhelu died while Chattopadhyay was in Dhaka for receiving his honorary D.Litt. in literature from Dhaka university in July, 1936. Subhash Chandra Sarker also noted in

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Yamini Narayanan, "Street Dogs at the Intersection of Colonialism and Informality: 'Subaltern Animism' as a Posthuman Critique of Indian Cities," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 35, no. 3 (October 6, 2016): 479, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263775816672860>;

his article that even before Bhelu, Chattopadhyay had another indie dog, whose death also left a considerable impact in his life:

Surendranath Gangopadhyay has recorded that when Sarat Chandra's pet dog "Kana" died he had composed a poem in English.¹⁷⁰

Apart from highly affective interactions with nonhuman animals, Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay also had advocated his love for them in a very radical yet humorous way. We can consider one of his *Lalu* stories, which vehemently voices the protest against animal sacrifice in religious rituals.¹⁷¹

The particular story in our discussion, *Memories of Deoghar* centres around one nameless stray dog who formed a sincere attachment with the narrator during his temporary stay in Deoghar. The trope of perambulation and the random observations on strangers dominates almost the first half of the story. The second half of the story focusses on the interspecies interactions between the narrator and one random dog, who had a chance encounter with the narrator in the dark:

I was roaming in the streets aimlessly. It got dark, and I thought I was completely alone. Suddenly I realised that all this time, I was followed by a dog silently. I faced him and asked jokingly, "Hey, do you want to come with me? Do you think you can escort me back to my home in this darkness?" Maintaining a certain distance, he was observing me. My questions made him think for some time, and then he started wagging his tail. I understood he accepted the deal. "Well, let's

¹⁷⁰ Subhash Chandra Sarker, "Sarat Chandra Chatterjee: The Great Humanist," *Indian Literature* 20, no. 1 (1977): 55, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24157548>.

¹⁷¹ Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay and Somdatta Mandal, "Lalu," *Indian Literature* 51, no. 6(242) (2007): 84–87, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23347640>.

go then". Under the streetlight, I saw him- an old dog, mange has already claimed most of his fur, he walks with a slight limp. (Chattopadhyay, 1778)¹⁷²

The narrator's instructions to the other people in that house, of letting him enter and stay for the night, of feeding that dog regularly, were surreptitiously disobeyed and the dog was thrown out of the house by the gardener's wife, who also had the habit of taking the extra food and leftovers, which the narrator intended for him.

The argument of his travel companion almost reiterated the similar kind of approach, expressed by Gandhi:

No matter how you explain it Dada, when there is not enough food for every human being, it is rather a luxury of you to feed just a stray dog. (Chattopadhyay, 1779)¹⁷³

The story amplifies on the silenced side of this 'gaze of the dog' at the time of farewell in the station. In the previous chapter, I have already explained how the 'animal gaze' creates a self-revelatory narrative of animal presence amidst the overwhelming anthropocentric, cultural spectrum. Chattopadhyay's minutiae use of the words in describing this brief interaction of a few days with a stray dog, crystallises a moment of canine-human bonding amidst the predominant, established mainstream narrow anthropocentrism, which has always disregarded this presence within the ambit of socio-cultural and geographical spectrums. The last few lines of the story magnify this sense of canine presence in its widest range, both visually as well as symbolically:

Like an obstinate child, his presence kept on coming to my mind and I just couldn't find any interest in returning to my home now. May be Atithi will go back

¹⁷² Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay, "Deogharer Smriti," in *Sarat Sahitya Samagra*, comp. Sri Sukumar Sen (Calcutta: Ananda Publishers, 1985), 1778.

¹⁷³ *Ibid*, 1779.

to that house, but this time the iron gate will be kept shut. Probably Atithi will wait for me by the roadside for the next few days, hoping that I will come back. Maybe he will even climb up to my room in the first floor to check, if I had really come back and then he will be disheartened with my absence there. A homeless dog will be out again in the uncertainties of the vast, open road. He may be the most insignificant being in this entire city, but in my memories, he will remain the only one with the real claim, with the truest place in this heart. (Chattopadhyay, 1779)¹⁷⁴

The story subverts the ephemerality of the canid-human communications by creating a lasting memory of the nameless, homeless, ownerless dog in the writer's work. By designating a name, *Atithi*, which is actually a noun meaning the guest, the narrator ascertains a distinct personality on a canine individual, whose distinctness was never acknowledged in the public visibility and would probably be always beyond the scope of recognition, if not for this specific work. The comparable, parallel status of both the narrator and the dog in that household as guests, also underscores Chattopadhyay's profound sense of equality across the multiplicity of different species, something similar to the sense of equality and comparable characteristics between an adult dog and a child, which we will soon explore in the third subsection of this chapter, in Lila Majumdar's *Haldey Pakhir Palok*.

Stray identity in the context of dogs always underscores a certain sense of ferality along with vulnerabilities to the exposures of feeling unwanted and disrespected. Sarah Cathryn Henderson in her thesis contended that the unstable, uncertainties that accompany the word 'stray' with its further implications:

¹⁷⁴ Chattopadhyay, *Deogharer Smriti*, 1779.

The word "stray", as identity or an act, connotes a particular relationship with space, a moving outside or off course. (Henderson, 3)¹⁷⁵

Atithi, the dog in question here, his presence is rendered palpable through his companionship with the writer during his long evening walks in that unknown space. His ownerless status, the lack of fixed habitat or rather the lack of domesticated certainty indicated his position in the relegated margin, something that was vilified during the colonial period in India. In the article, where Vanja Hamzić draws a comparative analysis of the historical development of this concept of 'pariah', amongst gender, caste and speciesism, one reference cites the discriminatory attitudes towards free-ranging, ownerless dogs belonging to their native place and the European foreign breeds, imported from abroad. Hamzić quoted the passage from Pratik Chakrabarti's article, where one British soldier unambiguously expresses not only his preference but also his encouragement in the blood sports, involving the hunting of these indie dogs by those of the foreign breeds.¹⁷⁶ Hamzić further argued that pariah canines were comparatively in better condition than the outcasts amongst people, considered pariahs within the mainstream society. But I would take departure from Hamzić's argument and argue that native, pariah canines were equally vilified and castigated like their suffering human counterparts. One of the legal proceedings also notes the level of discriminations played out not only in segregating both canine and human pariahs, but also the network of interspecies supports, assumed by the British Officials, a significant point that I have discussed in a separate article.¹⁷⁷ The proceedings during the beginning of the Twentieth

¹⁷⁵ Sarah Kathryn Henderson, "Wandering like a Lost and Starving Dog": Representations of Human and Nonhuman Animal Straying in Victorian Literature and Culture," PhD Diss., (University of Toronto, 2014), 3.

¹⁷⁶ Vanja Hamzić, "The (Un)Conscious Pariah: Canine and Gender Outcasts of the British Raj," *Australian Feminist Law Journal* 40, no. 2 (2014): 192, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13200968.2014.985774>.

¹⁷⁷ Swatilekha Maity, "Animal Presence, Metropolis and the Rise of Animal Rights in Colonial India," in *Situations and Contexts: Narratives on Nineteenth Century Bengal*, ed. Prasanta Ray (Kolkata: Hyphen Publication, 2022), 48; Proceeding 43, Branch Sanitation Municipal Department, March, 1900, West Bengal State Archive.

Century meticulously record the annual dog pogroms routinely conducted. As a matter of fact, in later years, the only concern that kept Calcutta Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals involved in this dog issue, was the 'method of killing them *humanely*', and not *the humane attitude* towards these stray dogs.¹⁷⁸ That article has explained the correlation of systematic denigration that overlapped both the canine pariah and the human ones.¹⁷⁹ The colonial network constructed a complex system of the destruction of canine pariahs by the lower caste individuals, while ensuring that the class hierarchy was maintained through encouragements to those elitist, upper class people who supported it. The administrative system appointed underprivileged people annually for killing the dogs with either strychnine or bludgeoning with bamboo sticks.¹⁸⁰ The colonial administration ensured in various ways to discourage strong, positive sentiments towards the native, pariah dogs of the Indian subcontinent, either through mass extermination or imposing tax on street dogs in various cities.¹⁸¹ I am citing from one of these proceedings which distinctly marks the intention of introducing dog-tax in these cities. In his letter to the Commissioner of Police in the Rajshahi Department (currently in Bangladesh), J. H. E. Garrett, the Deputy Commissioner of Darjeeling wrote:

I have the honor to bring to your notice the fact that it has for a long time been considered desirable that a tax should be levied in the town of Darjeeling upon rickshaws and dogs-on the former on the ground that they are essentially articles of taxing and therefore in their nature proper subject for taxation: on the latter on the ground that a tax would greatly tend to the disappearance of ownerless dogs

¹⁷⁸ Proceeding 61-62, Judicial Branch Judicial Department, March 1902, West Bengal State Archive.

¹⁷⁹ Maity, *Animal Presence, Metropolis and the Rise of Animal Rights in Colonial India*, 46.

¹⁸⁰ Proceedings 162, Branch Police, Home Department, June 1913, The National Archive of India; Proceedings 55-68, Judicial Branch Judicial Department, January 1902, West Bengal State Archive.

¹⁸¹ Maity, *Animal Presence, Metropolis and the Rise of Animal Rights in Colonial India*, 46-47; Proceedings B 242-244, Municipal Branch Municipal Department, 1884, West Bengal State Archive; Proceedings B, 242-244, Municipal Branch Municipal Department, August, 1903; Proceedings B 263-265, Branch Municipal Department, December 1919, West Bengal State Archive

which are very liable to contract rabies and become a source of great danger to the public. (Proceedings)¹⁸²

From the angle of literary perspectives, this story runs parallel with Sinha's analysis of Rabindranath Tagore's poem, "The Dog" *Aarogya (Convalescence, 1941)* which also demonstrates the interspecies interactions between the poet and another stray dog.¹⁸³ I would like to argue that unlike the dog's presence as "bakyahen." or a silenced being according to Sinha, in this story Atithi's presence is rendered with an autonomous palpable agency, capable sufficiently to articulate the companionable subjectivity that holds the interspecies bonding at its truest level. I would intend to extend Sinha's interpretation of Levinas's Bobby, especially the emphasis on Matthew Calarco's observation of this interaction as a "proto-ethical moment in his gesture".¹⁸⁴ Calarco also stresses on the stray identity of Levinas's dog, Bobby, and here let me quote Calarco on this point. Calarco continues:

"Man's best friend" testifies to the freedom and singularity of the human and it is through this testimony that there is a "transcendence in the animal" (DF, 152). But Levinas is perhaps missing the more obvious point here: Bobby's life is also at stake in the camp. He is not a pampered, Oedipal pet, but a nomad struggling to survive, living on "in some wild patch" of the prison. (Calarco, 58)¹⁸⁵

Taking this cue from Calarco and the emphasis on the stray existential status of Levinas's Bobby, I would like to underscore the random interspecies interactions that accentuate both temporality in terms of duration and yet the transcendence in terms of its poignantly lasting impact, a thread that also connects Levinas's narrative with

¹⁸²Proceedings B, 242-244, Branch Municipal Department, August, 1903, West Bengal State Archive.

¹⁸³ Sinha, *Toward a Stray Manifesto*, 130.

¹⁸⁴ Sinha, *Toward a Stray Manifesto*, 132; Matthew Calarco, "Facing the Other Animal Levinas," in *Zoographies: The Question of the Animal from Heidegger to Derrida* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 58.

¹⁸⁵ Calarco, *Facing the Other Animal Levinas*, 58.

Chattopadhyay's story here. Let me quote the actual passage describing this significant moment of interspecies relationship here:

And then about halfway through our long captivity, for a few short weeks, before the sentinels chased him away, a wandering dog entered our lives. One day he came to meet this rabble as we returned under guard from work. He survived in some wild patch in the region of the camp. But we called him Bobby, an exotic name, as one does with a cherished dog. He would appear at morning assembly and was waiting for us as we returned, jumping up and down and barking in delight. For him, there was no doubt that we were men. (Levinas, 153)¹⁸⁶

The simultaneously temporary yet lasting random interactions captured and recorded between the species, is something that correlates at the fundamental level of canid-human relationships. It is also of the lasting aspect of canine-human relationships as expressed through the literary works here.

The Triumph of the Underdogs and Interspecies Relationship in Subodh Ghosh's *That Strange Mine of Mica (Sei Odbhut Obhrokhoni)*

Street dogs in India have always been identified as the classic embodiment of the underdogs. The cultural symbolisation of street dogs as the underdogs is prevalent in our colloquial language. In the previous two chapters, we have explored how this marginalised position has been appropriated in literature from different angles. Subodh Ghosh was one of the leading writers in the modernist, experimental literary arena of the middle to the Eighties of the Twentieth century Bengali literature. His literary career started with two very striking short stories- *Ajantrik*, which was translated in English, as *The Unmechanical*, *The Mechanic Man* or *The Pathetic Fallacy*, and later was adapted

¹⁸⁶ Emmanuel Levinas, "The Name of a Dog," in *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, trans. Seán Hand (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1990), 153.

into a film by Ritwik Ghatak, while *Fossil* remains a penetrative exploration of exploitation of the working class in the hands of decadent feudalism and nascent industrialisation in the mining regions of Bihar and Chotanagpur. Ghosh's works are varied, multilayered, and, to a great extent, radical. His works capture a significant moment in the context of socio- historical juncture- the conflicts between feudalism and mercantile industrialism, and the exploited working class, in certain contexts of the tribals of Bihar, Chotanagpur, Ranchi. The conundrums of modern life, with its corruption and exploitation, were brought out in his *Fossil*. In his works, we find individuals who may be alone societally, yet they are not detached from their core emotive connections. Later, many of his stories, like *The House of Wax (Jatugriha)*, *Sujata* were adapted into films. Ghosh's works bring into this analysis a unique exploration of individuals, who leave their marks with very striking characteristics. Their unforgettable, unique compassion for the things and beings, who are neglected or overlooked by the majority, makes them stand out from the conventional characters. The predominant characteristics of his protagonists stand out in terms of this inexplicable sense of compassion and attachments in a world, which is mostly oblivious or too insensitive to fathom these emotive dimensions of character. *Ajantrik* is a story of a taxi driver named Bimal and his extremely sincere love for his old car, which he named as Jagaddal. The specific story, which I have selected for this chapter, also is rooted in the key motif of 'compassion' and 'attachment'. Subodh Ghosh's own writings always carry the testament of a deeply felt emotional attachment towards those characters who strive towards transcending past their circumstantial obstacles and insensitivities.

Subodh Ghosh's own personal stance towards more-than-human animals, is crucial in exploring this multifaceted narrative of empathetic animal awareness. Ghosh's attitude towards animals was unequivocally that of empathy and identification. I feel that to

foreground the prioritisation of Ghosh's pro-canine attitude, it is relevant to explore this attribute to some extent in some of his other works as well. Before entering into the details of the storyline, it is necessary to cite some of his writings that relate to his awareness towards animals and other forms of life. In his *Essays (Prabandha)*, two of his nonfictional writings expostulate about human beings' intrinsic, instinctively forged, deeply-felt relationships with animals. He gives accounts of the empathy that animals had demonstrated in interacting and cohabiting with humans. In his *Humans Reared by Animals (Poshupalito Manush)*, he cites multiple references to people who had been taken care of by animals in the wild.¹⁸⁷ In this particular article, he not only cites historical occurrences where humans were found and reared by wolves in the wild but also how one species of animal had taken care of the orphan cubs of another species. His acute understanding of animal's inherent empathy is expressed with the line:

The affection and empathy of animals is not weaker or lesser than human affection and selflessness. One recent incident can prove it to a great extent. The recent incident of a mother goat's acceptance and taking care of two orphaned tiger cubs at Karachi Zoo is one inspiring example of this powerful animal empathy. (Ghosh, 108)¹⁸⁸

In another of his nonfictional writings, he gives a heartfelt tribute to the dogs and their intrinsic connection with humans in the walks of civilisation.¹⁸⁹ This article also positions dogs as the truest companion of human beings in their loneliest walks of life. From famine-ridden abandoned human habitations to the last, uninvited companions of the funeral rites, from the homeless street dwellers to the ostracised mentally unstable

¹⁸⁷ Subodh Ghosh, "Poshupalito Manush," in *Prabandha* (Calcutta: Nepal Chandra Ghosh, 1955), 108.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 108.

¹⁸⁹ Subodh Ghosh, "Koukurjya," in *Prabandha* (Calcutta: Nepal Chandra Ghosh, 1955), 64–66.

individuals, dogs emerge as the trusted, truest companion to human in Subodh Ghosh's work.

The particular story selected for this chapter is *Sei Odbhut Obhrokhoni*, translated in English as *That Strange or Curious Mine of Mica* or *That Magical Mine of Mica*, though the former title may be slightly more apt, is a story about a transformation and there are moments in the story which conform to the magical dimension of the plotline but it is not magical according to the conventional sense of the word. The magical or the transformative aspect emerges through an interspecies bond, randomly formed at the edge the civilised world and that of wilderness, in the face of human hostilities and non-cooperations. Seen from that angle, this is a story about two individuals, canine and human, as they learn to strive and transcend the elemental and societal obstacles, in the survival level; it is also a story of survival with the bare minimum and striking out the chances which keep their existence hanging. The story was first published in *Puja Barshiki Anandamela* of 1975, a special collection of stories, novels, and literary works meant for children and young adults published annually in the months of September and October. The story takes place in the background of the mining regions of Bihar, Chotanagpur. In setting the plot of this work, the narrative weaves a rich ensemble of the ecological, industrial and socio- cultural history of the region. To a great extent, this historically enriched narrative contextualises the ecological damage done by the industrialisation of that landscape and brought to the forefront how this drastic shift impacted a long-standing push in the lives of the tribal people in their mass displacement. Ghosh masterfully creates this work as a narrative which addresses the deeply-wrought interspecies relationships interspersed with the tribal life, folklore, ecological system and the economic aspects of the mining societies, this particular point I will elaborate later in this chapter. A general outline of the story runs with the main protagonist Harshanath

Sarkar, who comes to Bandhupur Range, a small mining town located between Koderma and Giridih, in search of mica. The story operates around his arduous attempts to excavate active sources of mica, along with the life of a stray dog, who has been wounded by one of the hunters, and his subsequent companionship to Harshanath Sarkar in those forests.

But before getting into the details of the storyline, I would like to start this section by drawing the attention to seemingly disparate points in the history of animal coexistence in South Asia. Both these points converge in the motif of killing- the first point is the trope of the legalisation of dog pogroms, while the second one is the legalisation of killing wild dogs or *dholes*. The fact that these events were recorded in administrative levels, speaks to the degree of support that these decisions were backed by the state machineries of the time. The act of killing other species of animals under the pretext of protection of human beings is a traditional method and has been in effect historically. The particular story in this discussion charts its radical narrative by creating a subtle counter narrative of this destruction and in this way, creates a departure from the mainstream, speciesist, anthropocentric narrative. Ghosh's *That Curious Mine of Mica* hinges on this trope and counter argument against the rampant destruction of animal lives, supported and encouraged with a vindictive propaganda by established authority of its time.

One incident occurred in Bombay in 1832, and another would aptly be called a series of events, which kept on taking place from the colonial period to the 70s of the Twentieth Century India. These two references will foreground why Subodh Ghosh's this particular story is so radical without appearing too obvious or theoretical. The particular incident of Bombay which I am referring to is the Dog Riot of 1832. Jesse S. Palsetia in her article *Mad Dogs and Parsis: The Bombay Dog Riots of 1832* chronicles the turn of the events, which started centering around the mass culling of the street dogs

and soon escalated into a politically significant volatile rupture in the contemporary socio-political atmosphere. Mass killing of the street dogs was a recurrent event which took annually, sometimes even bi-annually in parts of the colonial India. As I have also mentioned before that Samiparna Samanta notes that the only concern of the animal rights activists during the colonial period was the ‘humane’ method of killing dogs.¹⁹⁰ In my article, I have also argued how a distinct polarisation plays out in attitude towards canid street animals like dogs, jackals or foxes and the animal workers.¹⁹¹ The Dog Riots of 1832 is important as it was one of the incidents which created a massive political repercussion in public minds, centering on the animal lives, specifically the otherwise overlooked or neglected street dogs. The Bombay Dog riots of 1832 can be considered an equivalent political event to that of another incident which took place at least after seventy-five years in a different continent, the Brown Dog Riots of London in 1907. In her incisive analysis of this historical event, Coral Lansbury revealed how the position of dogs plays upon a series of socio-cultural factors and in this way, inevitably renders a political significance associated with the notions of class constructs. Although the old brown dog, whose status was at the centre of the political turmoil of The Dog Riots of 1907 of London, was not a victim of mass dog pogrom, he was a victim of vivisection in the University College, at the department of Physiology, an event meticulously recorded by two medical students, Louise Lind-af- Hageby and Liese Schartau in *The Shambles of Science*.¹⁹² Palsetia minutely cites the nuances of the dog riots of 1832 in Bombay. According to her, it was accentuated by multiple factors- for example, the majority of the population belonged to the Zoroastrianism, which reveres dog in pioussness, the dates of

¹⁹⁰ Samiparna Samanta, "Introduction Writing Embodied Histories: Humans and Non -Humans in Nature, Science, and Imperialism," in *Meat, Mercy, and Morality: Animals and Humanitarianism in Colonial Bengal, 1850–1920* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2021), 8.

¹⁹¹ Swatilekha Maity, "Animal Presence, Metropolis and the Rise of Animal Rights in Colonial India," in *Situations and Contexts: Narratives on Nineteenth Century Bengal*, ed. Prasanta Ray (Kolkata: Hyphen Publication, 2022), 27–54.

¹⁹² Coral Lansbury, *The Old Brown Dog* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 10.

the mass extermination coinciding with their festivities, the intertwining of the Hindu and Jain sentiment, the financial stronghold of the Parsi community, all these factors collectively contributed in escalating the matter of dog extermination into a politically charged matter of utmost significance.¹⁹³ Even post-independence also, this practice was continued. The journals and periodicals which were significant in constructing and spreading the awareness on animal lives, documented these annual culling of street dogs in the urban landscape of post-Independent India.¹⁹⁴ In fact, The Madras Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals used to have a home for dogs, which exclusively held a lethal chamber for killing the street dogs in popularised ‘painless method’.¹⁹⁵ These official accounts of canicide underscores the repeated attempts of obliteration that street dogs faced in the hands of the established authority in both during the colonial as well as in Independent India. The ambivalent position of dogs as both a ubiquitous animal within the human habitat as well as easily killable being, constitutes the status of these animals as contingent on human whims.

The second point of killing comes through the cue of the hunting of wild dogs or *dholes*. In literature, we came across dholes in Rudyard Kipling’s *The Second Jungle book*, where in *Red Dog* episode, they are portrayed as sinister, and aggressive, eventually killing Mowgli’s wolf-mother, Akela. According to Bhaskar Acharya, the term ‘wild dog’ is a misnomer, as dholes or the Asiatic wild dogs are distinctly different true dogs.¹⁹⁶ Due to their distinctly red or bright rust colour, they are also known as ‘red dogs’. In case of barking, these dogs don’t bark like usual dogs but they can make as much

¹⁹³ Jesse S. Palsetia, "Mad Dogs and Parsis: The Bombay Dog Riots of 1832," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland* 11, no. 1 (January, 2001): 18-19 and 24, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s1356186301000128>.

¹⁹⁴ "Board's Activities," *Animal Citizen*, January- March 1974, 8; "A Kind Act to Dogs," *Animal Citizen*, October-December 1972, 32; "Board's Activities," *Animal Citizen*, April- September 1971, 66; "B.S.P.C.A at Work," *Bombay Blue Cross Bulletin*, December 1958, 9; "B.S.P.C.A at Work," *Bombay Blue Cross Bulletin*, June 1978, 12.

¹⁹⁵ "Board's Activities," *Animal Citizen*, July- September 1970, 6.

¹⁹⁶ Bhaskar Acharya, "The Ecology of the Dhole or Asiatic Wild Dog (*Cuon Alpinus*) in Pench Tiger Reserve, Madhya Pradesh," PhD Diss., (Wildlife Institute of India, Saurashtra University, Rajkot, Gujarat, 2007), 2.

distinct sounds to communicate amongst themselves.¹⁹⁷ According to Ananda Banerjee, out of nine subspecies, only three subspecies are found in India, *Cuon alpinus laniger*, *Cuon alpinus primaevus*, and *Cuon alpinus dukhunensis*.¹⁹⁸

Dholes or wild dogs carried a very negative connotation during the British colonial period. William Crooke mentions them in discussing about village dogs in the Indian villages. He mentions that these dholes were seen closer to jackals in species specific ways than wolves:

It is more nearly allied to the wolf than the domesticated dog, and is more difficult to tame than either of its wild kinsfolk. It does not bark; but howls and yelps more like a jackal. At the same tie all observers note how readily the tame dog reverts to the howl of the jungle animal. (Crooke, 142)¹⁹⁹

Other early examples of these wild dogs occur in the writings of European hunters and naturalists. During the British colonial period, wild dogs or dholes were heavily vilified for their resilience and hunting skill. They were and even recently have been killed in multiple ways- shooting on bounty, poisoning with strychnine and other pesticides, and even chasing them down to their caves and killing their puppies, have been some of the widely practised methods of killing dholes.²⁰⁰ This had been a regular practice from the Nineteenth-Century colonial India. In the writings of Burton, we also come across these types of killing methods systemically, every year. These animals were unanimously blamed for killing most wild animals. Their unrelenting hunt and specific

¹⁹⁷ A.J.T. Johnsingh, "Reproductive and Social Behaviour of the Dhole, *Cuon Alpinus* (Canidae)," *Journal of Zoology* 198, no. 4 (December 1982): 450, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jzo.1982.198.4.443>.

¹⁹⁸ Ananda Banerjee, "A Shy Killer," *Down To Earth* (June 14, 2014), <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/environment/a-shy-killer-44762>.

¹⁹⁹ William Crooke, *Things Indian* (London: John Murrey, 1906), 142.

²⁰⁰ "Dhole (*Cuon Alpinus*)," in *Canids: Foxes, Wolves, Jackals and Dogs. Status Survey and Conservation Action Plan*, ed. C. Sillero- Zubiri, M. Hoffmann, and D.W. Macdonald (Gland, Switzerland and Cambridge, UK: IUCN/SSC Canid Specialist Group, 2004), 216–17.

way of devouring their preys, eating the hunted animal even when they were alive, constructed a particular negative attribute to their character in popular psychology. In the earlier accounts of Littledale and Phythian Adams also, we come across incidents where the wild dogs were killed indiscriminately, in some cases even the mother dogs who came looking for their cubs, were captured and killed by the hunters.²⁰¹ The hunters and game enthusiasts were encouraged to kill these wild dogs indiscriminately. Not only hunting, the article no 25 also made a special allowance to poison the carcass killed by dholes, in order to kill them in massive numbers.²⁰² There are only a few exceptions such as the one recorded by an anonymous narrator writing under the pen name of Robin Hood, who documented one incident where a mother dhole was spared; the warm attitude towards the dholes during that time was indeed a very rare occurrence:

A faint whine from its depth apprised me that I had found the puppies, and I hastened back to my camp for coolies to dig them out. I soon unearthed six lovely little russet -red balls of fur (the mother was evidently foraging as we did not see any sign of her). Anything prettier than the puppies would be difficult to imagine... During the night the mother evidently traced them to my tent, for she came around the camp, and the servants were throwing fire sticks at her all night to her off. In the morning, I still found her circling round and might easily have shot her; but I sympathised with the faithful brute in her bereavement, and would not harm her. (Robin Hood, 122)²⁰³

I started this subsection with the references to two historical citations of animal extermination here, because this story by Subodh Ghosh is entirely rooted in the politics

²⁰¹ Hamilton Littledale, "Notes on Wild Dogs & Etc.," *The Journal of Bombay Natural History Society* VII (1892): 502-03; Phythian Adams 650-651. Phythian Adams, "Jungle Memories Part IV Wild Dogs, Wolves Etc.," *The Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 48, no. 4 (1949): 650-51.

²⁰² W. S. Burke, ed., *The Indian Field Shikar Book*, 4th Edition (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink and Co., 1908), 397.

²⁰³ Robin Hood, "Wild Dogs," *The Journal of Bombay Natural History Society* X, no. Part I (1895): 122-23.

of resistance against this mainstream, populist, ‘civilising’ notion of killing animals. This work, like Harshanath Sarkar, the central character of this story itself, is a single voice of resistance in a world, where this type of unrestrained genocide of an entire species was encouraged, rewarded and celebrated. Harshanath voices the pro-canine concerns in this story. Seen in a broader scale, his character becomes an extension of the pro-animal, and environmentally conscious voice of justice, which just started emerging when this story was published. E.R. C Davidar, A. J. T Johnsingh were the early advocates of this environmental justice and wildlife conservation during the 19070s in India. Banerjee mentions that Davidar himself noted in one of his articles published in the Nilgiri Game Association, that the bounty was increased from Rs. 15 to 25.²⁰⁴ This story also starts with an incident of animal killing in its graphic, visceral violence. The displacement and subsequent migration of one of the local tribal clans, named Turi begins the narrative and the story recalls an incident in the memory of one character named Mr. Atal Sarkar, one of the earliest settlers in the mining town of Bandhupur Range mining town:

The tribal people who used to dwell here, they were called as *Turi*. The oldest amongst them in that time was Chhoto Turi. Only Mr. Atal Sarkar, the maternal uncle of Mr. Chandra, the doctor in Koderma, knew him. Atal must be about a hundred and one years old now. He remembers how, once with a sharp sickle in one hand, this Chhoto Turi dragged a wolf by his leg out of the corn bush. The wolf’s entire body was smeared in blood, as was Chhoto Turi’s. Chhoto Turi chopped the wolf in halves almost; his head was dangling from his body. (Ghosh, 56)²⁰⁵

²⁰⁴ Ananda Banerjee, "A Shy Killer," *Down To Earth* (June 14, 2014), <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/environment/a-shy-killer-44762>.

²⁰⁵ Subodh Ghosh, "Sei Odbhut Obhrokhoni," *Pujabarshiki Anandamela*, 1975, 56.

But within this the story, another narrative is also embedded- a spirit of resistant, subversive narrative strategy of the pro-animal concerns. A little later in the storyline, the account draws into the central plot, the trajectory of the more-than-human world of this abandoned Turi settlements. The story subtly draws a line between the wild children of the forest, i.e., its wildlife as well as the changing lives of the domesticated animals after the Turi migration to Assam tea plantations:

The *Turis* left this place, their homes very abruptly, taking only just some basic stuffs, earthen containers and their personal belongings. Before moving away, they sold their cows, pigs and goats in the local markets. If you pass by the erstwhile Turi settlement now, you can still see some of their left-out things remaining here and there, hidden amongst the wild weeds and bushes. The wild datura shrubberies beside the highway of today's Koderma to Giridih, bear the traces of these former human settlements. The presence of mongoose, porcupines, cobra, speckled krait, all these beings fill up this space. The haunting ground of rabbits and wild squirrels, it hardly bears the traces of its former human settlements. (Ghosh, 58).²⁰⁶

The reappropriation of wild space by nature's own wild animals, is taken to a different level, when the story includes one strange incident witnessed by Atal uncle, whose accounts are referred multiple times in the entire course of the story. Chhoto Turi was the only person who refused to move away and he passed away alone, under mysterious circumstances, an incident which constructed an ironical twist in the story:

That entire episode still sends a cold shiver in Atal uncle's mind. One day in the glimmers of the late afternoon sun, he saw an old wolf coming out of the same

²⁰⁶ Ghosh, *Sei Odbhut Obhrokhoni*, 58.

bush, from where once Chhoto Turi came out with that wolf's body. Atal uncle saw that this old wolf was chewing a human bone with relish. What a peculiar turn of the events! What a strange coincidence! The person who once killed a wolf in such a brutal manner, is now killed and being eaten away by another wolf in that same place! This is life with all its unfathomable equations and mysteries! (Ghosh, 58)²⁰⁷

The animals reclaiming their own space, reappropriating their lives as a consequence of human migration, underscores a deep-rooted ecological impact of human settlements into the wild, untamed spaces. The people who intruded this space, frequented the spot for its potential natural source of mica. Their own stability was disrupted with a circulating rumour of wild dogs or *dholes* in this location. The Sub-Divisional Officer of Giridih even sent for a professional hunter this time to kill these rumoured wild dogs. The story demonstrates how the attitude towards animals, specifically animals like wild dogs or other scavenging creatures is manipulated with rumours, false narratives of their aggression and viciousness, surrounding the reality with mysteries. The professional, government appointed hunter fabricated a false narrative of dangerous, and ruthless, predator wild dogs, or dholes. A Government order was issued to exterminate the wild dogs from this area on an emergency basis. We also have to remember that this story was published in 1975. Just three years back, *The Wildlife Protection Act, 1972* came in effect. An Act which would initiate a crucial change in the way wildlife had been viewed in the public eye. By cordoning off the wild animals out of the range of hunting and destruction, this Act necessitated the crucial juncture in the history of multispecies coexistence within India. The text under the veneer of seemingly simple narrative foregrounds an alternative, radicality which not only points out the sheer indifference of the public and these administrative bodies to the species-specific

²⁰⁷ Subodh Ghosh, "Sei Odbhut Obhrokhoni," *Pujabarshiki Anandamela*, 1975, 58.

differences between the wild dog, or dholes *Cuon dukhunensis* and pye-dogs or pariah dogs *Canis familiaris*, but also reinforces the socio-cultural politics of constructing a narrative of human initiated violence and aggression into the natural, animal world. In the early 1970s, both wild dogs in their natural habitat, and urban, free-ranging dogs in human habitats, were considered ‘illegal citizen’, following the cue of Colin Dayan. Their presence in popular literature was accompanied with either exaggerated accounts of aggression or with sheer indifference lacking sufficient documentation. This story brings the issues of the destruction of animal lives through the intersectional lenses of ‘contact zones’ between wildlife and semi-domesticated yet free-ranging species cohabitant with human lives.

The fabricated propaganda of populist anti-animal campaign is juxtaposed with the narrative voice:

Samuel, the officially appointed and celebrated hunter is checking his rifles every day, although nobody has seen him going inside those forests, even for once. Bidhu Mitra, Nitu Samanta, Mansur Ali, Shibu Chatterjee, Ratanji and the others are all on high alert! The labourers have already fled from this area to Koderma market, out of the sheer panic. In this one month, not a tiger has been spotted in this area. The ruthlessness of this pack of wild dogs is so legendary in a such a degree that even bears don't dare to come for their usual haunts of mahua and honey! In the midst of all these fear and panic, some peculiar howling was heard for thrice or four times in this month. The experienced people conjectured that foxes under fear might be howling like that. How shy and stealthy howling were those! (Ghosh, 59).²⁰⁸

²⁰⁸ Subodh Ghosh, "Sei Odbhut Obhrokhoni," *Pujabarshiki Anandamela*, 1975, 59.

The story builds on these cues of wide assumptions and allows them sufficient situations to be misinterpreted- for example, it was only later that the readers could fathom that those peculiar howling were not made by scared foxes, but of the weak, malnourished, stray dogs. The populist anti- animal propaganda is juxtaposed with the last line of this quoted passage, an authorial commentary, subtly pointing out the authentic expressions in those howling as ‘shy and stealthy’ and not all raising fear. Burton specified the peculiar characteristics of these wild dogs, who are known to be very silent.²⁰⁹ Their enormous endurance of physical pain and incapacity to make loud noises like usual canids construes their peculiarity in popular psyche. It is perhaps not entirely surprising that even when a specific species of animals demonstrates extraordinary skill in enduring pain, how even that capacity can be manipulated as a symptomatic of extreme cunning nature and unnatural fiendishness in the popular, mainstream, anti-animal narratives of speciesism. Burton distinctly pointed out that the dholes or the wild dogs can carry themselves even with severe pain:

It has been observed by most of us who have shot wild dogs how indifferent to pain they appear to be. Never a sound will they utter however severe the wound, and will go miles with a body wound or a broken limb. Even when closely approached to put them out of pain they utter no sound and do not attempt to attack or bite. Best writes in ‘Indian Shikar Notes’, that he has seen such a wild dog turn and swallow his own protruding entrails, which had to be dragged from his throat with some force after the beast was finally killed. (Burton, 714-15)²¹⁰

²⁰⁹ R. W. Burton, "The Indian Wild Dog.," *The Journal of Bombay Natural History Society* XLI, no. Part IV (1941): 699-701 & 712-713.

²¹⁰ Burton, *The Indian Wild Dog*, 714-715.

The picture of wild dogs or dholes was constructed in such a specific way that they emerged as unfeeling, devilish, fiendlike creatures who do not feel pain and neither are concerned about pain of other species.

This story demonstrates how the motif of hearsay and floating rumours can have an important role in the construction of propagandist literatures of anti-animal campaigns, which could enable the extermination of several multispecies lives with a legally approved mass pogrom. The fabrication of wild dogs in this story was carried out by the state appointed hunter, Samuel and the other members of the mining associations for their own selfish intentions. The story was published in 1975, just three years after *the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972*. If we look at the contemporary nonfictional writings on these wild dogs, specifically by the conservationists and wildlife enthusiast, we find a contrasting image to the populist narrative on wild dogs, as upheld by the characters like Samuel and other miners here. The popular narrative in support of the culling of the wild dogs was construed and perpetrated with the colonial enterprise. In several writings of the nature enthusiasts and hunters, we come across this notion that wild dogs were responsible for killing other wild animals or ‘game animal’ as they used to be known during that time. The socio-economic structure of colonial game hunting built a trend of continuation even after the Independence. This structure prioritised the European hunters while constructing a system that would continue to keep the native hunters financially dependent on meagre payments or rewards while exploiting their skill to its optimal point. Rashkow pointed out how massive the payment disparity was between the native hunters and the European hunters, a system which perpetrated and, in a way, compelled the native or aboriginal hunters to depend on the killings of the animals, branded as ‘vermin’, of which dholes or the wild dogs being one of the significant ones amongst them:

Payment must have been a major motivating factor for many subaltern *shikaris*. Poor hunters focussed on earning rewards for vermin eradication, on putting meat on the tables of townsmen and on earning a living by acting as shikaris for wealthier sportsmen...By destroying a single man-eater, a poor hunter could potentially earn more with a single bullet than in an entire lifetime. (Rashkow, 4)²¹¹

There were references to the rewards offered to kill the wild dogs systemically over a long period of time. Fiona Mani mentions this point in her doctoral thesis with significant details along with the process of procuring the hunting licence:

The Government correspondence suggested that a reward of Rs. 30 be implemented so that people would have an incentive to shoot such “vermin” and clear the forests of the predators. (Mani, 266)²¹²

Julie Hughes pointed out that tiger, leopards along with these wild dogs were always listed under the ‘vermin’ aimed to be exterminated, specifically in parts of Rajputana.²¹³ Towards the early Twentieth century, the game laws were changing, but the status of the wild dogs or dholes remained unchanged.²¹⁴ Julie Hughes also pointed out how the attitude towards dhole was distinctly different amongst the Maharajas or the Princes of these states, Europeans hunters, officials and the native tribal people, for example, Dungarpur’s Bhil.

I am bringing all these references related to the status of wild dogs as one of the most persecuted species to substantiate the argument that when this story was written,

²¹¹ Ezra Rashkow, "Making Subaltern Shikaris: Histories of the Hunted in Colonial Central India," Montclair State University Digital Commons, 2014, <https://digitalcommons.montclair.edu/history-facpubs/18>, 4.

²¹² Fiona Mani, "Guns and Shikaris: The Rise of the Sahib's Hunting Ethos and the Fall of the Subaltern Poacher in British India, 1750-1947," PhD Dis., (West Virginia State University, 2012), 266.

²¹³ Julie Hughes, "Threatened Kingdoms of Dwindling Beasts," in *Animal Kingdoms: Hunting, the Environment, and Power in the Indian Princely States* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2013), 238.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 241.

their endangerment was complete, and the public awareness was just rising towards the pro-animal stance. Almost contemporary to this story, the nonfictional writings on wildlife preservation stressed on the necessity of preserving wild dogs.

The twist in the argument is that this story does not even have a wild dog as its character- the plotline builds around the fabricated image of wild dogs in the background. The conflicts between this false fabrication and the truth are positioned in the first appearance of Harshanath himself, when he attempted to correct the misconception about the presence of the wild dogs in that region. In the entire storyline, we see him multiple times correcting this widely held popular belief. His own precarious position as an adventurer and an explorer of the source of mica accentuates his own solitariness as well as possible vulnerability in the hands of the mica merchants and established hunter like Samuel. His words of protest and later, his actions of protest by rescuing the wounded dog and taking care of him despite challenging situations in the face of rising hostility and obstacles, accentuates his character with the spirit of empathy and fortitude while throwing into the relief the notion of individual versus majority. I will repeatedly draw the reference to the time of its publication, i.e., the early 70s, a time when the annual culling of street dogs was also still legalised, a time when people were not completely prepared to see wild dogs as endangered animals in urgent need of conservation.

This text predominantly in an unassuming manner, maneuvered a narrative which would compel the readers to root for the pro-animal sentiment even when it was still not favoured by the majoritarian sentiments. In his first conversation with all the other miners and Samuel, Harshanath distinctly emphasised that the rust-coloured dogs were just stray dogs from the adjacent village, wandering in their malnourished condition from place to place:

Ratanji's munshi Tilakram commented, "I have seen them myself. A pack of wild dogs ran past me the other evening." Harshanath immediately protested, "No, they are not wild dogs. They are just stray dogs, coming from the nearest village. They leave village when food becomes scarce. Poor soul, all those homeless, starving dogs, they are forced into roaming from place to place only for a morsel of food. My uncle Atal told me, that he also saw this similar kind of situation long time back, when stray dogs would haunt the abandoned *Turi* slums in search of food. They would sniff here and there, lick those broken containers, just for a bite. When people leave, the dogs suffer so much in those places". (Ghosh, 60)²¹⁵

The coexistence of dogs and humans even in geo-politically marginal spaces, the impact of human migration, is also felt palpably in the other forms of life. Their dependency and vulnerability, both in the proximity with human settlements, is underscored with these subtle cues. The entire fabrication of this fake rumour about wild dogs, and then the act of hunting down three malnourished dogs and wounding another one massively, underscores the degree of unethical unscrupulousness that was so much prevalent in the established networks of wildlife bounty hunting and reward. The nuances of silenced vulnerability and sadness is articulated in the descriptive passages, where the narrative voice in an apparently nonchalant tone, records the details of these incidents, though underscoring the poignancy of the wounded animal's plight:

There is a trail of blood, on dried leaves and wild bushes, but after a certain distance the trail has ended, without any trace. The vultures will finish its body within a few days and none would know that Samuel has duped the Government with the claim of a thousand rupees reward in the name of hunting vicious wild

²¹⁵ Ghosh, *Sei Odbhut Obhrokhoni*, 60.

dogs, when in reality, he only killed some homeless, already weakened, starving stray dogs. (Ghosh, 64-65)²¹⁶

At the other end of this spectrum, there is Harshanath, who keeps on mentioning that those dogs did not need to be killed, they were harmless:

Every evening these five merchants gather for cards. All of them found Harshanath's responses very strange. Frankly, some of them could hardly restrain their laughter. Would a normal person feel sad when those vicious dogs were being shot? No. But Harshanath did, and in an equally strange voice he told them something, which seemed like a warning. The distressful calls of those poor souls at the time of their death, echoed through this entire area, with the sound of bullets, shot distinctly eleven times. Their cries seemed to reverberate for sometimes, while Harshanath was pacing restlessly back and forth. When Ratanji asked him, "I don't understand why you are getting so upset Harsha Babu? They are vicious creatures, dangerous for us, and killing them is making you this restless! So strange!" Harshanath's glance was touched with a deep unfathomable sadness. He spoke slowly, pausing with every sentence, "I saw them, I know them. One day it got very late. I was coming back, alone, on the road through that village. These were the only creatures that saved me that night. These dogs saved me from a bear, when nobody was there to help. They are not vicious. They are starving, harmless poor street dogs from the village. They don't have to be killed!" and then he said something even more strange- "This is wrong, so very wrong! This is a sin. This forest won't ever forgive this sin." (Ghosh, 71)²¹⁷

²¹⁶ Ghosh, *Sei Odbhut Obhrokhoni*, 64-65.

²¹⁷ Ghosh, *Sei Odbhut Obhrokhoni*, 71.

The story underscores this voice of empathy and interspecies bonding with subtle nuances; it shows how the wounded dog sleeps with Harshanath in the abandoned, almost dilapidated bungalow at night, how with care and time the dog's health improves while Harshanath's own health deteriorates. In the introduction of this chapter, the notion of 'commensality' or the commensal interspecies relationships in literature is hinted. According to Terry O' Connor, commensality denotes the skills and capabilities of adaptation of one species to the living space of another, which process that derives from 'together at table' concept, a mutually beneficial to both.²¹⁸ In this story, this aspect of the relationship is not rendered in the pragmatic manner. Rather, this aspect of the interspecies canid-human relationship emerges through the acts of sharing the meagre amount of food that Harshanath was able to manage with Bhola. The plotline also weaves in the course of the events, the stray like existence of one Sadhuji, who during his stay of just one or two nights, shared the food with Harshanath and Bhola. This character of Sadhuji also embodies a quintessential nomadic lifestyle that is attuned to the uncertain yet free mobility from one space to another and as one of the consequences of that, the continuous random exchanges with people. Harshanath found this Sadhuji on the platform of Koderma rail station, where he was lying almost unconscious out of sheer fatigue and starvation. Harshanath fed him on that day. Days later, this is the same Sadhuji who also accidentally visited Harshanath's dilapidated bungalow, where he was staying with Bhola in great difficulty. The storyline is punctuated with this symbolic as well as literal sharing of food across the species borders, amongst the nomads or in other words stray individuals, both humans and canines. The references to the scenes with the sharing of food as well as undergoing through stages of starvation, both Harshanath and

²¹⁸ Terry O' Connor, "Introduction," in *Animals as Neighbours: The Past and Present of Commensal Species* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2013), 6.

his dog Bhola, underscore this commensal aspect of the relationship in its cultural, Anthro-zoological, and affectively loaded implications in this novella.

The naming of the dog as Bhola marks his transition from a nameless, mistakenly hunted stray to that of a loved companion. His crucial presence during the climactic moments of this story and his contribution as a messenger of Harshanath's note urging for help, consolidates the pivotal role that a representative of persecuted, neglected canines performs in this entire story. If we follow the subtle, subterranean narrative, a strong, animal friendly message emerges from the story. The sporadic recounting of violence and intrusion perpetrated by humans into nonhuman animal lives comes in the discussion directly in the form of historical contextualisation. I would like to argue that seen from that way, the entire story becomes a narrative of the silenced, unheard narrative of animal lives and their destruction and vulnerability in the face of human encroachment. I am citing here the folklore that is associated with the Bhalukiya mica mine shaft, whose name itself is derived from the word bhalu, meaning the bear. The lore says that at the time of its discovery, a local landlord named Chandrika Singh brutally killed the bear who was dwelling in that place:

That mine shaft, which was named as Bhalukiya, that is the unluckiest place one can find in this region. People say that the head of the local land owning zamindars, Chandrika Singh once killed a bear in that shaft. It was also rumoured that Chandrika Singh saw something very strange at that moment. After being shot, the bear was writhing in indescribable pain, and died like that- Singh saw a pair of golden hands in that darkness, right beside the bear; those hands were waving

invitingly, as if they were trying to lure others into the cave, into their doom.
(Ghosh, 67)²¹⁹

The story starts with the trope of hunting and killing and concludes with a warm picture of interspecies companionship in the face of powerful anti-animal authority. By threading together the narratives of Harshanath and Bhola, transcending the atrocities from their vulnerable positions to that of considerable power, the story creates a narrative of underdogs and their mutual, interspecies support system. It is not only Harshanath who saves the dog, but the dog, Bhola also saves Harshanath. This reversal of power, can be traced to the earliest narrative in the story, a human hunting a wolf, and then many years later, presumably getting hunted by another wolf. The subversive radicality only emerges when an individual deliberately introduces the notion of empathy and compassion for other forms of life in the place of hunting and acquisition and thus breaks free from the prey and predator cycle. The deeply embedded narrative of compassion and empathy is not conveyed in this story with a sentimentalised concerns for animals, rather it subtly dominates the entire narrative and the course of the events. Something in this story conveys the message of a difficult and firm notion of justice- the sense of ethicality, which revolves around the notion of compassion reciprocated by compassion while, cruelty is responded with another act of cruelty. The pervading sense of compassion and a poignant awareness of the limitless yet disturbing vulnerabilities of animal lives is amplified with the vulnerability of intricately linked existence of their human companions, care-givers or empaths. This story masterfully articulates how random chance encounters between two individuals of different species also illuminate the multispecies entanglements in the face of human encroachment and atrocities.

²¹⁹ Ghosh, *Sei Odbhut Obhrokhoni*, 67.

Magical Beings, Dreamy World and Lila Majumdar's *Haldey Pakhir Palok* or *The Yellow Bird*

It is not an easy thing to love animals, Didi.

Haldey Pakhir Palok or *The Yellow Bird* by Lila Majumdar, translated by Kamala Chatterjee

All these three texts of this chapter underscore this overpowering notion of interspecies empathy in certain moments of individual lives, with their capacity to illuminate a range of larger issues through this perspective. To love an animal, other than us, requires a certain level of understanding and one's own sense of integrity towards 'others', without limiting within a sense of imposition, tangible transactional quality of relationships. This sense of pervading empathy is deeply instilled in the works of Lila Majumdar, specifically those works which explore animal-human dynamics from multiple perspectives. Lila Majumdar's works frequent with various canine, feline characters. One of her works I have included in the first chapter for its alternative take on the intersectionality of animal characters and their special ability. This specific work that this subsection will attempt to explore is *Haldey Pakhir Palok*, which in English has been translated as *The Yellow Bird* by Kamala Chatterjee. Lila Majumdar has won many awards for her works. In 1968, she was awarded the Rabindra Puroshkar for her autobiography, *Somewhere Else (Aar Kono Khaney)*. In 1963, one of her other works, *Bak Badh Pala* was also awarded Sangeet Natak Akademi Award. This specific story, was awarded the Bengal State Award for children's stories in 1960. *Haldey Pakhir Palok* or as its translation reads, *The Yellow Bird*, centres around the disappearance of a dearly loved family dog, Bhulo and its affective as well as imaginative repercussions in the minds of two siblings, who are guided into an exploration of magical dimension of the quotidian reality. It is considered as one of the classic tales of disappearance, exploration

of magical dimension, and the smooth yet mysterious resolution through the reappearance of the main character back into the familiar realms.

The web of magical, dreamy aspect of reality is one of the major characteristics of Lila Majumdar's works. In most of her works we find that the children accidentally become exposed to this other side of reality- some of them even consciously seek this out in their games or lessons. The works of Lila Majumdar take a striking departure from the usual children's stories written in Bengali, in their nuanced portrayal of deeper aspects of human lives with its relevant complexities instead of providing a black and white notion of morality and ethical dilemma. In the previous two subsections of this chapter, we have located how dogs and humans in their random encounters constituted an interpolation of our concepts of the strangers and the trusted companions. The unfamiliarity becomes non-existent in the interspecies interconnectedness that takes place in the intuitive and affective level. In this specific story, it is not the characters of the dog who is unfamiliar or a stranger to the humans. Rather, in this story, the canine character emerges as the pivotal figure, whose absence takes his two human companions to world of dreamlike experience. It is the character of their caretaker Jhogru who guides them to this world of beautiful strangeness. Aveek Sen in a comparative study of Lila Majumdar's autobiography *Pakdondi*, argues that the animal characters in Majumdar's works always come with an inherent unknowability, some kind of unfathomable longing which eclipses their intrinsically warm and soul fulfilling bonding with their human characters:

The specific question of why a *dog* is compelled to flee repeatedly from its human attachments immediately presents before the children the most radical form of otherness,

of the unknowable, that their familiar world can provide them with and this is what animals generally do in Leela Majumdar's stories, from *Deene Dupure to Kaag Noy*.²²⁰

The plotline of the story runs around the two siblings, Bogey and his sister Rumu and their pet dog Bhulo, whose sudden disappearance sets the course of the events in motion. Their companion, Jhogru, possesses an immense knowledge of the supranatural world of folklore and oral culture, that merges an intricately woven sense of life across different species and time barriers. It was also that same Jhogru who first informed them about the magical power of the yellow bird. According to the folklore and the version of Jhogru, there is a specific type of yellow bird, which holds a magical power. If a dog or a jackal by any chance eats this bird, the dog or the jackal is transformed into a human being. This story is not only about a story of one sibling duo and their wise guide missing their beloved dog, but also about this undercurrent of empathy that surrounds the popular psyche about dreams, fairytales, orature on humans' interconnected existence with other forms of life. The story within this veneer also makes observations regarding the human intrusions into the nature. Bhulo, whose very name stands for absentminded or forgetful, is a dearly loved indie dog, adopted by Rumu and her elder brother Bogey. The entire story revolves around the trope- "Why does Bhulo run away?" This story sensitively captures how children respond to their beloved nonhuman animal's absence in an adult world, which fails to grasp the depth of the sadness that comes with it. The story starts when Bhulo returns after a day's absence with a yellow feather in his mouth. Both these siblings are sensitive and Jhogru attempts to navigate them with the help of oral narratives and folkloric beliefs which may not substitute this sadness by coming up of with materialistic yet superficial suggestions of a 'pure-breed dog' as their grandfather does,

²²⁰ Aweek Sen, "'Why Does Bhulo Run Away?': Notes on Leela Majumdar, W.H. Auden, and Abanindranath Tagore - Articulate," *Articulate*, November 20, 2021, <https://articulate.org.in/why-does-bhulo-run-away-notes-on-leela-majumdar-w-h-auden-and-abanindranath-tagore/>.

but whose rich expanse in those magical stories construct a world where the absence of Bhulo finds a greater and deeper wealth of purpose, explanation mixed empathy, intuition and imagination.

In the version of the yellow bird story, the second part deals with a transformation; in this story, that transformation is never described, yet it is implied with suggestive language. The morning, Bhulo mysteriously goes missing, a toddler appears, whom Jhogru introduces as the son of his brother-in-law. This is one of the crucial points in this story, as it subverts the populist, degraded notion of dog and equates beloved canine with an equally, extremely adorable baby. In our colloquial nomenclature, dogs very rarely get distinguished with adorableness, and they are easier to be equated in derogatory usages, as I have already pointed out in the second chapter. Here, in this story, by allowing a mental space for this transformation from a canine to a child, Lila Majumdar masterfully instils in us the deep-rooted warmth and care that we or the children feel towards a possible mongrel, someone whom the mainstream culture will not even consider with due significance. I am quoting here the description of the baby and his behavioural details which subtly draws a parallel reading for the symbolically similar behavioural patterns between dogs and human babies:

A tattered mat lay on the courtyard in front of the hut, and a little dark boy sat there. He was so chubby that there were creases on his tummy. Few tufts of curly black hair adorned his head. Bare-bodied with a smiling face, he had brick-coloured eyes and pointed ears sticking out like a bird's wings! (Majumdar, 8)²²¹

Lila Majumdar in her inimitable lucid yet touching language, captures the adorable behaviours of a toddler. I intend to point out that in our essentially speciesist language,

²²¹ Lila Majumdar, *The Yellow Bird*, trans. Kamala Chatterjee (Calcutta: Puffin Books, 2010), 8.

animals and animalistic behaviours are always looked down with a certain sense of either derision or degrading characteristic. Without taking recourse of a didactic of compassion towards animals, Lila Majumdar integrates through the eyes of an empath how sensitive, affectionate children spontaneously transcend above the species-specific barrier and can perceive their dogs and younger children in the same light of love and warmth:

When the little boy was lowered to the veranda floor, he crawled straight to Bhulo's plate and finding it empty, let out an angry howl. He calmed down only when Rumu gave him a piece of bread. Bogey softly called, "Bhulo! Bhulo! Bhulo!" the little boy started chuckling loudly, crawled to Bogey and licked him with a moist tongue...The boy was delighted to see the dainty wax-flowers cascading down, and tried to eat them by fistful. This was the time when flocks of wild ducks roosted on the timber trees and it looked as if the tree had sprouted giant white flowers. The boy giggled at them. Suddenly, by an unseen command, the ducks rose all together to the sky and flew away. The child lifted his small arms towards them and started to cry... Bogey shook the boy gently, "Why did you eat the yellow bird? Who asked you to eat it?" The boy stopped crying, big drops of tears running down his cheek. (Majumdar, 8-9)²²²

The exquisite tenderness of this baby becomes inseparable from the exclusive place of affection that Rumu holds for Bhulo, who is addressed by the adult family members as most of the times, mongrel, except their grandmother who affectionately calls him so.²²³ The presence of an absent dog constantly lingers in the background; the palpable presence of a deeply loved animal, his companionship is poignantly articulated in a child's language:

²²² Majumdar, *The Yellow Bird*, 8-9.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 30.

Rumu went to have a look at Bhulo's plate... Rumu pushed away the plate with her foot and said, "In the evening, Jhogru's wife was feeding the boy mashed bananas. And my legs are aching so much now, Dada." She wailed and burst into a torrent of tears. (Majumdar, 30)²²⁴

The indescribable heaviness in checking and seeing the unattended plate of a missing pet, can only be articulated through the mask of crying under the pretext of muscle pain. The sad and emotional repercussions of a single dog and his looming absence in the lives of these sibling duo along with their Jhogru, sheds light on myriad narratives of loss and reclamations.

Lila Majumdar's stories are vibrant with this spontaneous affection for other forms of life. In her stories, cats perform their usual 'duties' by rousing the entire neighbourhood, monkey mother leaves her baby and then in the evening comes back to get her, the wood cutter rears an orphan cub of a panther mistakenly, thinking as a kitten of a house cat, the bear comes out and plays in the courtyard with her cubs and then in an equally nonchalant manner goes inside the forest. In this story too, Rumu and Bogey both cope with their restless sadness in the absence of Bhulo, in a world which does not allow space to recognise the psychological shock in missing one's beloved four-legged companion. In Jhogru's attempts to take away this pain by diverting their minds into the rich world of folklore, he exposes them to a wider world of multispecies conscience with their pain, joy, and sublime emotional expansions. Majumdar never anthropomorphises her animal characters, neither she makes the human characters act like animals. Her mastery lies in skilfully weaving the inexplicable gap of comprehension between

²²⁴ Lila Majumdar, *The Yellow Bird*, trans. Kamala Chatterjee (Calcutta: Puffin Books, 2010), 17.

nonhuman animals and humans, yet emphasising their empathy for each other. This world, Jhogru's world of Dumka is empathetic and encompassing all kinds of life forms:

Underneath, insects of various shapes and sizes start running about at breakneck speed. It is fun to watch, but very painful for them. “Why is it painful?” “They are creatures of darkness, and cannot stand light. Also, that is their home where they live with their eggs and their young ones. Once the stone is removed, the babies die and the eggs break. (Majumdar, 22-23)²²⁵

In children's literature, there are references to the teachings of nonviolence towards animals. Majumdar does not tone down the reality of the ugly aspect of animal-human encounters in the conflicting areas; instead, she describes it in great details but along with that also emphasises the overlapping mutual empathetic link of filial connections in all the species. Beneath the gossamer veneer of the childlike, fantastic stories of shape shifting and transformations, it is also a story that touches upon the crucial aspects of animal-human coexistence in the ecologically volatile areas. The unfathomable vulnerability of both wild animals and humans is exposed in a very tender way. In her stories, the outsiders remain outsiders with their logical mind and practical intellect, while the local individuals, in his lexicon, the people of Dumka, are brought out with all their spontaneous kindness as well as limitations. We find that they are not very open to cats while, some of them can easily forgive wild animals and refrain from harming them during their moments of vulnerability, which Jhogru's micro stories illuminate so heartily. The story of the mother bear with her cubs in the time of forest fire and the Sardar, the chief of their village, and the capturing of the elephants, all these are recorded and narrated in the colloquial, oral culture:

²²⁵ Majumdar, *The Yellow Bird*, 22-23.

During the forest fire, the bear too came out with the others; there was a cub with it, who was limping from an injury. The little one fell down right in front of our Sardar, the village chief. A year ago, this bear had chewed to pieces the foot bones of the sardar's son, so now he was ready with deadly bow and arrows in his hands. "He killed the bear?" "When the Sardar raised his bow, the bear clasped the cub to its breast and stood staring at him. and our Sardar lowered bow, turned and walked away. It is not an easy thing to love animals, Didi. It is not enough to keep a dog or a cat in the house and pet and caress them". (Majumdar, 35)²²⁶

The elemental uncertainty and the strange vulnerability eclipsed both animals and humans, and Lila Majumdar in her potent yet simple lexicon, creates a plethora of portals through which the children can experience this deep, poignant experience of simpler yet stranger lives. The sacredness of filial bonds, and the deep integrity in recognising and respecting that even with the sufferings of one's own, reflects the attitudes of Dumka's local people towards animals. In one of their representatives, the writer places the protest against the treacherous ploys humans use to capture and bind 'free-spirited' wild animals, and that is the reason why Jhogru can say spontaneously:

"Who said humans love animals? Once I went to watch the *Khedda* operation, where elephants are caught by men using magnificent tame elephants as decoys to lure them. I saw free-spirited animals, who rejoice in going down the green hillsides with their herd, being shackled and taken away. Do you call that love for animals? Baby elephants feel very ticklish if one touches their soft skin. Do you know, men use rough scrubbing brushes on them to get rid of that ticklish feeling, so they could put the howdah on them? Otherwise, at the slightest touch

²²⁶ Majumdar, *The Yellow Bird*, 35.

the little ones would roll on the ground laughing their heads off! Do you call these methods of love? (Majumdar, 34)²²⁷

The distinction between the local people of that area, and the outsiders are demarcated with this line of compassion versus exploitation. One of the colonial constructs in the hunting was setting the hierarchy between the one who used to hunt because of sheer necessity and survival and those who hunted for reputation and pleasure. The weight of necessity was a crucial factor in the lives of local people who stayed inside the forests and the adjacent areas, and this significant aspect is touched upon in the sensitive narration of Jhogru to Rumu and her elder brother Bogey. The utter meaninglessness of these hunting trips organised and encouraged by these outsiders, whom Jhogru calls as 'Babus' is exposed in the narrative which merges the real with the supernatural. The death of a monkey by a misfire and then the vanishing of the entire horde, along with the dead monkey, weaves this matrix of intertwining real and the supernatural world. The folkloric elopements of the micro-narratives of Jhogru, like one hunter's being bitten by a poisonous spectacled cobra, known in Bengali as *Kharish*, and his subsequent decision to stop hunting the wild animals after the local people had cured him, all these stories underscore the juxtaposition between the local people's knowledge, respect and mutual protective tendency towards the forest with all its animal and plant life while the outsiders' intrusive tendencies to claim the land. Parama Roy terms these prejudiced cultural forms as 'extrahuman entities', which she explains through Dipesh Chakraborty's phrase as 'radical untranslatability':

How might this be achieved within the protocols of a secular and universalist discipline like history, though without ignoring or explaining away the nonsecular phenomenology of his subjects? Such a challenge is impossible to resolution; it

²²⁷ Majumdar, *The Yellow Bird*, 34.

speaks to the incommensurability- indeed, the 'radical untranslatability'- between normatively disenchanting disciplines like history (or literary scholarship) and the imaginations- definitionally subaltern and non-Western in Chakrabarty" telling- in which gods, spirits, or the supernatural are actors in the material world. (Roy, 75)²²⁸

I quote Roy here, because her argument underscores how pervasively superstitions and prejudices surround almost every aspect of ordinary lives in remote areas, both during the Colonial and Post-Independence India. The superstitions also played a significant role in the societal ostracisation of differently abled individuals. This story deals with this notion of ostracisation while making it presentable and subtle for children's readership. The pro-nature local people versus the outsiders as intruders is subtly articulated through the local people's concept on hunting:

Bogey Dada, we kill because of hunger or to save our lives. (Majumdar, 43)²²⁹

The difference in the necessity and concern of hunting sets apart the distinction between the native, local hunters who only undertook this type of activities under sheer pressure of survival. On the other end of the spectrum, there were outsiders like European hunters or the native Princes or kings. As quoted by Raskow, in one of the articles in the *Journal of the Society for the Preservation of the Wild Fauna of the Empire*, Henry Seton-Kerr comments:²³⁰

²²⁸ Parama Roy, "The Strange Ecologies of Empire," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 49, no. 1 (2021): 75, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s1060150319000640>.

²²⁹ Majumdar, *The Yellow Bird*, 43.

²³⁰ Ezra Rashkow, "Making Subaltern Shikaris: Histories of the Hunted in Colonial Central India," Montclair State University Digital Commons, 2014, <https://digitalcommons.montclair.edu/history-facpubs/18>, 5.

Your true sportsman is always a real lover of nature. He kills, it is true, but only in sweet reasonableness and moderation, for food, if necessary, but mainly for trophies. (Kerr, 26)²³¹

The prioritisation is only given to those hunts which were done for the reward or the reputation, rather than those for necessity or survival, and in this way, a system of devaluing the native or the local hunters was constructed. This prioritisation of reward or pleasure principle in hunting over survival or necessity also performs the process of devaluing animal lives, the destruction of which was supposed to be considered primarily as the source of pleasure and reward according to this system. Sending so many lives just for pleasure or reward underscores the ultimate devaluing of animal lives and reduction of these lives as mere commodities, in contrast to actual sources challenging power with dignity or integrity.

One of the reasons of my citing this history of hunting and their popularised perceptions in public psyche as well as their trajectory of victims in human's hunting is to consolidate the degree of anthropocentric ideas hinted in the dynamics of this story. The absence of one dog, throws into the relief the children's coping up with the sense of loss in the backdrop of an enriched yet contradictory culture of animal-human coexistence in that geographical space. The fantasy and reality are constantly enmeshed in this magical story. Majumdar randomly presents Rumu, Bogey and Jhogru in front of a horse, in lieu of Jhogru's story of *pakshiraj*, the winged horse. But unlike the winged majestic horse of Jhogru's story, this horse looks restless and emaciated:

At the sight of them, the horse stopped short, its whole body quivering, and a large white patch could be seen round the pupils. There was froth at the corner of

²³¹ Henry Seton-Kerr, "The Preservation of Big Game," *Journal of the Society for the Preservation of the Wild Fauna of the Empire IV* (1908): 26.

its mouth and its chest rose and fell like a bellow, Bogey and Rumu were speechless! Every single rib bone of the horse could be counted and the two bones near the shoulders stood unnaturally high. (Majumdar, 27)²³²

The untold, silenced history of this unknown horse and his deprivation or narratives of struggles become palpable amidst all these fantastic children's stories. Nirjhar Dey in discussing about the fantastic aspect of this story quoted Rosemary Jackson on the capacity of fantasy literature to integrate reality into the woven fantastic fabrics in order to make it more tolerable or acceptable for the children.²³³ Majumdar makes it very difficult to categorise and segregate the real from the supernatural or the fantastic- the subtle yet penetrative observations of Jhogru punctuate all his stories with an untold yet implied scenarios of the adult world with its own baggage of moral complexities and repercussions:

Bogey Dada, I know why a pure, thoroughbred horse cannot perform on a special race day or why an inferior horse suddenly takes off like a piece of hay in front of a gale! Now, get up, it is time to go home. (Majumdar, 27-28)²³⁴

There is a reason why I have been citing all the animal narratives in *The Yellow Bird*. Most of these stories underline the crucial significance of human interference or encroachments in animal lives with devastating consequences, and in many ways the stories recounted or narrated by Jhogru, are crated with a strong base of local, orature of Dumka, and these stories construct a different, alternative testament countering the populist anthropocentric, speciesist narratives.

²³² Majumdar, *The Yellow Bird*, 27.

²³³ Nirjhar Dey, "Flying Away from the Reality on the Wings of the Yellow Bird," Academia.edu, November 19, 2013, https://www.academia.edu/5155877/Flying_away_from_the_Reality_on_the_Wings_of_The_Yellow_Bird; Rosemary Jackson, "The Fantastic as a Mode," in *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London & New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis, 2003), 20.

²³⁴ Majumdar, *The Yellow Bird*, 27-28.

There is also another angle to these animal stories. Unlike the magical creatures and the fantastic micro-narratives of Jhogru, the account of Bhulo, the central animal character, the beloved dog of Rumu and Bogey, stays beyond the scope of this story for majority of the time. The readers are kept entirely in the dark about what exactly happened to him while he has been out the story's ambit. The story underscores this unknowable aspect of animal's lives in spite of the fact that they are our companions. The empathetic yet independent coexistence between canine-human is something that is also reiterated in this story like the one discussed in the first subsection. The sudden reappearance of Bhulo one morning and the coincidental disappearance of the baby throw into the relief the interchangeable status that empathetic humans can relate to human babies and their adult beloved animal companions in a parallel and equal level. The ritualistic process of *niduli mantra*, a chanting that cures insomnia, the amulet of gold and silver, the five-legged spider and Rumu's gesture of carrying this spider cautiously to make that *niduli mantra* active, all these together create this sense of urgency in the interspecies bonding, which remains ignored in the mainstream stories. At the core level, *The Yellow Bird* is an exploration of this sense of longing, for our missing companions, and it does not differentiate whether that companion is another fellow human or an animal. Becky Tipper explains the relationship of children with their beloved animals in two ways; one is 'biophilia' a term explained by Gail F. Melson, and the other one is micro-geographies of children. Tipper quotes the definition of 'biophilia' according to Melson as:

A natural attraction children have to animals... a predisposition to attune to animals and other living things that is part of the human evolutionary heritage...

children are born assuming a connection with other living things... Every human child begins life situated in what adults call 'the animal world'.²³⁵

Majumdar's *The Yellow Bird* explores this connection and negotiates this world of 'biophilia' with the adult readers. Rumu's sadness for all types of animals within the scope of this narrative underscores this encapsulating experience of children's instinctive bonding with nature and the multiplicities of life. I will further refer to Tipper's analysis of children's familial close connection with their pets, in the light of this work. For Rumu and Bogey, their notion of family also takes Jhogru, and Bhulo within the familial bond. Tipper's argument is constructed around the animals whom the children see, interact and cohabit in their everyday lives and it is these minutiae of activities and their remembrances that create the space of nonhuman animal lives within the narrative focal points. Bhulu, along with the dark coloured baby, create this form of micro-geographies through the material stuffs or physical spaces used and occupied by them, in the world of Rumu and Bogey. The collar, Bhulo's plate, the amulet intended for the baby, all of these material objects construct this narrative of canid-human micro-geographies in the text. The dreamlike landscapes of Jhogru and the nook and corner of the household, transform this into unique, memorable, and significant ones in children's perspectives, a process that Tipper explains in the words of Gaston Bachelard's 'the enlarging gaze of a child'.

²³⁵ Becky Tipper, "A Dog Who I Know Quite Well": Everyday Relationships between Children and Animals," *Children's Geographies* 9, no. 2 (2011): 146, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2011.562378>; Gail F. Melson, "Animals and the Study of Children," in *Why the Wild Things Are: Animals in the Lives of Children* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2001), 19–20.

Conclusion

This chapter outlines a map of the canine presence in modern South Asian literature from the 1930s to the 1970s and through these texts attempts to locate not only the multilayered positions of the dogs in our literary fields but also sees them as a reflection of the general attitudes towards animals in their light. All these three stories are also forms of negotiations- negotiations on ideas of familiarity and strangers, on notions of ferality embedded in the stray identities and domesticated beings, and the overlapping presence and absence through reality and unreal dreaminess. Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay's *The Memories of Deoghar* illuminates the position of contemporary street dogs with a representation of his Atithi of this story. Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay's own active involvement in the animal rights movement, his being the chairmanship in Howrah C.S.P.C.A and numerous activities of rescue and addressing the cruelties are never hinted in this particular short story- yet these issues come to the forefront of the discussion while understanding the real significance of the storyline.

Subodh Ghosh's *That Strange Mine of Mica* touches upon the polarisation, which started to emerge during the 1970s India in the field of wildlife conservation and protection. His portrayal of Bhola, with his former stray identity as the hunted, starving pariah foregrounds the narrative with the existential threats that street dogs of our nations have been subjected to. Along with the street dogs, Ghosh also captures the shape of propagandist literature when it comes to the wild dogs and their presentation in the mainstream narratives of hunting. With Harshanath's resistant voice, it becomes an extension of the other spectrum of this polarity, the side represented by E. R. C. Davidar in his poignant observation on the natural intuition and intellect of the dholes, something that was always disregarded in the popular, mainstream narratives:

The deer population would have dropped below the level of survival in Sigur had not wild dogs themselves started taking a hand in their welfare by restricting their population growth. This was achieved by allowing only the alpha female or a limited number of females to breed. Indications are that such planned parenthoods among dholes are more advanced than in human society. (Davidar, 233)²³⁶

It is not that these narratives are amorphous, sprawling- I intend to argue that these aspects of the narratives are also crucial in understanding the canid-human relationships and their representations in literature. Unlike most of the didactic children's literature, Lila Majumdar's *The Yellow Bird* does not impart teachings on compassion to other beings. Sibaji Bandyopadhyay in his *Education and the Lessons of Modernity (Shiksha o Adhunikotar Path)* chapter, mentioned the necessity of teaching children to be compassionate and empathetic to other nonhuman beings.²³⁷

Significantly, Colesworthey Grant, the founder of the Calcutta Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, also elaborately illustrated on this necessity of compassion for the fellow creatures. His pamphlet on this issue was published and widely circulated in the Nineteenth Century Calcutta. Colesworthey Grant's *To The Children of Calcutta: On Cruelty* is an extensive discussion in the resistant, pro-animal, anti-speciesist stance taken up by the emerging animal rights activism of the Nineteenth Century. From the establishment of the Calcutta Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in 1861, precisely ninety-nine years after, Lila Majumdar's *The Yellow Bird* was awarded the president's Award in 1960. *The Yellow Bird* becomes the articulation of on one hand the explorations of fantasy in children's stories, on the other hand, an

²³⁶ E. R. C. Davidar, "Whistling Hunters," in *Whispers from the Wild*, ed. Priya Davidar (Delhi: Penguin Random House India, 2012), 233.

²³⁷ Sibaji Bandyopadhyay, *The Gopal-Rakhal Dialectic: Colonialism and Children's Literature in Bengal* (New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2015), 137-38.

integrated shape of this compassion for other beings in children's literature. At the heart of this story lies a narrative of transformation, both physical as well as metaphorical. All these three stories, are testament of transformations- transformative ideas towards the animal companions and their capacity to transform our lives.

IV.A Dog's Day: The Canine Life Writing in Literature of South Asia

In the previous chapters, I have explored how the dogs have been presented in the literature of South Asia. In this chapter, we will take a counter glance from the other side. This chapter will be an exploration of those specific texts, which are not only canine centered but, which also exercise the 'voice of the animals' through their centrally positioned canine characters. The life of animals is one of the central topics in the literature. The central positioning of characters also expresses importance and depth that character holds in real life. There are only a handful of stories and narratives where we find dogs as the central protagonists in the texts, even in lesser numbers of those texts which have the canine characters as their narrators. By assigning the position of the narrator to our canine companions complicates the notions of interspecies relationship and coexistence to a great extent. The analysis of dogs as the significant yet partial characters in the fiction has helped to bring out the socio-cultural perception of the mass in a broad perspective. They also expose the changes these cultural attitudes underwent because of various changes in the discourses of medical science, ecological awareness, urban planning etc. Here I intend to clarify that my argument and analysis will only focus on those specific narratives which unambiguously fall in the category of the animal characters, specifically canine characters as the *first-person narrators*, excluding those narratives where their lives were recorded as animal biographies. Animal biographies like Virginia Woolf's *Flush*, Paul Aster's *Timbuktu*, and in South Asian context, Perumal Murugan's *Punachi, or the Story of A Black Goat*, *Adorini* by Prabhat Kumar Mukhopadhyay, *Kamdhenu* by Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay, and the likes articulate this sequencing the events of animal lives in their own chronological orders, cause and effect

cycles. This chapter hinges on the point of how animals, more specifically canine characters, could have seen us? How would they articulate their experience of cohabiting with humans?

This chapter sets out to explore this canine perspective, which I will term as 'canine gaze' in three texts, Bhagirath Mishra's *Amanushnama*, Kunzang Choden's *Dawa*, and one graphic narrative by Shohei Emura, named *Oye! Chhotu*. Among these, Mishra's novel is entirely about dogs, specifically more on dogs who have a range of variegated relationship with humans- domesticated, previously domesticated but currently abandoned, feral, community dogs familiar with humans of their places and so on. Emura's *Oye! Chhotu* also deals with the perception of the world entirely from the eyes of a puppy born on the street with a handful of siblings. Mishra's novel manipulates this unique angle from the perspectives of multiple dog narrators and a particular physical location named *Bat-Tala*, the shade of an immense banyan tree at the outskirts of the human habitat. Emura's graphic narrative presents characters in the fringes of another urban human habitat.

Before getting into the detailed analysis of these texts, I think it is necessary to construct a theoretical methodology of these canine narrators in the larger literary platform. The moment we bring in the context of animal narrators into the discussion, the problems of consciousness emerge- how can we delve into the minds of animals and can decipher what exactly they are thinking, or how do they reciprocate our emotive responses, or whether those are their responses at all? Bhagirath Mishra's narrative here is, I believe, attempted to capture the 'lived experience' of these dogs with as much authenticity as it can be imagined. Seeing the world through the eyes of another animal, except human, constitutes an account of alternative or a different parameter of reality which can transform our notions on coexistence, multiplicities of awareness and trans-

species connections. There are several theories on the different types of animal narrators who execute the role of the protagonists in several texts. In this chapter, I intended to construct a representative analysis of texts which incorporate the animal narrators who through their presence and '*animal existence*', comment, expose and critique the monolithic anthropocentric experiences and in that way also construct a historical narrative of our own time and space through *their* eyes.

Theoretical Structure and A Brief History of Animal Narrators in Literature

The notion of animal characters is an ambiguous position from the angle of perspective and speciesist 'positionality'. If we historically trace the origin of this animal protagonists, the stories of Aesop, *The Jataka Tales*, *the Panchatantra* will emerge as some of the earliest examples. From there, in the western ancient classical literature also, there are many examples of talking animals in literature. Citing the example provided by Deborah Steines, Christine Ivanovic notes that the tradition of introducing talking animals in literature goes back to the time of Hesiod and Archilochus, the versions of the fable *The Eagle and the Snake* as one of the oldest in the record.²³⁸ In the medieval period, we have seen that beast fables were quite prevalent in the common literary landscape. Tristan Schimdt notes that during the periods of Antiquity and the Middle Ages, in the Euro-Mediterranean cultures, there was a prevalent tendency to interpret animal behaviours and physical attributes, which consequently led to the conceptualisations and psychological projections. The animal-human relationships were distinctly marked with an ambivalence of closeness yet species specific alienation.²³⁹ In more recent times, when

²³⁸ Christine Ivanovic, "Talking Animals and Politics of World Literature," *Comparative Literature Studies* 54, no. 4 (2017): 704.

²³⁹ Tristan Schmidt, "Introduction: Perception and Evaluation of Animals in Euro- Mediterranean Cultures," in *Impious Dogs, Haughty Foxes and Exquisite Fish: Evaluative Perception and Interpretation of Animals in Ancient and Medieval Mediterranean Thought*, edited by Tristan Schmidt and Johannes Pahlitzsch (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2019), 1-10.

we proceed towards the early Modern Period, we come across animal representations in literature- where some of these works are heavily marked with speaking animal characters, while the others are simply the expressions of the writers' own emotional and mental attachments formed with their respective companion animals, with commemorative values. With the advancement in technology and geographical explorations of the world as well as documenting the 'New World' in all its diversities on various lifeforms, the animal representations in literature also took a paradigmatic shift. During the 16th century, we find feline speaking characters in works like *Puss in Boots*, later during the 19th Century, in the works of Balzac, Saki and Émile Zola.²⁴⁰ If we attempt to locate the examples of animal autobiographies, our search will take us back to texts like Dorothy Kilner aka Mary Pelham's *The Life and Perambulations of a Mouse* (1784) *The Biography of a Spaniel* (1806), Arabella Argus's *The Adventures of a Donkey* (1815), Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty: His Grooms and Companions, the Autobiography of a Horse* (1877).

There is also another aspect to these depictions which has been stressed by a section of the animal critics. In depicting animals as talking in human language is an entirely imaginative undertaking, as it is unable to bridge the speciesist gap amongst animals and humans. There is an aspect of grotesqueness in portraying talking animal characters in literature, as Karla Armbruster pointed out; she maintains that most of the times these literary works verge on to the humanisation of animal characters so much that their species-specific uniqueness is obliterated. Thus, the literary works get reduced to the risks of mere portrayals of only the absurd side of human expectations:

²⁴⁰ *The Dover Anthology of Cat Stories* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, Inc.), 2015.

It's true that fiction featuring talking animals can be terrible: both terrible as literature, using the nonhuman perspective as an easy gimmick, and terrible for human relations with other animals, relying on the grossest anthropomorphism, lapsing into worn-out (and often destructive) stereotypes about all species involved, and confirming a sense of humanity's ultimate superiority over other creatures. (Armbruster, 18)²⁴¹

But interpreting the portrayals of speaking animals in literature only from this reductionist aspect will not cover its far-reaching contribution in our contemporary literature and how canine-human or in the more generalised view animal-human interactions are captured. Erika Fudge, in her seminal works on the concept of narration and narrating subjects, draws a very distinct line between humanised animals and anthropomorphised animals in the literature. Fudge maintained that these 'humanization of animals' are necessary despite being sentimental as they are essential in making their places in our culture and for making us reconsider human interactions more because, "they actually might serve an ethical function".²⁴² Fudge continued that without anthropomorphised representation gaining and representing nonhuman perception in our anthropocentric literature, will be almost impossible- in this way, although these seem to appear exercises in mere sentimentalism yet they compel the readers to look into the human-animal relationships from a more positive angle.²⁴³

In tracing the historical evolution of this genre, Julia A. Smith provided a comprehensive map of how the Natural history as a popular domain in literary and cultural life necessitated, contributed and increased the exploration of this genre in

²⁴¹ Karla Armbruster, "What Do We want from Talking Animals? Reflections on Literary Representations of Animal Voices and Minds," in *Speaking for Animals: Animal Autobiographical Writing* edited by Margo DeMello (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis, 2013), 18.

²⁴² Erica Fudge, "Real and Symbolic: Questions of Difference," in *Animals* (London: Reaktion, 2002), 76.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 76-77.

multiple literary works. She argues that the expansive celebration and acceptance of the Natural History in middle class populace provided a fit platform for this type of narrative, in the shape of "three types of discourses- argument, description, and anecdote".²⁴⁴ Smith's analysis on this specific genre of animal autobiography is seminal in two points. One is why both animal biography and autobiography have such a deep-rooted connection to the Natural history and exactly how they have corresponded to each other in the history of animal subjectivity in literature. The second point is why this animal autobiography is crucial from the perspective of animal-human relationship and mutuality. To find the explanations of these two points, we should discuss the second point first, and then proceed to the former one. Smith argues that the writers of these texts dwindled between two notions of animal consciousness- whether their behaviours are controlled by reason or by instinct.²⁴⁵ This concept of animal consciousness could only be explained through a deep and pervasive sense of empathy, and here I quote Smith. In analysing the contribution of the Natural History, Smith notes:

Furthermore, many authors of animal autobiography cared deeply about real animals and animal welfare. Thus, animal autobiography needed real animal natures to write about. Natural history laid out the natural dispositions of animal species, and animal autobiography depicted those dispositions in individual animals under assault, making them capable of speaking about that distress. (Smith, 729)²⁴⁶

This sense of empathy and a heightened sensitivity towards cruelty by humans to other-than-human animals also function as the intersection of animal biography and

²⁴⁴ Julia A. Smith, "Representing Animal Minds in Early Animal Autobiography: Charlotte Tucker's 'The Rambles of a Rat' and Nineteenth-Century Natural History," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 43, no. 4 (2015): 725–44, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24577321>, 726.

²⁴⁵ Smith, 729.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 729.

animal biography.²⁴⁷ Though Harriet Ritvo maintained, even the sensitive animal autobiographers, who intended to raise empathy towards animals, were markedly aware of the exercise of excess empathy for animals. In Ritvo's own words:

Even the sentimental fabulists were firm about the line separating man and beasts, a line which placed certain ineluctable limits on the obligation to be kind to them. It was, for example, permissible to exploit them economically in all the usual ways. In no case, according to these earnest didacticists, should concern for animals, eclipse concern for other human beings (Ritvo, 82).²⁴⁸

In a colonised place like India, empathy for animals was ambivalent. Empathy for the animals was one of the major factors in religious sections like Buddhism, Jainism, and Vaishnavism- the notion of 'ahimsa' or noninjury and 'karuna' or sympathy towards other species, were two of the main tenets of these religious practices.²⁴⁹ The early works that focussed on animals in colonial India, they demonstrated a combination of natural history, medical science and compassion for animals. The discourses on Natural history positioned each animal within their species-specific habitat, habits, physical attributes and certain temperaments. One of these earliest books on the basic descriptive aspects of animals was *Pashwabali*, published from Calcutta School Book Society in 1822. Abhijit Gupta precisely pointed out that this book was also the first of its kind from a different angle- this book belongs to a publishing house which initiated "modern, secular

²⁴⁷ Ibid.,730.

²⁴⁸ Harriet Ritvo, "Learning from Animals: Natural History for Children in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," *Children's Literature*, Vol 13, (1985): 72-93.

²⁴⁹ Ian Harris, "'A Vast Unsupervised Recycling Plant': Animals and the Buddhist Cosmos," in *A Communion of Subjects: Animals in Religion, Science and Ethics*, ed. Paul Waldau and Kimberley Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 207–17; Lance Nelson, "Cows, Elephants, Dogs, and Other Lesser Embodiments of Atman: Reflections on Hindu Attitudes towards Nonhuman Animals," in *A Communion of Subjects: Animals in Religion, Science and Ethics*, ed. Paul Waldau and Kimberley Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 179–93.

pedagogy, perhaps the first of its kind in the world."²⁵⁰ Gupta further informed us about the multiple editions which came out in 1828 and then in 1838, the latter was under the initiative of Ramachandra Mitra. With a deep history of animals as the speaking subjects in the ancient Indian texts like, *the Jatakas*, *the Panchatantra*, in the colonial period, we come across the expressive animal characters in the latter half of the Nineteenth Century and the early part of the Twentieth Century again. Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's *Kamalakanter Daptar* was published in 1875. In this text, there is a particular chapter named "Cat", where we find the eponymous human Kamalakanta is engaging in conversations with one of the semi-domestic and semi-feral cats at his home, under the influence of opium.²⁵¹ Frederike Middelhoff draws two distinct genres in literature, dealing with animal narrators. He maintains that,

The autobiographical animal narrator comprehensively and anthropomorphically narrates his or her life, while the animal protagonist, that is, the experiencing subject of the story, behaves "naturally", neither metamorphosing nor using human language, as is the case in many fables, parables, or fairy tales (Middelhoff, 56).²⁵²

When we place these texts under this paradigm, we find that the characters of Bhagirath Mishra's *Amanushnama* fall in the category of the animal protagonists, as does the eponymous character of Shohei Emura's *Oye! Chhotu*, the graphic novella. *Jataka stories* or *Aesop's Fables* differ massively from narratives like *Amanushnama*, *Dawa*, or even stories like Premchand's *The Turf War*. Kunzang Choden's *Dawa* presents the

²⁵⁰Abhijit Gupta, "How an 1822 Publication by the Calcutta School Book Society Brought Animal Biographies to Students," *History of Publishing, Scroll*, August 19, 2021, <https://scroll.in/article/1003081/how-an-1822-publication-by-the-calcutta-school-book-society-brought-animal-biographies-to-students>.

²⁵¹ Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, "Cat," in *Kamalakanta: A Collection of Satirical Essays and Reflections*, trans., by Monish Ranjan Chatterjee (Calcutta: Rupa, 1992), 98-104.

²⁵² Frederike Middelhoff, "Recovering and Reconstructing Animal Selves in Literary Autozoographies," in *Animal Biographies: Re-Framing Animal Lives*, edited by André Krebber and Mieke Roscher (Kassel: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 57-79.

eponymous character, a street dog Dawa's life entirely from the first-person narrative. In this chapter, I will argue that Kunzan Choden's *Dawa*, Bhagirath Mishra's *Amanushnama* and Shohei Emura's *Oye! Chhotu* present a very nuanced take on the human habitat from an angle where several species interact with each other, sharing the interspecies dependency and also through language, and in this way these texts explore a very necessary insight into the '*animal*' *intervention* in contemporary South Asian Literature. *Dawa* is one of the most powerful instances, which forces us to acknowledge the performance of animal life from the experiential perspective.²⁵³

In the previous three chapters, I have explored how we, as humans have seen, felt and explored our companion animals' presence in our lives and in our literary and cultural repercussions. This chapter constitutes the 'reverse gaze', from dogs to humans, and attempts to delve into the 'nonhuman experience' within an intrusive, disruptive humanised system. This 'reverse gaze' literally translates into a dog's view of an urban landscape like Thimphu of Bhutan in Choden's *Dawa*, and the prioritisation of animal voice within a multispecies relationship describing the human world, but *only according to the canine perspective* in texts in *Amanushnama* and *Oye! Chhotu*. I would like to argue that this chapter functions as both as an exercise and an experiment in 'returning the animal gaze', which shares a profound abyss of incomprehensibility between other-than-human animals and humans.²⁵⁴

These three texts correspond to each other not only on the level of sentient, expressive animal characters but also through a certain expression of a specific line of existential understanding from the perspective of '*animal consciousness*'. I will argue that presenting free-ranging, street dogs as the active, autonomous agents reflects the dynamic

²⁵³ David Herman, David Herman, "Storyworld/Umwelt: Nonhuman Experiences in Graphic Narratives," *SubStance* 40, no. 1 (January 1, 2011): 178, <https://doi.org/10.1353/sub.2011.0000>.

²⁵⁴ John Berger, "Why Look at Animals?" *About Looking* (New York: Vintage International, 1991), 3-30.

changes in socio-cultural factors which dominate and shape human's understanding of their fellow beings and also crucially, these texts emerge as the strong representations of inclusive, multispecies understanding of life.

Kunzang Choden's *Dawa A Story of a Street Dog from Thimphu: An Experiment in Canine Biography*

This chapter focusses on specifically those texts which perform the centrality of animal characters without or minimal human interactions in the plotline. When we place this text in chronological order in comparison with the other two texts, *Dawa* comes out as the earliest one in the list with Bhagirath Mishra's *Amanushnama* as the second in 2010 and Shohei Emura's *Oye! Chhotu* as the third in 2014. The complete title of this novel is *Dawa: The Story of a Stray Dog*. I find it significant here that the main title of a text written in English uses the word 'stray' in the name itself. The construction of an identity and the demarcation of this specific stray identity is significant in terms of positioning the narrative of the animal agency here. In this subsection, I intend to explore how the specific narrative style contributes to the construction of animal identity in an essentially anthropocentric term. As I have mentioned earlier that writing on animal characters as the central subjects of fictional texts, throws into the relief the discursive nature of interdisciplinary references. The influences and interventions of ethology, Natural history, medical science, cultural ambience, administrative and legal system, attitude of people towards animals and the historical evolution of the specific geopolitical space, collectively construct, shape and carry forward our intrinsic interactions with animals. In exploring the multiple aspects of this novel, a few of the questions that we should ask as readers may be as follows; what would happen if the protagonist of a text is a street dog? What would be her/his realisation after coming to know that their individual identity is considered by most humans as indispensable as any other? Why we

should read life story a street dog? Who should read a novel which recounts the life of a street dog? But, before all these questions, comes another question- how to write the story of a street dog's life? Dogs and humans do not share the same language and, despite our best interests, it is not realistically possible to fathom their experiences in *their own way*, transcending our species-specific barriers. But, ethologists like Konrad, Horowitz, and Haraway have explored and discussed the canine communication with humans from behavioural as well as emotive perspectives.²⁵⁵ Our communications and interactions with other-than-human animals are behavioural and reciprocal without involving the linguistic system consciously. Seen from that angle, these interactions are inherently instinctive and emotive at the cerebral level. In western metaphysics, from the moment of Jeremy Bentham's proclamations of "can they feel pain? Can they suffer?", society has evolved into more psychologically open towards the concept of animals as sentient beings.²⁵⁶ It is also significant that from Eighteenth Century onwards, there is a rise in writing of animals' lives.²⁵⁷ Although this biography is not the fact based, empirical, objective, yet there is a tendency to make animal biographies as realistic and credible as the theories of ethology and observed responses of the animals would allow.

Krebber and Roscher have unearthed a curious tendency in animal biographies. The writers of these animal lives are liberated from the responsibilities of accessing animals' minds yet were expected to remember and record the individualistic traits in the behaviours of the animals they wrote about. They argued that:

²⁵⁵ Konrad Lorenz, *Man Meets Dog* (London: Routledge, 2002); Alexandra Horowitz, *Our Dogs, Ourselves* (New York: Scribner, 2019); Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003).

²⁵⁶ Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1781; repr., London: Batoche Books, Kitchener, 2000).

²⁵⁷ Ritvo, *Learning from Animals*.

The animal biography responds to and tries to capture our experience of other animals as individuals, with their own personalities, idiosyncrasies and each and every one with a self of its own, as well as our desire to lend voice and recognition to these individual creatures. (Krebber and Roscher, 2)²⁵⁸

Seen from this way, animal biographies are also records of how we, as humans, have observed and experienced other animals over a period of time. As I just elaborated on this genre of animal life writing in Indian literature in the introduction of this chapter, a more detailed study in this field will take us to the works of Dhan Gopal Mukerji's *Gay Neck: The Story of a Pigeon* and *Kari the Elephant* and their relevance as 'animal biographies' in literatures from South Asia in the modern period. In 1936, Munshi Premchand published twelve stories for children. One of these stories is *Kutte Ki Kahani*, which has been recently translated in English as *A Dog's Tale*.²⁵⁹ The story is written in the first- person narrative of a dog, whose adventures also shed light on the contemporary political and societal scenario of the country. In many ways, Kunzang Choden's *Dawa* reminds us of Munshi Premchand's canine protagonist of *A Dog's Tale*. *Dawa* as a text like *Kutte Ki Kahani*, gives a glimpse at the life of urban animals of Bhutan, and in the way of describing their life experiences, also recounts a commentary in continuation of various facets of urbanity in connection with animal-human relationships there. The concept of narration is very important in this text. The narrative style of *Dawa* differs significantly from the other two texts selected here. Emura's *Oye! Chhotu* incorporates a

²⁵⁸ Krebber and Roscher, "Introduction: Biography, Animals and Individuality," in *Animal Biography: Re-Framing Animal Lives* (Kassel: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 2.

²⁵⁹ Munshi Premchand, "A Dog's Tale," in *A Dog's Tale' and 'Jungle Stories*, trans., by Pranav Kumar Singh (New Delhi: Niyogi Books, 2023), 9- 116.

graphic narrative style while Bhagirath Mishra's *Amanushnama* works on a mixed style of 'animal consciousness' and Gerard Genette's homodiegetic narration.²⁶⁰

***Dawa* as A Canine Biography**

Fictional works which centre around the recounting of life stories of animals also function as a similar purpose like that of human biographies. They also focus on the creation of some type of cohesive, chronological, ordered image of one individual. Krebber and Roscher pointed out that these biographies, centering on animal subjects' lives, tend to focus on the individual animals. It is through these lives of these individual animals that their species and general trajectories of lives can be fathomed within the empathetic, biological, and socio-historical standpoints. Krebber and Roscher mapped out the purpose of animal biography in the context of literary relevance beautifully by noting that animal biographies are intended in:

Evaluating the constructing of animal biographies as a way of making visible and honoring animals s individuals externally, from historical sources, lived experiences. The bodies of animals. The two perspectives are closely related, of course, in that they share a desire to honor, capture and make noticeable the animal as an agent, who is individually self-determined, at least to some degree, and in taking seriously the parts animals play in society. (Krebber and Roscher, 7)²⁶¹

From 1960s onwards, there was an immense change in discourses of ethology, the notions of 'animal consciousness' and people's attitudes towards other-than-human animals. It was also around this time that a specific concern emerged in seeing animals as not only having 'a phylogenetic (or species) history and a cultural (or group) history

²⁶⁰ Lars Bernaerts et al., "The Storied Lives of Non-Human Narrators," *Narrative* 22, no. 1 (2014): 68–93, <https://doi.org/10.1353/nar.2014.0002>, 70-71.

²⁶¹ Krebber and Roscher, *Introduction: Biography, Animals and Individuality*, 7.

but also their own coherent individual (biographical) history'.²⁶² By citing the examples of such ethologists like Jane Goodall, Shirley Strum, Joyce Poole, Matthew Chrulew explains further that these animal behaviourists and scientists established an image of ethology as a cultural practice and demarcated the identities of the animals as individuals and within the animal sociability.²⁶³ Eric Baratay summed up the evolution of animal biographies succinctly; towards the end of the Eighteenth Century, a sort of heroic mode was adopted by the practitioners of this genre on the lives of famous animals. In the Nineteenth Century it was evolved into a more representative biography, while in the Twentieth century, it is the individual animals, who were considered as the genuine protagonists of these works.²⁶⁴

Originally written in English, *Dawa* was published in 2004 from Bhutan. The eponymous protagonist of this text is a street dog who was born in a small town, named Paro and from there covered a long distance in the span of his life. This dog is shown to have an acute sense of his surroundings- the memories of death of his mother and his siblings in the intentional poisoning by humans, his actualisation of his own talent of howling, his capacity to understand the language of humans, his peregrinations from one city to another, all are described in a cohesive, chronological order. In his journey, he comes in contact with several other street dogs of these places; some of them are hostile to him while the others maintain their distance, and yet some grew quite close with him. All these canine characters are presented collectively and yet their individualities also stand out. But this text underscores one crucial factor of urban animality- the inherent

²⁶² Matthew Chrulew, "Living, Biting Monitors, a Morose Howler and Other Infamous Animals: Animal Biographies in Ethology and Zoo Biology," in *Animal Biography: Re-Framing Animal Lives* (Kassel: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 24; Dominique Lestel, *Les Origines animales de la Culture* (Paris: Flammarion, 2003), 376-377.

²⁶³ Chrulew, *Living, Biting Monitors, a Morose Howler and Other Infamous Animals: Animal Biographies in Ethology and Zoo Biology*, 24.

²⁶⁴ Éric Baratay, "Introduction: In Search of Individuals," in *Animal Biographies: Towards A History of Individuals* (Athens: The University of Georgia, 2022), trans., by Lindsay Turner, [EBook].

uncertainties of stray existence. This text throws into the relief the life narratives of those urban street animals, whose identities do not linger to be constructed by and with the human intentions. The dogs in this text, including the eponymous protagonist himself, are not shown to be at the receiving end of the humanitarian compassion; their lives are shaped with human interferences yet they follow their own instinctive impulses and necessities. In this novel about a stray dog's life, humans are the marginal characters. The presence of humans is material yet ephemeral, except two or three instances, the novel only registers a heightened indifference with cold hostility from humans. The beginning of this novel reminds us of the other celebrated animal biographies in literature.

Dawa and the Growth of the Canine Self

Middelhoff argues while discussing E. T. A. Hoffmann's *Tom Car Muir* that some of these animal writings are a kind of parodic exercise of *bildungsroman*.²⁶⁵ I would like to argue that a sincere exercise in this literary genre actually attempts to materialise a type of animal *bildungsroman* in literature. The narrative structure is in the third person, yet the internalised experiences of Dawa are minutely observed and articulated. In this text, Choden performs a significant experiment- she does not entirely anthropomorphise dogs of this story yet attributes them sufficiently with equal human intelligence to comprehend the causality and factors prior to any incident in human experience. Dawa's understanding of human emotion and comprehensive capability to figure out human language are something more akin to the anthropomorphic representations of animals in literature. Yet, the life decisions, their determining factors and motivations, are rooted within canine experiences. Dawa's journey from Paro to Thimphu and from there to the cave of Gelongma Pelmo and then again back to his own place of birth, Paro, the text

²⁶⁵ Frederik Middelhoff, "Recovering and Reconstructing Animal Selves in Literary Autozoographies," in *Animal Biography: Re-Framing Animal Lives* (Kassel: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 63.

creates and completes a cycle of a dog's life, while narrating the events in the present tense from one stage to another. The text follows a dog, who does not seem to boast of regal personality or physical strength. But the natural gift that he was born with was the gift of howling at the moon. Choden appropriates the canine behavioural traits and impulses with a preconceived understanding of the human world; for example, the typical canine behavioural hinted through the interactions with other dogs or the impulses to howl at the moon, or the feral peregrinating tendencies of the street dogs, have been combined in Dawa's character with his understanding of human language. He could understand what the humans are saying in their own language. Yet, with a sleight of power dynamics, Choden makes it a one-way street- at least from the verbal and linguistic aspect. Except for the monk in Thimphu, and the senior priest near Gelongma Pelmo, we don't see many reciprocative interactions between dogs and humans in this text. It is also a significant difference with the other two texts selected in this chapter. We do not come across this type of canine-human communication in them. The text showcases domesticated dogs in the course of the novel, the characters of Zorro and Tang, who helped Dawa find his way to Gelongma Pelmo, yet they remain as the side characters as best.

Theodore Ziolkowska's seminal work shows a trajectory of patterns in canine biographies. The analysis terms a particular genre that emerged in the Eighteenth Century, as *canine picaresque*; Francis Coventry's the *History of Pompey the Little: Or, The Life and Adventures of a Lap-Dog* (1751) being the most celebrated one, while the *Biography of a Spaniel* (1797), Edward Augustus Kendall's *Keeper's Travels in Search of His Master* (1798), *Memoirs of Bob, the Spotted Terrier: Supposed to be written by Himself*, are some of the other noteworthy texts.²⁶⁶ These texts further demonstrate

²⁶⁶ Theodore Ziolkowski, "Talking Dogs: The Caninization of Literature," in *Varieties of Literary Thematics* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983), 86-122, 103.

influences of Cervantes's *The Colloquy of the Dogs*, which in turn can be influenced considerably by Des Périers' *Cymbalum Mundi*.²⁶⁷

Dogs talking in human languages is a form of anthropomorphisation, which is manoeuvred in this text as well as aptly articulating the assumed canine responses in relation to their behavioural patterns. The novel follows one of the traits of biography writing, when it starts with the basic physical descriptions of Dawa with the details of his birthplace. What really sets apart this novel from the usual animal biographies is that, in texts like Munshi Premchand's *A Dog's Story*, or Dhan Gopal Mukerji's *The Gay-Neck*, their lives and existence is sufficiently validated by their contributions to fellow humans. They had considerable significance and contribution in terms of service or companionship to humans; their identities carried that sense of importance. From the external perspective, Dawa was just an ordinary street dog, one of the many, and later towards his life he was affected with mange, a physical condition that would push his identity even more towards the margins of anonymity and indifference in anthropocentric society. Dawa's existence and identity is just a juxtaposition with these other comparable yet different animal characters in the literature. Born on the streets, he was never adopted by any humans for any responsible purpose according to the human standard; throughout his life, he was accustomed to the despise, indifference, or hatred from humans to that extent, where these responses are seen as the normative ones. The fleeting compassion shown by Sonam Pem, the maidservant, the monk at Changankha temple at Thimphu, and the hermit at Gelongma Pelmo, becomes the rare responses here. Choden presents this disease of mange, a particularly canine physical condition through Dawa, as a canine equivalent to human's leprosy. The latter part of the story is entirely Dawa's self-odyssey in search of this cure from the caves of Gelongma Pelmo, where apparently a human

²⁶⁷ Ibid., 101.

cured herself from leprosy with prayers and meditation in the ancient time. I would like to argue that Choden masterfully re-appropriates the bildungsroman genre within the purview of animal biography.

This text does not aim in charting out the speciesist hierarchy of anthropocentric culture; rather, it attempts to prioritise the animal life and perception by carefully circumnavigating the already established notion of speciesism. As a dog moving from one territory to another, this constant state of migration poses several types of existential risks for Dawa. Repeatedly, he emphasises on his actions which would ensure his survival, from other dogs, from humans at large. Julie A. Smith traces the emphasis on this self-preserving, survival guidance in animal narrative as a response mainly to shield themselves from the human aggression, quite common in an anthropocentric world.²⁶⁸ The text repeatedly aims at this behavioural strategy throughout the entire novel. The entire course of the novel can be divided into two segments. The first segment deals with the self-realisation of Dawa, including his revelation of his inherent gift as a good howler, while the second part focusses on his journey towards the cave of Gelongma Pelmo, to cure himself from mange. For humans, he is just another sickly, street dog barely striving in the cities of Bhutan. Also, through the presentation of nomadic, migrant existence for the greater part of the storyline, *Dawa* as a literary work, necessitates the construction of street dogs as pariahs, or in common term, the outcast.

Dawa starts his journey from Paro, and at the end of the novel, after curing him miraculously at Gelongma Pelmo, he returns to Paro again; this time he calls this place as his home. The spatial circularity also symbolises the circular completion of the cycle of his self-actualisation. To the others, irrespective of the species, canines and humans, his personality or character does not stand out. It is his own knowledge of himself that

²⁶⁸ Smith, *Representing Animal Minds*, 740.

creates the completion of self-knowing and lends this text the spirit of the bildungsroman, 'growth of the soul' narrative essence which has been exclusively in the anthropocentric culture. In one chapter, another dog named Dampa counsels Dawa as to observe humans but not to imitate them. When Dawa's behavioural patterns take on humanistic trends, Dampa mocks him. It necessitates a reverse speciesism, by creating the centralised canine perception and marginal, sub-standard humanised behaviours, a kind of a redemptive act of learning human language, something that Dampa inspired him to learn:

For the next few days, he continued to attend these classes and before long, he knew all the honorific terms that were taught in the lower school and he was sure he could learn the rest on his own. He went back to Dampa and showed off his new knowledge. Dawa suddenly stopped when Dampa began to laugh uncontrollably. Dawa was almost afraid that Dampa had had a sudden seizure, for he was rolling on his back, thrusting his legs into the air, with his lips peeled back and all his teeth exposed...

'What is the matter?'

'You, you. You are the matter. You make me laugh,' said Dampa breathlessly.

'Why do I make you laugh?'

Now tears of laughter were pouring out Dampa's eyes. He wiped them with the back of his paws, said, 'You should see yourself, dancing, singing and pointing out your body parts. You look ridiculous just like a human being.' Dawa smiled in spite of being the cause of his friend's uncontrollable laughter. 'We must learn from

the human beings but we must never imitate them,' Dampa said; he had regained his composure, but there was still a trace of laughter in his eyes. (Choden, *Dawa*)²⁶⁹

Again, just a few pages before this conversation, in another conversation, when Dampa called howling as a 'senseless' activity, Dawa emphasised the immense significance of it, according to the canine ethology:

Dawa took offence in the use of the adjective "senseless" to describe the nightly howling. 'Dogs must howl. It is in us to howl. It is a tradition we must uphold. "Tradition, what does it mean? What purpose does it serve?' Dawa was not easily excitable, but this conversation made him edgy and impatient. 'It's our dog culture.' (Choden, *Dawa*)²⁷⁰

The story highlights this significance not directly but in a pervasive form, through its detailed description of howling. This species-specific behaviour is validated and given a special status for an extension of Dawa's own growing self-realisation. The instinctive impulse of dogs to howl at the moon is given an evocative and sublime touch when Dawa names himself after the moon. While reading Éric Baratay's *Animal Biographies*, one particular chapter piqued my interest. In this collection of individual animal biographies over the centuries from a varied range of geo-political spaces, one narrative stands out. Baratay provides details of two stray dogs in San Francisco in the Nineteenth Century, and how their serialised records of activities garnered a very favourable, warm audience in contemporary socio-cultural milieu. As a result of their stray existence, these two dogs were not presented with their narrative of origin, yet the physical aspect of their personality, along with temperaments, were minutely noted down. In the introducing

²⁶⁹ Kunzang Choden, "Chapter 3: Dawa is Educated," in *Dawa: The Story of a Stray Dog* (Thimphu, Bhutan: Riyang Books, 2004), EBook.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

Dawa to us readers, Choden initiates his account with his physical characteristics and then proceeds towards the initial name that he was ascribed to, the name 'Koto', which in that regional language stands as crooked.

The first line of the text positions Dawa at the centre of the narrative with physical description:

Dawa is a yellow brown dog. His coat is ragged and patchy, and he looks a bit scruffy all over. That's because he is survivor of chronic mange, which has plagued him for a long time. He is an old dog. (Choden, *Dawa*)²⁷¹

His malnourished body and spindly, rickets affected, weak legs earned him this name 'Koto', which means crooked. Choden ensures the ugly, unattractive aspect of Dawa's personality, to underscore the substandard, biologically weaker position of Dawa in the scheme of Darwinian philosophy. He does not belong to the 'fittest' of his litter, and yet somehow, he survived. The ineffable sublimity of Dawa's emotional revelation in full moon juxtaposes his insignificance, pitiable perception in the eyes of others, specifically, from anthropocentric gaze, but again it is deftly countered from his own canine perception:

One full-moon night, the fifteenth of the fourth month according to the Bhutanese Calendar, he was wandering around town like most other dogs, with nothing particular to do. After he had gone around the town more than half a dozen times, he lifted his head sadly and suddenly he saw the big, circular yellow mystery in the dark night sky. All at once, he felt an overwhelming sense of wonder. As he gazed at it, he realised that the moon was flawless, while he himself was the personification of everything flawed and blemished, an orphan with a dirt- looking

²⁷¹ Kunzang Choden, "Chapter 1: Who is Dawa," in *Dawa: The Story of a Stray Dog* (Thimphu, Bhutan: Riyang Books, 2004), EBook.

coat and a disproportionate body. He continued to gaze at the moon for a long time until his whole body shook tumultuously. No sound of the intended bark ensued through his open mouth. Instead, a huge sob filtered into the cold night air. It was not a sob of sadness, or anguish, but a sob of revelation. He would call himself Dawa Koto, or the Crooked Moon- the fusion of the perfect with the imperfect- to give birth to a new identity (Choden, *Dawa*).²⁷²

Manfred Jahn defines narration as the telling of the story in a way which ensures "the cooperation of the audience while respecting their needs, and focalization is the submission of potentially limitless narrative information to a personal filter."²⁷³ Jahn points out that Genette formulated a few categories focalizations. Following that model, it can be argued that *Dawa*, as a novel, incorporates the variable internal focalization, as there are one or more 'internal reflector characters' in this story.²⁷⁴ Seen from that angle, *Dawa* is not only the life story of one dog- it also encapsulates within the course of the novel, the life stories of other dogs, as well as a passing commentary on a few humans' lives too. The narrative style becomes a symbolic perambulation through the lives of multiple dogs cloaked inside the circular journey of one dog's self-odyssey.

²⁷² Choden, *Chapter 1: Who is Dawa*

²⁷³ Manfred Jahn, "Focalization," in *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, ed., by David Herman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 94.

²⁷⁴ Jahn, *Focalization*, 98.

World from a Pair of Puppy Eyes and Shohei Emura's *Oye! Chhotu*

I would like to begin this part of the chapter with a reference to a Bengali rhyme by Sukumar Ray. This is one of the shorter poems by Sukumar Ray and it is included in the collection of nonsense verses, named *Abol Tabol*. The name of this poem in Bengali is *Koto Boro*, which roughly can be translated into English as "What a Big, Ol' Wide World!".²⁷⁵ The poem depicts the wonder of a baby mouse inside a broken drawer/cabinet. Amongst the eight lines, the first four lines spatially positions this baby mouse in her immediate locale- she is lying with her mother and only listens to her in one of the very remote corners of a shelf in a broken drawer/cabinet. When her eyes open, and she can see the heavy wooden walls of the cabinet surrounding her niche, her mind is filled with a sudden sense of sublime wonder. The poem ends with this exclamation coming out from this baby mouse, "Boy, what a big, ol' wide world it is!". This poem came out in 1923 and, exactly 91 years after its publication, a collection of graphic narratives was released. One of those graphic narratives also centered on a baby's perception of the world. Here, this baby is a puppy, born on the street with a few of his very competitive siblings and an equally tough yet vulnerable mother. The baby mouse of this poem and the puppy of Shohei Emura's *Oye! Chhotu* synchronised in this what William Nelles termed as *animal focalization*; it incorporates within texts the animal characters in central position.²⁷⁶ But it is also true that being a graphic narrative, *Oye! Chhotu* also exercises the power of experiential assertion through its presentation along with the verbal articulation, which the strictly literary non-graphic texts lack. In this subsection, I intend to explore the perceptions of the world through the lived experiences of a puppy born on the street, a central theme which was not explored through graphic

²⁷⁵ *Abol Tabol* has been translated a few times- three translations stood out amongst them.

²⁷⁶ William Nelles, "Beyond the Bird's Eye: Animal Focalization," *Narrative* 9, no. 2 (2001): 188–94, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20107246>.

narratives in South Asian literature, until recently. This chapter will attempt to position the graphic narratives on dogs in relation to the genre of graphic narrative and also with its unique contribution in shaping the discourses on the critical animal studies of our times.

Graphic Narrative and Animal Presence

The specific collection in which we find Shohei Emura's *Oye! Chhotu* also features 10 other graphic narratives on our companion animals, or as the preface of this book explains:

This collection of comics was conceived after a series of meandering conversations with artists in India and the US revealed a shared admiration for dogs amongst comics-wallahs, as well as a collective desire to explore *what the world would look like from the other end of a snout.*²⁷⁷ (my emphasis)

In the simplest terms, all graphic narratives presented in this anthology are different ways of seeing the world, from the eyes of dogs. In this way, beneath the playful, light-hearted veneer of this commentary, lies a deeper message- an inclusive, multispecies perspective of looking at the world. As I have explored through the reference of John Berger's theorisation of 'looking back' or the capacity to return the gaze by the other-than-human animals, all these texts employ a unique technique which partakes and, sometimes, fully explores the 'animal focalisation' in a vivid yet underrated manner. In several of these texts, in their ambivalent, multiplicities of implications, they target an unuttered yet experienced point in the discussion; to borrow the words from David

²⁷⁷ Vidyun Sabbaney & Jeremy Stoll, "On 'Dogs!'," in *Dogs: An Anthology*, ed., by Vidyun Sabbaney & Jeremy Stoll (India: Captain Bijli Comics, 2014). 1.

Herman, some of these graphic narratives harp on the placing humans within the domain of the animals themselves, and in this way, they cut through the species-specific differences between dogs and humans. My intention in this chapter to explore depth of the focalisation of canine perceptions and their existences without or with the minimal human intervention. The specificity of this text as graphic narrative sets it apart from the other two texts, *Amanushnama* and *Dawa* from the genre specific angle. *Oye! Chhotu* is a graphic narrative whose plot structure is rooted in the visual and linguistic medium of its presentation. Although graphic narratives, comics, graphic novels are often used interchangeably, they are distinctly different, as David Herman pointed out.²⁷⁸ Herman also put forth the analysis of Daniel Stein and Jan- Noël Thon, that "graphic narratives are more inclusive, and widely pervasive in different formats, genres, and storytelling traditions (Stein and Thon, 5)."²⁷⁹ In discussing the multiple yet problematic aspects of graphic narratives and the 'animal perceptions', Herman asked a very significant question, i.e., "how the representation of what it is like for (nonhuman) characters to experience events is shaped by medium-specific properties of graphic narratives."²⁸⁰ Herman further explained that Thomas Nagel distinctly pointed out that "it is possible to ask what it is like to be (or experience the world as) that sort of being, whether a bat or a butterfly, a hummingbird or a human."²⁸¹ Since graphic narrative incorporates a broader narrative technique, visual and text-type, it inherently articulates a more open and expansive rendition of the multiplicities of interpretations, rooted in their other-than-human perception of the world.

²⁷⁸ David Herman, "Introduction," in *Animal Comics: Multispecies Storyworlds in Graphic Novels*, ed., David Herman (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 3.

²⁷⁹ Daniel Stein and Jan- Noël Thon, "Introduction," in *Comic Strips to Graphic Novels: Contributions to the theory and History of Graphic Narrative*, ed., by Stein and Thon (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015), 5.

²⁸⁰ David Herman, "Storyworld/Umwelt: Nonhuman Experiences in Graphic Narratives," *Substance*, Vol 40, no 1, issue 124 (2011), 160.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, Thomas Nagel, "What Is It like to Be a Bat?" *The Philosophical Review* 83, no. 4 (October 1974): 435–50

Oye! Chhotu centres around a very young puppy, who explores the world on his own terms. Against the black and white panels of the narrative, he, his siblings, their mother and the larger world of the contemporary city create a panoramic vision of the world according to a pair of puppy eyes. The entire narrative is woven across other canine characters who come across Chhotu in his explorations, and it underscores a very dynamic, independent sociological ecosystem of their own, with the competition, territorial aggression, the presentation of pack ethological structure of free-ranging dogs and a pervasive yet peripheral vision of the world of humans. Dogs in this narrative are independent- they are neither overtly attached nor afraid of humans. This narrative showcases a healthy, independent yet spontaneously inclusive multispecies lifestyle, where multiple species interact, stay and share the lives together without intervening in each other's individual subjective space overtly. *Oye! Chhotu* pitches through one of the important messages. As a graphic narrative of dogs in contemporary urban ecology, *Oye! Chhotu* highlights the larger impacts of human intrusion into the other forms of life, crossing the species-specific destruction of dogs and humans. It sheds light on the accumulation of chemical and human waste materials into the adjacent forest areas, which affects the natural ecosystem of this space immensely, specifically for the other-than-human animals.



Picture 1: First page of *Oye! Chhotu*

The front cover of the graphic narrative gives an eloquent visual presentation- with the moon in the background and an artificial presumably historical architecture, the barbwire separating the urban from the arboreal fringes of the city, our eponymous character looks us, the reader with evident perplexity and confusion in his eyes.

This fringe, outskirts of main the centre of the urban landscape, is again reinforced in the last panel of the first page; in a field littered with plastic waste materials, a lonely mother is lying on her side with her puppies under the open sky. An aeroplane is spotted overhead.

Chhotu's exploration of the surrounding area, his first interactions with the other elder dogs of that locality, and his friendship with Mottu, probably elder from the previous generation, all collectively construct the lived experience of a puppy in the open wide world. But the perceptive world of *Chhotu* does not veer into the 'self-narrative of

animals'; rather, it pushes into perspective the biologic and felt sensation of the surroundings of street puppy.²⁸² Chhotu's first taste of biscuits left by some humans, his interactions with the other dogs of that area all synchronise with the popular, circulated beliefs on dog's behaviours in communities. David Herman in discussing central nonhuman animals in graphic narratives, notes that these visual texts are based on 'narrative theory and research in the fields of ecological psychology, the philosophy of mind, and cognitive theory'.²⁸³ He further explained that these graphic narratives which feature nonhuman animal characters at their centre, also articulate two aspects- they are both 'the manifestation of and a resource for what might be termed "folk ethologies" or understanding of animal behaviour that circulate more or less widely in the culture'.²⁸⁴ The behavioural details, for example, when Chhotu is learning to howl or when Mottu is teaching them to jump from a higher place to the ground, all these are usual behaviouristic patterns of dogs. There is an attempt to explain typical behavioural responses. In a way, we can term them as humanising explanations of canine behaviours. When Chhotu is caught by the elder dogs of his area while trying the biscuits for the first time, one of them admonishes him by said, "the punishment for stealing a biscuit is removal of hair and being tied to a tree by your tail!"

²⁸² David Herman, "Animal Autobiography; Or, Narration beyond the Human," *Humanities* 5, no. 4: 82. <https://doi.org/10.3390/h5040082>.

²⁸³ Herman, *Animal Autobiography; Or, Narration beyond the Human*, 94.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 94-95.



Picture 2: Second page of *Oye! Chhotu*

Mottu's mentoring of Chhotu in smaller details of a dog's life, in simple activities like running, or selecting the spot and preparing it for lying down, all reiterate the humanistic approach to ethological patterns which take place in the instinctive levels of other-than-human animal lives. Lisa Brown, in her introduction to *the Illustrated Animals*, gives a succinct summation of graphic narratives with animals in their focal positions. She notes that:

Ultimately, comics and graphic novels are a virtually untapped source of insight into cultural paradigms about animals. In particular, comics can address animals in a way that is unique by providing an alternate perspective on how we

humans believe animals think and behave, also how we treat them as a result.
(Brown, 6)²⁸⁵

Unlike *Dawa* or *Amanushnama*, this text presents the coexistence of dogs and humans in a mutually indulgent camaraderie; the text demonstrates parks where domesticated dogs come for their regular walks with humans. In a subtle way, it also counters one of the most widely contentious issues of dogs and human coexistence, an issue that canine enthusiasts or animal care givers have to face in any urban areas. The high-rise societies and the models of metro cities do not allow the population of animals on the pretext of animal wastes in the vicinity. The nuisance, which is natural in its own way, is indicted with something unnatural and unacceptable by the anti-animal, anti-canine majority for a considerable period, and as a consequence of it, indie, free-ranging community dogs with their care-givers become the easy targets of this social and cultural hostility. This text hits at the deeper layer of the waste-related issues of contemporary urban life- it builds the crescendo of the storyline upon it and makes the point that the long-term consequences of artificially human made waste materials, and their almost indestructible substance. The dogs emerge as the more sentient ones amongst these two species, with their acute consciousness around this issue. The text presents a simplified narrative, yet the literal and visual presentation of dogs, specifically stray dogs disguised as an unknown monster in the adjacent forests of the city fringes, with the garb of plastic waste materials is multilayered in its execution of the real problem. The accumulation of non-biodegradable plastic and papers pose a serious threat to the environment, and here *Oye! Chhotu* emerges as a visual narrative commenting on the intersectional concerns which encapsulate the urban animals' precarious existence, as the street dogs of urban

²⁸⁵ Lisa Brown, "An Introduction to the Illustrated Animal," *The Illustrated Animal, Antennae: The Journal of Nature in Visual Culture*, Issue 16 (Spring, 2011), 6.

areas also consume these materials, extremely dangerous and harmful for them, and the indifference of humans to these more important concerns to address rationally.

Presented in superficial light hearted portrayal, *Oye! Chhotu* as a narrative, underscores the plight that other-than-human animals suffer because of the accumulation of plastic waste in the environment. By making them counter this problem in their own childlike yet entertaining way, as garbage monster, this text articulates the agency of animals, who are also considered as the epitome of excess and 'waste' in contemporary, narrowed down by anthropocentric urban cultures. Tora Holmberg, in her succinct exploration of urban animals' transformative capacity in urban ecosystem, points out that these animals actually recycle and ameliorate the ecological system of the urban landscape. By attributing the power to scare the humans with that 'garbage monster', the text as a commentary manipulates and appropriates the politics of waste into something constructive.²⁸⁶

David Herman, in his discussion on the narrative structure of animal graphic narratives, categories the narratives in two broad types. Depending on the degree of representation, they can be typified as 'coarse-grained' or 'fine-grained' narratives.²⁸⁷ He further explained the animal character centered graphic narratives in four categories: direct animal allegory, anthropomorphic projection, zoomorphic projection and the fine-grained *Umwelt* Exploration.²⁸⁸ Following Herman's structure, I would like to argue that *Oye! Chhotu* falls under anthropomorphic projection to a great extent. It touches on the *Umwelt* exploration, but only on the surface level, while illuminating insights into the

²⁸⁶ Tora Holmberg, "'Wastable' Urban Animals," *lo Squaderno* 42 (January 1, 2016): 9–11.

²⁸⁷ David Herman, "Storyworld/Umwelt: Nonhuman Experiences in Graphic Narratives," *SubStance* 40, no. 1 (January 1, 2011): 164-165.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 167.

dynamics between politics of marginalised urbanscape, urban animals, and human intervention.

Umwelt, Multispecies Connection and Bhagirath Mishra's Amanushnama or The Saga of the Nonhumans

In the previous chapters, I have explored what kind of importance the representations of canines in our literature carry within themselves. In our analysis of those different aspects, we have come across the multilayered narratives of canine-human relationships are explored, acknowledged and to a great extent appreciated. Bhagirath Mishra's *Amanushnama* is one of its kind in our contemporary Indian literature, as it centres not only on its canine subjects but also the entire perspective is that from a dog's eye to us, to other animals, to the entire world. It is a fictionalised account narrated by dogs, with entirely from the canine perspective. Mishra's world is frequented by nonhuman and more-than-human life forms several times. In his works, we find a very interconnected, intersectional space where characters from varied socio-economic and cultural strata enter into dialogues; not only humans, his works also resonate with the representation, inclusion, and integration of multispecies outlooks. In his works, these nonhuman, or more-than-human characters are not marginal or the side characters, or even catalysts. These nonhuman characters are the agents of the narrative flow, which takes these plots forward. One short story by Bhagirath Mishra is *Ghatak, the Executer*, centres around the ritual of animal sacrifice, prevalent in some areas of India. The novel, *Janguru*, has its protagonist a woman and her beloved piglet in a community, where the life expectancy of pigs is very low because of their demand as the source of food. *Amanushnama* is the saga of a group of street dogs, who go through various kinds of involvements with humans, indifference, distrusts, hatred, aggression, care or empathy,

and silence- but what comes out of this narrative is that, this is not only a narrative of canine-human cohabitation or mutual understanding, as we have already explored in the previous chapters of this thesis. This is an account where humans are also placed at the backseat of the plot- they are not given the special importance or significance, that is so very common in animal centric narratives. Rather, humans are just one section of species like others, birds, reptiles, felines, bovines and even plants in the lexicon of canine narratives. The world of *Amanushnama* comes with a wide spectrum of various life forms, and their awareness that they collectively construct a worldview entirely from the point of view of nonhuman beings. I intend to analyse this work particularly as an interactive one, which plays on the concept of 'Umwelt' and 'animal gaze'.

Amanushnama, the name itself, stands for the act of de-centering humans- in Bengali, *manush* stands for humans. By adding the prefix *A*, the word is negated by its presence. By adding prefix *A*, *manush* is transformed into nonhuman. But if we follow the meaning of this word too closely, it can be quite ambiguous. In terms of relation, it can also mean non-humans or even sub-humans, as in the popular cultural belief of South Asia, animals other than humans are expected to belong to the lower hierarchy. In Bengali, this sub-humanity of the animals is denoted with *monushyetero jeeb*, which literally translates into sub-human animals, although with the prefix of the *sub*, the hierarchical supremacy of humans is validated. The literal translation of this novel's name, *Amanushnama* means the saga of nonhuman beings. But when we actually enter into this narrative, the style ensures an omniscient point of view, but only from the dogs towards other animals. In this way, this novel completely emerges into the animal consciousness, but without the intervention of human interpretations. Dogs in this novel do not behave or are made to react or respond as humans. Rather, they are presented in their usual canine behaviours and canine specific observations. The world that Mishra

conjuges up in front of us is a world throbbing with creaturely life, very vivid, in its sensory heaviness. The story starts with the mythological anecdote of Sarama and her adventures and then introduces the senior most dog in the narrative, called *Murubbi*. *Murubbi*, to a great extent, becomes the narrator and the narrated in this story. His function in this narrative is that of the thoughtful, introspective alpha within the pack of dogs- the characters of *Murubbi* in that way functions in the shape of their leader and the mentor to the younger ones. The physical space of these dogs is the artfully characterised 'threshold zone', where the ferality of these free-ranging dogs intervenes with human habitat.²⁸⁹ The space of *Bat-Tala*, which literally means, under the shade of the banyan tree, represents this marginal space of these animal characters, in their natural habitat, located in the grey area between human habitat and wild, feral outskirts. The course of the story flows effortlessly from one dog to another, charting their lives in accordance with the biological, natural and societal conditioning of the time. From *Murubbi's* cohabitation within a family of humans to their sudden disowning because of *Murubbi's* age and accompanying sickness- within a span of a few pages, the story unfolds the journey of life for this senior dog. From *Murubbi*, the story takes us to the lives of other dogs like *Fauji*, *Bhikhu*, *Bantkul*, *Gheeybhaja*, *Sundori*, *Bilati*, *Telebhaja*, *Lyangra*, *Kali*, *Chandu*, *Kelo*, *Bhulo*, *Chhotku*, *Tilki*, *Punchki*, and *Gunda*. It is not only dogs whose voices narrate the story- it is more like the voices of the other animals and creatures whose interspecies communications float the narrative with multiple yet parallel storylines. In the breadth of this novel, we come across many characters, all of them are canines, birds, bovines, goats, cats, even wild animals like monkeys, elephants and snakes too. The presence of humans mostly comes in the form of intrusions except in a

²⁸⁹ Sage Daniel et al., "Organizing Space and Time through Relational Human–Animal Boundary Work: Exclusion, Invitation and Disturbance," *Organization* 23, no. 3 (February 2016): 434–50, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508416629449>.

few canine-human interactions. The human presence intercepts at moments of crisis and violence, and initiated by humans only, towards the animals. The buoyancy of the plot depends on the peregrinations of these various canine characters in the story, who explore and survive through various man-made crisis for them. Their battle of survival does not seem to be grand, yet they attain a sense of epic intensity, as the narrative charts out the resilience and perseverance of their quotidian struggles in apparently nonchalant descriptions. Beneath the veneer of this normalisation of pain and struggles, *Amanushnama* etches *the testament of stray existence*. The story brings out the essential precarity of their existence while underscoring the other factors of the societal conditions of interspecies life. Murubbi, Bilati, and Fauji, these three characters suffer these uncertainty cohabitations with humans markedly in their lives, but in three different ways. For Murubbi, his status was contingent on his indie specific identity, and the referential consequences borne out of the distrust and condescending outlook that average people tend to have towards indie breeds. Murubbi's increasing age and other forms of physical weakness aggravated his position more in the human household. For Bilati, it is the incident of abandonment, a common malpractice that occurs almost every day with domesticated dogs in this country. Bilati's position in that household was that of a substitute child- with the baby, her position was rendered unwanted, and hence her prioritization in that household also became redundant. In the case of Fauji, the exploitation is more directly palpable- as a military dog, he was trained to take risks and his principal task was to protect his human companions. In *Amanushnama*, we find that most of the canine characters here touch upon one or two contexts, which manoeuvre around the canine-human relationships in contemporary society.

The politicisation of animals is intensified with their active exploitation as 'war animals'. Elizabeth E Lawrence poignantly remarks how this exploitation has always

been extolled in essentially speciesist lexicon throughout the history; by citing the example of Ernest Harold Baynes, Lawrence argues general attitudes towards animal exploitation in war have been presented in the garb of 'humanity' over the years.²⁹⁰

Even the author of a book resulting from a study of animals in the First World War, a man who expressed much sympathy with the suffering of the horses employed in that conflict, felt that "we used those horses... to the very limit, and it was fitting that we should. When men are dying by the thousands, and civilization is at stake, there is no time for sentimentality. There was no reason for sparing horses if by their use we could shorten the war, and save the lives of men and all that real men stand for." (Baynes 1925, 34).²⁹¹

Lawrence starts her article with the poem by Katherine Lee Bates's *The Horses*, which was a tribute to some 80,000 horses, sent off to Europe to join their human companions in battle, according to Leonard Mieke.²⁹² Dogs, in the history of human civilisation have been made to accompany humans as 'military animals', risking their very existence. In the works of Homer, Herodotus, and Polynaenus, there are records of dogs in battles; Theodore Baskaran commented that the historians maintained that the Indian hounds were exported in massive numbers to the West, places like Babylon, Egypt, Rome.²⁹³ During the Mughal period, dogs were used for the purpose of hunting and assisting in battles.²⁹⁴ Even before the Mughal dynasty too, there are references to dogs

²⁹⁰ Elizabeth E Lawrence, "Animals in War: History and Implications for the Future," in *Anthrozoös*, Vol. IV, No. 3, 145-153.

²⁹¹ Lawrence, *Animals in War*, 1; Ernest Harold Baynes, "Horses," in *Animals Heroes of the Great War* (London: Macmillan, 1927), 21-34.

²⁹² Leonard Mieke, "The War Poems of Katherine Lee Bates," published in the blog, *Woods Hole Historical Museum, Falmouth_3*

²⁹³ S. Theodore Baskaran, "The History of Dogs in India," in *The Book of Indian Dogs* (Delhi: Aleph, 2017), EBook.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*,

who proved their worth through acts of courage and loyalty.²⁹⁵ The character of Fauji in this novel brings the notions of canine involvement, contribution, and exploitation in human history, a topic which is still quite unexplored from the academic and interdisciplinary vantage point, specifically in the context of South Asia and its literary representation. The contribution, participation, and exploitation of dogs in wars is just a segment of the rich, multidisciplinary history that we can access. Human battles have had always their nonhuman animal companions, who have been significantly responsible for assisting, ensuring and saving human lives. Until recently stories on the blind devotion of dogs in crucial situations to their human companions, or their ability to obey the instructions, most of the times, even at the cost of their own lives, underscore a repetitive pattern in the point of emphasis in these narratives. It is the anthropocentric, speciesist narratives which glorify the blind, almost fatal devotion to their human companions, but who were always denoted as their *master/owners* in these stories. But in the most recent academic enquiries have charted the depth of involvement and exploitation of dogs in wars.²⁹⁶ There is a section amongst animal historians who have rigorously gathered and analysed the systematic regimentation of dogs in wars, from a more critical and multidisciplinary angle, while emphasizing the canine perspective.²⁹⁷ Pearson notes that, "The late 19th Century saw numerous Western states begin to deploy dogs for police, customs, and army work in the metropole and colonies, often in intense competition with each other."²⁹⁸ In establishing the emotional dimension in these interspecies

²⁹⁵ Aditi Shah, "Dogs through the Ages," Peepul Tree, June 29, 2021, https://www.peepulree.world/livehistoryindia/story/snapshort-histories/dogs-through-the-ages?srsId=AfmBOorKA4lxYwyByW-TYuyE-2MfsSVfwI5PnSZg9s-51LQ_73nEl_0c.

²⁹⁶ David Karunanithy, *Dogs of War: Canine Use in Warfare from Ancient Egypt to the 19th Century Seminole Wars* (London: Yarak Publishing, 2008).

²⁹⁷ Chris Pearson, "Four-Legged *Poilus*: French Army Dogs, Emotional Practices and the Creation of Militarized Human-Dog Bonds, 1871-1918," *Journal of Social History*, Winter (2018), 1-30; Maria Grazia Suriano, *Animals in the Great War* (Associazione Cultural Se Case Studies, 2017), EBook.

²⁹⁸ Pearson, *Four-Legged Poilus*, 2.

communications, Pearson reasserts the First World War as the pivotal moment in canine-human interconnection, as pointed out by Monica Baár.²⁹⁹

While Fauji's character brings out the aspect of military service dogs, on the other hand, Bhikhu, Murubbi, Bantkul, Gheeyebhaja, Kaali with her children Punchki and Gunda capture the quintessential stray existence. One crucial aspect of this novel is that it narrates the lives and existence of the animals and through the fictionalised exercises in these interspecies dialogues emphasises their interrelatedness in its matrix, while keeping humans outside of this multispecies camaraderie. Their struggles of survival underscore the ruthless, exploitative manipulation of nonhuman animals in the hands of humans. In the deeper layer of this text, there lies an inherent insistence on the acknowledgement of nonhuman contribution in our societies over a period of times. I intend to argue that by creating a narrative which prioritizes and represents entirely the perspective of canine characters and through their eyes, the species dynamics between animals, birds, monkeys, cows, horses and so many other creatures with humans, constructs a structure of agency that highlights the extent of nonhuman contribution in anthropocentric worldview. It is a narrativization of *the dog's view of the world*, a point that will keep on coming back in the other two works selected in this chapter. In the larger scale, this novel creates two oppositional accounts in this narrative- a thriving multispecies web without and indifferent to the human interventions, and the other one that is intricately linked as well as disrupted by human interventions.

Linda Nash pointed out that nonhuman animals, to some extent the influence and also help to shape human intentions.³⁰⁰ By modelling a structure of this work in this

²⁹⁹ Monika Baár, "Prosthesis for the Body and for the Soul: The Origins of Guide Dog Provision for Blind Veterans in Interwar Germany," *First World War Studies* 6 (2015): 82, 85.

³⁰⁰ Linda Nash, "The Agency of Nature, or the Nature of Agency?" *Environmental History* vol 10, No. 1 (2005): 67-69.

specific angle, this text creates a space for the canine centered perspective in the literary field which has always celebrated the anthropocentric angle. The use of dogs in wars and the status of military service dogs after their release from their involvements, the construction of stray identity which intricately linked with peregrination and an instability in the physical space, the use of animals in the circus, the experiments done on animals in scientific laboratories, the growing hatred and violence towards stray animal population in human habitats- all these issues are presented and explored through a dog's eyes here. The humans are described as *two-leggeds* throughout the entire course of this novel- what also stands out here is the assumed expectations of a common language or communicative system comprehensible in across the species, except humans. In this novel, we find crows like *Kalindi*, or cows, or monkeys, or horses engaging in dialogues not only amongst their own species but also with other species, transcending the species-specific barrier of linguistic incomprehensibility. The only species which who do not understand this shared language is humans. The discrimination exercised on animals throughout the centuries for their inability, rather lack of ability to express themselves articulately in *our language*, is subverted through this structuring of the narrative technique here. Narrating the life experiences of animals has been explored in the literature in several ways. In *Amanushnama*, we find that the animal characters narrate their experiences through a third-person narrator, while revealing their authentic experiences and ignorance or limitations through this voice. Their observations are guided and constructed through their animal perceptions and there is an attempt of Mishra to maintain this perception without human explanation or intervention.

'Umwelt' and the Animal Consciousness in *Amanushnama*

This articulation of experiences considered as felt by the animals and creatures other than humans, these explorations of perceptions as understood and experienced by

beings other than humans, calls for a specific theoretical approach which prioritises the perceptions of nonhuman beings. The perceptive and functional aspects of experience, as felt by the animals, can be explored from the philosophy of *Umwelt*. The Umwelt theory of Jacob von Uexküll of 1940s was a breakthrough approach from the objective positivist theory of the Western philosophy. According to this *Umwelt* philosophy, each living beings experiences the world from an exclusive range of perceptions contingent on their unique, species-specific biological constituents. Jacob Von Uexküll pointed out that all living beings are intrinsically surrounded by a 'sensory veil':

Around us is a protective wall of senses that gets denser and denser. Outward from the body, the senses of touch, smell, hearing and sight enfold man like four envelopes of an increasingly sheer garment.

This island of senses, that wraps every man like a garment, we call his Umwelt. It separates into distinct sensory spheres, that becomes manifest one after the other at the approach of an object. (Uexküll,107).³⁰¹

The emphasis on the aspect of experiencing the world in its subjective particularities of every living being makes this the theoretical approach of *Umwelt* so critically significant in texts like *Amanushnama*, or *Dawa* or *Oye! Chhotu*. Sergey V. Chebanov pointed out that Jacob von Uexküll also underwent through some stages of change in this theoretical approach- despite trying to merge this concept of *Umwelt* with *Innenwelt*, Uexküll acknowledged and established these two as separate in later years.³⁰² Chebanov also specified that Uexküll's notion of human *Umwelt* theoretically 'coincides with which E. Husserl called life world- *Lebenswelt*.'³⁰³ John Deely suggested that it was

³⁰¹ Jacob Von Uexküll, "An Introduction to Umwelt," *Semiotica* 134 (2001): 107-110.

³⁰² Sergey V. Chebanov, "Umwelt as Life World of Living Being," *Semiotica* 134 (2001): 169-184.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, 169.

the interpretations by Thomas A. Sebeok of Jacob von Uexküll's works which played an instrumental part in revisiting and reappropriations of *Umwelt* in the field of semiotics, although Uexküll always considered himself as contributed to the growing areas of 'biological science, early ethology' (Deely, 125).³⁰⁴ Uexküll himself explained that our attitudes towards animals were considerably shaped by the transition 'from perceptual side to the functional side with accuracy'(Uexküll, 111).³⁰⁵ He continued to explain that this perception of the surrounding world around every animal and living being is created and constructed with their own biological organisms, already determined as well as determining the spatial, temporal and other specie-specific minute particulars:

Every animal is surrounded with different things, the dog is surrounded by dog things and the dragonfly is surrounded by dragonfly things. (Uexküll, 117).³⁰⁶

These kinds of *Umwelt* punctuate *Amanushnama* poignantly. The narrative reveals this *Umwelt* from so many canine characters' perspectives here. The world of *Bat-Tala*, the banyan tree, is explored through the senses of Murubbi, the most senior dog in this novel. Since he is literally an old dog with failing eyesight, his rendition of this *Bat-Tala* is vibrant with olfactory and auditory senses. In his perceptions, physically absent, late, already dead dogs also come, as some ephemeral figure of Sarama, the god of dogs, of ancient Indian mythology, also appears. In one of those nights, Murubbi again undergoes through those sensorily provocative sensory experiences:

From some distant places, herds of elephants are traversing miles after miles- their resounding footsteps, are coming from the far away forests towards paddy fields. In the stealth of darkness, a tiger is out on his nocturnal, solitary journey;

³⁰⁴ John Deely, "Umwelt," *Semiotica* 134 (2001): 125-135.

³⁰⁵ Uexküll, "The New Concept of Umwelt: A Link between Science and the Humanities," *Semiotica* 134 (2001): 111-123.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 117.

the air is thick with his musky, pungent smell. Murubbi can also listen to the moving footsteps of bears; sleuths of bears are moving in packs towards that *mahul**³⁰⁷ forest near Majherpara- their constant grunting is filling up this space. Hunger is the real culprit here. Hunger in all of them are driving us crazy, pushing us into the danger itself. Otherwise, who wants to get into trouble? *Two-leggeds* are dangerous, they don't even nurture kindness towards their own fellows- they would be kind to us, to those wild animals! Humpf!

When Murubbi was contemplating all these, suddenly he heard another noise. The owl up in the branches suddenly lets out a shrill hoot- "Who, who is there?"

A civet cat was passing under the tree stealthily. This sudden hooting made her stop, "it is me!" (Mishra, 78-79)³⁰⁸

The description of night in the voice of *Murubbi* stands out in its immensity of this *Umwelt* appropriation. The banyan tree and its shade, which functions as the marginal space for all these nonhuman beings, turns vivid with a plethora of olfactory and auditory senses. The conversations between the owl and the civet, later on the inter-species communication between *Gunda* and the escaped monkey, *Pitpit* during a considerable period, several conversations that take place amongst horses, dogs, cows, cats, crows, even wild elephants, collectively stand to underscore the interconnectivity that operates in the multispecies dimensions. Uexküll maintained that every animal, every species, has their own *Umwelt*, unique and different from the rest. Yet, despite these differences, these separate *Umwelt* are interconnected, but not mechanically- in some organic, integral, and rhythmic ways, which Uexküll emphasised as 'musical'.³⁰⁹ *Umwelt* as a philosophical

³⁰⁷ **Mahul*, in English it is known as *Phanera vahlii* and its scientific name is *Bauhinia vahlii*, a plant which is characterised with its addictive, intoxicating attributes to the wildlife, specifically with bears and the likes.

³⁰⁸ Bhagirath Mishra, *Amanushnama* (Calcutta: Dey's Publishing, 2010), 78-79, translations are done by self.

³⁰⁹ Uexküll, *The New Concept of Umwelt: A Link between Science and the Humanities*, 117.

base has been crucial in understanding and exploring the animal consciousness. John Deely too explained this unique standpoint further, and has succinctly pointed out that every species "constructs and lives within *its own* lifeworld".³¹⁰ Kalevi Kull and Donald Favareau pointed out that according to Uexküll, each living being, in this specific case, "every living animal is a subject, and what she or he perceives becomes their *perceptual* world and all that he does becomes their *effector* world. *Perceptual* and *effector* worlds come together from a closed unit, the *Umwelt*".³¹¹ Not only Murubbi, Gunda, Pitpit, Kalindi, Gheeyebhaja, Tilki, Punchki, Fauji, Chhotku, Bantkul, Bhikhu and so many like them, in the way this novel creates and articulates entirely fictitious representations of animal world, specifically the world of dogs in the midst of human habitats and also in connection with other animal species. This work throws into the relief this notion of the interconnectivity in and amongst these different animals, different species and thus underscores the notion of the different, plural yet interconnectivity amongst separate *Umwelts*.

When Fauji and Gunda, two dogs from this *Bat-Tala*, mistakenly get into a running train and land in an unknown place, far from their territory, they come across several animals- one cow who is trying to escape from his owner, a herd of goats tied under a tree, one dog with his homeless, penniless human. The cow died alone while hiding in a shrubbery from his owners, as they were trying to sell him to the butchers. The conversation of Fauji and Gunda with this cow exposes the cruelty that is always involved in profit centered structures of animal-humans in the complex, anthropocentric contemporary socio-economic structure. The novel repetitively touches upon these issues through the eyes of dogs here- Gunda comes across cow, horses, goats and one escaped

³¹⁰ Deely, "*Umwelt*," 128.

³¹¹ Kalevi Kull and David Favareau, "There is *Umwelt* before Consciousness, and Learning Transverses Both," *Biosemiotics*, (November. 2022): 491-495.

monkey named Pitpit in the course of the novel. The humans in this novel emerge in three types of roles mainly. The ones who really empathise with animals, in particular dog- the numbers of this type of human characters are rare in this text. The second type shares an ambivalent, precarious stance for fellow animals or companion animals; some of them exploit this interspecies bonding, because the presence of these animals helps in growing their materialistic endeavours like growing business, or guarding their houses, etc. The novel touches on the subtle issues of interspecies cohabitations, by exposing these dichotomies of empathy and calculative utility on both sides. In urban animals, a majority of these creatures survive on their profitable aspects to the human society. The dog named Bhikhu is an apt example on this- his loitering in front of the shop of the human character named Khudiram, necessitates his presence in that locality, to that extent that when the exterminating team from the local municipality come to kill dogs in that area, Khudiram hides him in his shop or tells the dog-catchers that *Bhikhu* is his own pet dog.³¹² Bhikhu's presence is productive for his business because *Bhikhu* inspires other humans to buy biscuits for him- it is mutually dependent and supportive in this canine-human relationships. Likewise, there is an unnamed old man who feeds some young puppies some puffed rice, which is not even proper food for dogs, but in the dire condition and amidst the severe scarcity of food, to these growing puppies, even that seemed like some treats.³¹³ It was entirely presented through the perspective of these puppies, who did not know the ulterior motive of the human for feeding them and letting them stay his courtyard every night. Murubbi's erstwhile human family, Fauji's human companions, and later on most of the human characters, all fit in this pattern, of transactional canine-human relationships. Human caretakers of Murubbi, or when Gunda's sister, Punchki is abducted by some humans, although it is clearly implied that she would be taken care of

³¹² Mishra, *Amanushnama*, 50.

³¹³ Mishra, *Amanushnama*, 339-340.

by them, but in a semi-domesticated, semi-feral way, owing to her breed as the native ones- all these humans belonged to this category. Love and longing for animal companions stems from a selfish need, which may be transformed into a deeper, more empathetic connection later. But this need-based coexistence is a common factor that prevails in canine-human relationships. The second type of humans are openly, unambiguously hostile to stray dogs within the human habitats, and the text is punctuated with incidents pertaining to this cruel aspect of cohabitation; this cruelty comes out in many forms. Sometimes it is expressed through directly acted out cruel impulses, like beating dogs randomly, or throwing hot water on them, or putting poison their food.³¹⁴ Other times, it is symptomatic through the sheer level of indifference in running over dogs or abandoning sick or old dogs by pushing them out of their known places. And the third type, which is shown to be the rare ones, are those who are empathetic and affectionate towards the native dogs of their own communities. There are only two instances where the relationship between dogs and humans is shown in the most empathetic, warm tone- one is the old man with his only companion Lalu dwelling together in that shanty by the road and the other one is Bhulu with his human companion. Both these micro stories share the similar type of tragic end- in a strange and immensely cold winter night, the old man and Lalu passed away in their roadside shanty, while Bhulu lost his human fellow in a tragic train accident. Eventually Bhulu too would pass away after a few months, which is depicted in a sort of dreamlike, supernatural way. Lalu with his old man came into the plot through the eyes of Fauji and Gunda on their journey back home.

The first active and direct human intrusion takes place in the narrative, when dog catching car from the corporation haunts this place and manages to kill and drive away

³¹⁴ Mishra, *Amanushnama*, 43, 221, 223, 228, 343-344,

several dogs in that area. In the course of the novel, we come across the dog catchers, killers, multiple times. Murubbi, himself meets his tragic end in the hands of one of these specially recruited dog killers, brutally in the second half of the novel. The contextualisation of this novel with the Animal Laws in India is enormously important because it creates the narrative of subversion and alternative outlook throughout the depiction of these events and simultaneously the assumed repercussions of these events from the *gaze of the animals*. *Amanushnama* was published in 2010. The kind of slaughter is described in this text, repeatedly, in reality has been carried out almost every year in some states of South India, in the city of Dhaka in Bangladesh and some cities of India. In 1960, Animal Welfare Board of India issued several laws relating to the control and management of street dogs in India. But a generalised overview in this history of legalisation of street dogs in India, has always been a contended and problematic area. In 1957, the Ministry of Food and Agriculture published a report of the Committee for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals; in this report, dogs are referred as beings only in connection to their status as either 'owned' or free-ranging animals in human habitats. This report unambiguously provides instructions that municipal laws abide by a system of licencing dogs with certain fees, and the ones who would be paid for this particular amount, would have to be demarcated with collars to differentiate from the free-ranging canines.³¹⁵ Thus the ownerless dogs would be easier to determine and hence it would be a quicker process to pick them for destruction. There are various inhumane methods of killing dogs in mass scale in detailed manner; from bludgeoning them to poisoning or killing them in lethal chambers, everything is recorded and instructed in the most casual, nonchalant, matter-of-fact way.³¹⁶ It is also crucial that even *the Act of Prevention of*

³¹⁵ "Animal Welfare in General," in *Report of the Committee for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals* (New Delhi: Govt. of India, 1957), 118.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 119-121.

Cruelty to Animals, 1960, in their detailed enumeration kept the killing of street dogs excluded from the actions cognisably illegal from the concerns of compassion and cruelty to animals. *Section 11* of the Chapter III of this *Act*, clearly provides the list of actions which would be considered as illegal and criminal acts against animals, with exception in point No: 3, which clearly states:

(3) Nothing in this section shall apply to-

- a) The dehorning of cattle, or the castration or branding or nose-roping of any animals, in the prescribed manner: or
- b) The destruction of stray dogs in lethal chambers or [by such other methods as may be prescribed]:³¹⁷

Killing dogs in mass scale was a decision, which was clouded with moral and legal ambivalences until very recently. It was also a decision which legally supported to a great extent; the report of the Committee for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals of 1957 also mentioned that those electrocution machines donated by the RSPCA, after being discarded on the ground of humanity, were still being used till 1997 in Hyderabad legally and till 1998 illegally.³¹⁸ The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty of Great Britain exported six RSPCA electrocution machine in 1930; they exported these machines only after they discontinued its use on the ground of inadequate humaneness. One of the leading magazines on animal welfare and animal rights brought this cruel way of dealing with street dogs by municipality, namely one such Alandur municipality. The secretary of this specific municipality further informed that, after April, 1970, dogs were not killed with Cynogas in the pit, although one humanitarian person informed that this specific

³¹⁷ *The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960.*

³¹⁸ "Chronology of the Humane Progress in India," Part II, Animal People Forum, November 1, 2011.

municipality was still rounding up the stray dogs and continued killing them up in the pit, with the infiltration of Cynogas.³¹⁹

***Amanushnama* and Animal Resistance**

The other animal characters, like *Pitpit* the escaped monkey from the *madari* or monkey whisperer as they are better known in popular culture, or that horse named *Lakshman*, or the cows trying to escape from the butchers, while eventually dying in the bush, all stand as representatives of their species, who have been exploited by humans in countless ways. Seeing from that angle, *Amanushnama* can be taken as a commentary from the animals on human society also. In the text, we find references to circus animals and animals used for experiments in the laboratories, thus making them subjects to cruel tortures repeatedly. Gunda's character is shown as the ones, who understands the politics behind it, and who is shown to be the one who actively retaliates it. This specific canine character is created with more imaginative liberty and superimposed anthropomorphic sensibilities. The circus as a functioning body has existed by an intricate system of animal exploitation in multiple levels. Directly it made the exploits through illegal, unethical captures and afterwards the brutal systems of tortures in the name of training the animals in various tricks and performances. On the other hand, like zoos, the travelling circuses also used to further these exploitations in urban and feral animals within the ambit of human habitations. Small animals like feral cats, civet cats, and free-ranging dogs would be killed, and their bodies would be used as the primary or secondary source of food to the wild animals captured and trapped within the circus parties. In a newspaper article, the writer and historian Sriram V. has pointed out that a system of feeding zoo creatures with the carcasses of street dogs was very much in practice.³²⁰ These details are relevant

³¹⁹ "Board's Activities," *Animal Citizen* (April-September, 1971), 66.

³²⁰ Sriram V., "Moving from Gruesome Handling of Street Dogs to a Humane ABC Programme," in *The Hindu*, March 26, 2024.

in this discussion because the plotline of this novel, brings these issues and throws into the relief through the eyes of a reactive, responsive dog, namely Gunda. Gunda is described as having a completely dark, large, muscular physique with a regal personality; he is the son of Tilki and the brother of Punchki. His character is shown to be aggressive towards humans, because he can perceive the innate cruelty in humans' treatment of not only towards dogs, but also towards other creatures as well. These other creatures are beasts of burden, circus animals and animals used for cruel laboratory experiments. In his puppyhood, he also came in direct contact with wild elephants, who lifted his small body up into the air with his trunk. His cohabitation with *Pitpit*, the monkey, who escaped from an anonymous monkey charmer or *madari*, only highlights this reactive, retaliative aspect of his nature.

Sarat Colling starts her first chapter with a reference to an incident of a cow, named Emily, who escaped from the slaughterhouse, and eluded her captors for forty days and forty nights, by moving into the forest and staying with the deer. But Emily also won over a group of sympathisers, who created a solid network of hiding her from the police and left hay for her in hiding. In her peregrinations and escapades Collins, also reads the far-reaching impacts of Emily's actions in terms of symbolical and cultural significance. In the physical plane, first crossing the walls of her abattoir, she leaped into freedom in the conceptual sense- the the constant movement from towns to forests, she also crossed the species-specific borders, thus transgressing 'conceptual and psychological borders, human expectations of where a cow belongs in modern industrial society.'³²¹

When we come back to the world of Bhagirath Mishra's *Amanushnama*, we also find these types of escapes repetitively; significantly, it occurs thrice. The first instance

³²¹ Sarat Colling, "Imagining Animal Resistance" in *Animal Resistance in the Global Capitalist Era* by Sarat Colling (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2021), 4.

occurs when Fauji, the abandoned military service dog and Gunda on their journey in the unknown land, came across a cow, who just escaped from his 'owners', who were planning to sell him to a potential meat seller. The second instance happened when Bilati, the only dog of some foreign breed, yet who was discarded by their human owners, escaped from the second adoptees, the moment she came to realise the purpose of their adoption. And the third is characterised through the character of *Pitpit*, the monkey, who escaped from one unknown *madari* or monkey whisperer. In all these micro narratives of animal escapades from their closure or abusive system, the novel as a fictional work points the readers to a larger narrative- a narrative of what animal historians and theorists would term as 'narratives of resistance'. These are not just simple, streamlined stories of escape- seen from a different angle, these stories chart the way, animals attempt to convey their experiences, preferences and wills to us, in a nonverbal yet evocative mode of communication. Citing the analysis of Marc Bekoff and Pierce and their notion of 'wild justice', and Sarat Collin maintained that the zoologist Donald Griffin also established that "animals have rich social and emotional lives," and their social structure also is constructed with the sense of justice, empathy, tolerance, aggression and depression, similar to those humans experiences.³²² The parallel accounts of the unnamed cow bring into this text the references to the other accounts of escaped farm animals in literature. In Bengali literature, Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay's *Budhir Bari Fera (The Return of Budhi)* also depicts the experiences of an escaped cow from her impending death in a slaughterhouse and returning to home; the entire experience is narrated from the animal's perspective. Jason Hribal poignantly documented the narratives of animals' escapes from

³²² Colling, "Introduction," in *Animal Resistance in the Global Capitalist Era* by Sarat Colling (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2021), xxiv; Marc Bekoff, *The Emotional Lives of Animals: Leading Scientist Explores Animal Joy, Sorrow, and Empathy- and Why They Matter* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2007); Marc Bekoff and Jessica Pierce, *Wild Justice: The Moral Lives of Animals* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2009).

their state of imprisonment and their status as objects of oppression. From Chuneer or Jumbo or Topsy or Mary, the resistant pachyderms to monkeys, gorillas, sea mammals and orcas, who retaliated or escaped, Hribal presented all their individual histories and behavioural changes, which decided the consequences in those specific ways.³²³ The accounts of escaped farm animals like bulls, sheep, pigs, cows also collectively constitute this gesture of nonverbal utterance on their resisting will against the state of captivity. Collins argues that these incidents must be viewed and analysed against the backdrop of industrialised farm animals and beasts of burdens, exploited by capitalistic endeavours.

The chance encounter of Gunda and Fauji with the cow only occurs at a distant, unknown place, where accidentally, in some unplanned way, they landed. Spatially, this displacement happens when both these dogs board the train, and fell asleep inside it, without assuming the consequence of it. Dogs, being highly territorial, are careful about their own areas, and even with free-ranging dogs, drastic change of place is not enjoyed or encouraged unless there are some crucial, important external factors to it. These two dogs, one of them, a former retired, military dog, Fauji is shown to be abandoned by his human family and the other one Gunda, grows up to be the volatile and sensitive, a sort of avenging character on behalf of the animals against humans. The figures of these two animals, on the run to return to their own habitat, create a different narrative of migration, that is determined and shaped by chance, nature and their own active will, instead of human coercion. Thus, their presence and details of the return journey maps out another form of animal resistance. In the course of the novel, Gunda's character emerges as the living epitome of 'animal resistant'.

³²³ Jason Hribal, *Fear of the Animal Planet: The Hidden History of Animal Resistance*, with an introduction by Jeffrey St. Clair (Oakland, California: Counter Punch, 2010).

But what also stands out from these historical and cognitive behavioural studies of escaped or resisting animals is a very unsettling picture of human cruelty, that has been encouraged, enabled and celebrated over several generations. It is the legacy of this 'human cruelty' against animals' sentient character. Although to compare the behaviours and liberating actions by these circus animals, or zoo animals seem to be very different from the behaviours of a feral dog like Gunda, yet in the fundamental level, they share the affinity and the common factors. In urban ecosystem, there is always a fear of free-ranging dogs gone rogue. The fear of 'mad dogs' and its socio-cultural impacts have been explored in the second chapter second chapter of this theses. To a great extent, the behaviours of semi-feral, semi-domesticated dogs of communities decide their lives and degree of acceptance within the human habitats. Often, a particular dog may show certain aggressive or irritable behavioural changes, depending on which she or he would have to face dire consequences at the hands of already intolerant humans. Hiranmay Karlekar poignantly documented a series of real-life incidents, which provoked a very anti-animal, anti-canine sentiments in human society.³²⁴ The anthropocentric perspective of most media and newspapers would only focus on the narratives, which vilify the animal, obliterating the real background and possible rational, cognitive explanations for their erratic behavioural changes.

Mishra's *Amanushnama* lucidly touches upon these complicated aspects of canine-human coexistence in the suburbs of our contemporary Indian life. His creation of the canine character, Gunda is transformed into a more-than life character with his transformation from the mere observer and recipient of human aggressions to a retaliative, autonomous agent, who is responding and to a great extent, reciprocating human violence with a wild sense of justice. His actions, in the literal sense, his attacks

³²⁴ Hiranmay Karlekar, *Savage Humans and Stray Dogs: A Study in Aggression* (Delhi: Sage Publications, 2008).

on the torturing humans are transgressive in both legal and societal terms. Karlekar notes that the moment, a street dog demonstrates any sense of violence, humans quickly gather around the animal for lynching. My use of the word *lynch*, is deliberate here, because the swift yet brutal decision is generally taken up by majority of the humans, including the administrative authority, that falls under a very insensitive, inconsiderate, limited purview of the perfunctory routine system of legality, without analysing the provocation or the systemic abuse on the animal subject, responsible for eliciting that kind of response from the animal.³²⁵ Also, there is a very crucial connection between the racist violence and speciesist cruelty, which has been explored in various ways. Citing Maneesha Deckha's observation on the similarity between 'race thinking' and species thinking', Collins succinctly notes that like speciesism, racism invokes a human-animal hierarchy.³²⁶ One of the easiest ways to accomplish is to indict the animal with a stamp of rabid or mad. In tracing the documented accounts of the circus elephants who were killed on the ground of aggression or impulsive attacks on humans, at various points in history, Collins pointed out that the equivalent types of narrative were also embedded within the mainstream culture, when the captive or the tortured animals protested in some way:

Many were traded from one circus to another, yet their names were changed so that the receiver would not realise that the elephant they were buying had a history of resistance. In response to their demonstrative agency, circuses began to portray elephant retaliation as part of their show's spectacle. The narrative of the

³²⁵ Hiranmay Karlekar, "The Killing Fields of Karnataka," in *Savage Humans and Stray Dogs: A Study in Aggression* (Delhi: Sage Publications, 2008), 17-18.

³²⁶ Collins, 6; Aph Ko and Syl Ko, eds., *Aphro-ism: Essays on Pop Culture, Feminism, and Black Veganism from Two Sister* (Brooklyn, NY: Lantern Books, 2017); Maneesha Deckha, "Intersectionality and Psthumanist Visions of Equality," *Wisconsin Journal of Law, Gender & Society* 23, no. 2 (2009): 249–67; Maneesha Deckha, "The Salience of Species Difference for Feminist Theory," *Hastings Women's Law Journal* 17, no. 1 (January 2006): 1–38, <https://repository.uclawsf.edu/hwlj/vol17/iss1/2>.

"mad elephant" was born, appropriating and capitalizing on their resistance (Collins, xxiii).³²⁷

The narrative of 'mad elephant' with the narrative of 'mad dog' is equable in this argument, because to some extent, mass psyche has a tendency to demonise animals, who demonstrate agency and the reciprocal violence towards humans. The panic and frenzy around this zoonotic disease of rabies, always had a considerable impact in mass psyche, but in many ways the Nineteenth Century was the high time of this phase, as it has already been explored in the previous chapters of this thesis.³²⁸ In our contemporary times too, rabies is a disease that is still capable of creating panic and terror in a public mindset when it specifically comes to the question of street dogs and this disease. In the Indian subcontinent, the infrastructure in most areas, the detection of rabid one or the aggressive one is very crucial yet a difficult task to do. Majority of the times, the street dog with the aberrant behaviour is left with *only one* brutal consequence. In this way, even with the species-specific differences, the captive elephants of the 'mad elephant' narrative share some similar consequential tragedy with the apparently free yet ubiquitous street dogs with irritable temperaments. Irritability and aggression in a dog's behaviours is capable of determining their survival and safe existence within the human habitat. Within a community whose attitude towards street dogs stretches between neutrality to anti-animal, the ethological changes in dogs can impact the canine community in so many ways. One point that Karlekar also pointed out is that the blurring lines between dogs' temperament and genuine cases of rabies; most of the times, a dog's behaviour and their levels of indifference, tolerance or acceptance articulates the general treatments, she or

³²⁷ Collins, *Introduction*, xxiii.

³²⁸ Bill Wasik and Monica Murphy, *Rabid: A Cultural History of the World's Most Diabolical Virus* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2012); Neil Pemberton and Michael Worboys, *Mad Dogs and Englishmen: Rabies in Britain, 1830-2000* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

he receives in daily life.³²⁹ He continues that most times, the popular mindset and the local and higher administrative bodies in power, lack the genuine sincerity and interest to delve into the factors behind the behavioural changes in their community dogs. The insincerity of the administrative bodies, the anti-animal sentiment amongst the local mass psychology and the representations of street dogs in an especially negative light by the anti-animal media houses would easily misconstrue the identities of these animals and are capable of initiating a mass rampage on these street animals. The symbolical and literal concept of a dog gone 'wild', or *rogue* can offer *only one determined solution* in popular mindset, a consequence that is very brutal for the concerned animal. It should be noted here that in our contemporary time, there are dog pounds in most major metropolis; these facilities are created with ferocious or wounded dogs in mind. These pounds are observational spaces where wounded or dogs suspected of rabies can be quarantined and kept under surveillance. But they are not properly utilised in times of necessity, and hence many dogs suffer a premature death in the hands of cruel, revengeful humans.³³⁰ In also one of my conference papers, I explored how often the anti-animal stories constructed by several media houses cumulatively shape and determine the popular mindset towards urban animals within contemporary Indian reality.³³¹ In the recent times too, there is always a polarisation in the representation of feral, urban animals contribute towards the understanding and shaping of the general mindset towards our companion species.

Bhagirath Mishra in this *Amanushnama* manoeuvred this '*mad dog*' narrative from the perspective of a 'resistant animal' within a community, which is situated in the

³²⁹ Karlekar, 20-24.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

³³¹ Swatilekha Maity, "*Stop the Bark: A Vision of Polarised Existence, regarding Human-Canine Co-Habitation in Contemporary, Urban India,*" in RC21 Annual Conference, *In and Beyond the City: Emerging Ontologies, Persistent Challenges and Hopeful Futures*, on 18th-21st September 2019, in Delhi, India; "Stray Dogs Menace," *ABP Ananda*, November 15, 2018, <https://bengali.abplive.com/video/tv-show/district/howrah/stray-dog-menace-hits-howrah-532049>; Girish Shahane, "It's unpleasant but culling cattle, dogs, and monkeys is becoming a necessary evil in India," *Scroll*, March 27, 2019.

intersections of town, forests and village, but separated from the major metropolis, and also detached from the access to the proper animal welfare infrastructure. Mishra's construction of the canine character Gunda and the monkey named Pitpit, is both implicit and explicit on multiple levels in articulating the grey zone in canine-human relationship within human habitat. While analysing the narrative construction of the speaking animals in nonhuman fictions, Bernaerts et. al pointed out that non-human narrators present their experiences through a polarised 'dialectic of defamiliarization and empathy'.³³² The course of the plot follows Gunda's life from his puppyhood and charts his emergence as a reciprocative 'resistant animal' in the entire novel. His attacks on humans in the novel reveal the aftermath of the reciprocal violence on humans and its impacts on the other-than-human community. The implication of this word, 'reciprocal', I will analyse later in this chapter. *Amanushnama* also demonstrates the culminating consequences of the avenging, violent reciprocations of 'resistant animal' not only on that particular animal but also on the animal community that concerned animal individual belongs to. *Amanushnama* demonstrates a trajectory of this 'mad dog' narrative in human society from the perspectives of several canine characters in the novel:

Nobody in their wildest dreams could have thought that their *Bat-Tala* would be facing a crisis, only for Gunda. Not even Murubbi could have anticipated it! For consecutively two days, Gunda has done *it*. A few days back, a rumour reached Murubbi of a dark, large *bhow-bhow* wounding a particular *two-legged* of the Gunj. Initially he didn't think about it at all- just some vague rumours of no considerable importance. But gradually in his discussions with others, Murubbi realised, this is something serious. Just a mention of this topic made a few of the *bhow-bhows* jumped in enthusiasm, "Oh, yeah, yeah! We know it quite well- we also know that

³³² Bernaerts, Lars, Marco Caracciolo, Luc Herman, and Bart Vervaeck, "The Storied Lives of Non-Human Narrators." *Narrative* 22, no. 1 (2014): 73.

two-legged culprit." In the afternoon of the same day, more clarifications reached the doggo community of this *Bat-Tala*; that the condition of that *two-legged* is very critical. Chandu's barks could hardly contain his joy, "whoever did it, I support him with all my strength"...In the evening when *Chhotu* came running with the news that it was *Gunda* who had bitten that two-legged and another dog hating two-legged of the sweet shop had identified him, Murubbi grew very restless....

Murubbi's mind gets heavy with a sense of foreboding, he could sniff the imminent danger in the air. With such a dignified personality, large built, very dark coat and bluish eyes, *Gunda* is very conspicuous in their community. One does not find such a regal one often. And that is the main problem. All those two-leggeds of the *Gunj* know quite well that *Gunda* stays in this *Bat-Talā*. These two-leggeds have a tendency to retaliate in massive scale. Murubbi cannot imagine what can be in store for the doggo of this *Bat-Talā*, once they decide to take revenge (Mishra, 221-222).³³³

The physical space of *Bat-Talā* created a haven for the street dogs of *Nilgunj*, *Kabardanga*, *Shmoshandanga* and the adjacent areas. For a place situated in the fringes of the mainstream urbanity, the interrelationship between street dogs and humans is fraught with basic instinctive feelings- it spans from the indifference to tolerance, and in select cases, a mutual yet distant affection. In a like scenario, when one dog misbehaves, the actions of that dog can implicate and pull into the narrative of other dogs of that same territory and thus create a network of accomplices in human perspective. For a popular mindset already poised on the delicate balance between indifference and fear mixed with

³³³ Mishra, *Amanushnama*, 221-222.

disgust, this kind of incident can push the collective human perspective towards the brink of a complete violence against the community of other species.

Amanushnama presents several 'resistant animals' in the narrative; through characters like the escaped cow, the horse named Lakshman, definitely this canine character Gunda who emerged as the main protagonist towards the latter half of the novel, and significantly *Pitpit* the monkey, this text weaves the theme of human aggression and exploitation in a pan-animal frame. *Pitpit* the monkey represents the wildlife who are despite their recognised status as wildlife, still get captured and exploited for profit-based performances, as in circuses or in the hands of monkey whisperers. It also hints at the tradition of performing animals in the contemporary Indian society. The novel exposes the relationship between performing animals like monkeys with their humans, who consider themselves as the 'master/owner' of these performing animals. The relationship between these monkey whisperers or snake charmers with their working animals is fraught with a codependent yet cruel aspect of it. Most of the snake charmers or monkey whisperers or *madaris*, as they are commonly known, belong to a marginalised community within the mainstream socio-cultural matrix of South India. Within this already marginalised section of the human society, the illegally captured monkeys or snakes share a multilayered oppression. According to the Schedule II of *the Wildlife (Protection) Act of 1972*, monkeys are considered as the wildlife, who cannot be used or exploited in any human dominated activities, from circus performances to other types of works. The characterisation of *Pitpit*, the monkey who managed to escape from his owner, while the other monkey, his mate *Phoolkumari*, remained the captive. This novel gives a vivid description of how monkeys captured and owned by the monkey whisperers are trained. The method of training of these monkeys at the hands of monkey whisperers

is brutal and forceful; one animal rights activist, Sachin Bangera, PETA India's manager of media and celebrity projects, mentioned that:

Monkeys are trained to 'dance' through beatings and food deprivation. The teeth are often pulled out by the *madaris* so that the animals cannot defend themselves.³³⁴

The rescues of monkeys from these *madaris* started making headlines in popular newspapers increasingly since the beginning of this century.³³⁵ The animal rights activism of PETA and People for Animals during this period were proactive in bringing out the sufferings and tortures that the animals faced in the hands of monkey trainers, though some reports in the newspapers followed an essentially anthropocentric approach to the extent that they ignored the longstanding tortures that monkeys face at the hands of monkey whisperers or *madaris*.³³⁶ Rajat Bhargava noted that:

Before 1978, legally rhesus macaques up to the number of 45000 and Hanuman langurs up to the number of 5000 per year could be exported from India.

³³⁴ "Raveena Doesn't like this Monkey Business," *Business Standard* (November 14, 2013), https://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ians/raveena-doesn-t-like-this-monkey-business-113111400352_1.html.

³³⁵ "No Madari- Monkeys in Mumbai: John," *The Times of India*, (August 26, 2007), <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/entertainment/hindi/bollywood/news/no-madari-monkeys-in-mumbaijohn/articleshowprint/2310143.cms>; Monika S, "Forest Department Rescues 2 Monkeys from "Madaris," *the Udaipur Times*, (August 29 2918), <https://udaipurtimes.com/news/forest-department-rescues-2-monkeys-from-madari/c74416-w2859-cid138815-s10698.htm>; "2 Performing Monkeys Rescued from Chokar Dhani," *the Times of India* (May 1, 2017), <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/nagpur/2-performing-monkeysrescued-from-chokar-dhani/articleshowprint/58449869.cms>; Six Monkeys Found Dead: 3 Young Ones Rescued, Shifted to Zoo," *The Deccan Herald* (March 8, 2010), <https://www.deccanherald.com/india/karnataka/six-monkeys-found-dead-2478182>; "10 Monkeys Rescued from Marina Beach," *The Times of India*, (August 29, 2011), <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chennai/10-monkeys-rescued-from-marina-beach/articleshow/9777304.cms>; "Monkeys Used for Begging RESCUED!" *PETA India*, August 16, 2018, <https://www.petaindia.com/blog/monkeys-used-for-begging-rescued/>

³³⁶ Nabamita Mitra and Shabina Akhtar, "Monkey on One's Back: Political Correctness and New Entertainment are Hunting Monkey Trainers out of their Habitat," *The Telegraph India*, February 25, 2007, <https://www.telegraphindia.com/west-bengal/monkey-on-one-s-back/cid/1006483>.

The total ban on capturing and exporting of rhesus macaques only came into force in 1978 onwards.³³⁷

Through the depiction of these animal characters who are voicing their angst and resistance, the novel prioritises the animal perspectives over human supremacy. My use of the word 'voicing' here is significant, because as Collins and Hribal have already established that animals express their experiences and emotions through repeated behaviours and actions.³³⁸

Yoshimi Kawade has further developed this idea of the subjective notion of *Umwelt* built on the dyadic relationship of the organism-Umwelt. Kawade has argued that this dyadic, two-way relationship provides a limited understanding of the consciousness or life experience. This explanation relegates by the virtue of the perception of autonomous organisms, the presence of other organisms to the margins, as 'objects, inanimate entities', yet "active interactions take place among subjective individuals, and there will emerge what can be called a society".³³⁹ This interconnection and mutual comprehensibility amongst different species is recurrently underscored in this novel, and significantly except one or two pointers in the stretch of this entire novel, humans were kept excluded out of this interspecies communication. By citing the notion of Imanishi Kinji's 'biosociology', Kawade further explains that the living organism always forms a triad, a matrix of interconnected, mutually understanding of every living being or individual, the society and their *Umwelt*.³⁴⁰ By prioritising and rendering the *Umwelts* of the animals

³³⁷ Rajat Bhargava, Rajat Bhargava, "Traditional Trapping Technique of Primates," in *Non- Human Primates of India*, ed. A. K. Gupta (Dehra Dun, India: Wildlife Institute of India, 2001), 185; Meena Radhakrishna, "Civil Society's Uncivil Acts: Dancing Bear and Starving Kalandar," *Economic and Political Weekly*, no. 42 (January 2007): 4222–26.

³³⁸ Sarat Colling, *Animal Resistance in the Global Capitalist Era* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2020); Jason Hribal, *Fear of the Animal Planet: The Hidden History of Animal Resistance* (Oakland: Counter Punch, 2010).

³³⁹ Yoshimi Kawade, "Subject- Umwelt- Society: The Triad of Living Beings," *Semiotica*, 134 (2001): 815-828.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, *Subject- Umwelt- Society*, 816-817.

while excluding that of the humans, *Amanushnama* spontaneously takes on a subversive stance, disrupting the speciesist hierarchy. It is not always that this work deliberately intends to harp on the idea of incomprehensibility between dogs and humans. There are a few junctures in the narrative that speak fluently about the canine-human connection, but they are few and they all the emphasise on the significance of dogs' perceptions of our own in this world. In that way, *Amanushnama* becomes an exercise in narrative on what Donna Haraway would call, "Dogs are not an alibi for other themes."³⁴¹

Towards the end of this novel, we find a multispecies interaction developing on this intersectional, interspecies connectedness, which transcends the species-specific barriers between urban animals and wildlife. In a very symbolical as well as literal gesture, Gunda, the 'resistant animal', becomes both the witness and one of the active participants in the in the grand movement against the speciesist exploitation of humans. The very end of the novel also creates a vivid visualisation of this cumulative, collective resistance of other-than-human animals against the monolithic, anthropocentric supremacy. The moments which culminate into the herds of elephants marching with other animals, birds hovering over them in the sky, subliminally presents the confrontational zone between other-than-humans and humans, between forests and human habitats, between the natural space of animals and the human intrusion into it.

³⁴¹ Donna Haraway, "Emergent Naturecultures," in *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003), 5.

Conclusion

This chapter maps out the multilayered aspects of canine-centered literary works from South Asia, works which focus on the animal perspective of the world view. The narratives throw into the relief several aspects of this experiment into animalised voices, which are inherently silenced or overlooked in the anthropocentric worldview. The previous three chapters present dogs as companions to humans; in this chapter, I intended to look at works which prioritise dogs as independent, individual stand-alone literary figures. Although these three texts are anthropomorphised to some extent, they may belong to the group of the 'absolute' or the 'cynocentric', while the previous three chapters deal with works which are fundamentally 'relativised', in the terminology of Theodore Ziolkowski.³⁴²

In my thesis, in this chapter, I have selected the narratives which are centered with canine protagonists, who critique the dominant societal mores and cultures through their species-specific articulation. In this chapter presents a critical inquiry into the way as fictional works, projecting canine and other-than-human characters at their centre, expands our perceptive horizons in the 'multispecies' interconnectedness in our world. These specific narratives necessitate an interspecies dialogue through these representations of anthropomorphised literary canines in this speciesist society through their specific standpoint, and also expose the transformative aspects of canine-human cohabitation in our contemporary South Asian cultural life. On the other hand, *Dawa* documents an ordinary, physically weak yet gifted dog's literal and emotive self-exploration. Its commentaries expose a comprehensive picture of urban life encompassing animal-human coexistence. *Oye! Chhotu* in its visual representation

³⁴² Theodore Ziolkowski, "Talking Dogs: The Caninization of Literature," in *Varieties of Literary Thematics* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983), 94.

articulates the 'experientiality' of a young puppy born on the street, in the narrative structuring of David Herman.³⁴³ It starkly differs from Orijit Sen's *Portrait of the Artist as an Old Dog*, which can be considered falling in the category of 'animal allegory' according to the animal narratives in graphic fiction by Herman.³⁴⁴ *Chhotu* also does not fall in the category of fine-grained graphic narratives like the graphic illustration of Laura Gilpin's *The Two-Headed Calf*, which are completely pervaded with the *Umwelt* exploration of animal consciousness.³⁴⁵

This *Umwelt* is explored and presented through an interconnected multispecies narrative in Bhagirath Mishra's *Amanushnama*. *Amanushnama* is more in line with Kafka's *The investigation of a Dog, by a Dog story*, where they are the primary narrators in the accounts. Naama Harel in *Investigations of a Dog, by a Dog: Between Anthropocentrism and Canine-Centrism*, notes that the positioning canine characters as first-person narrator inevitably anthropomorphised, yet it is also a necessary one in indicating the concerns from the nonhuman perception.³⁴⁶ Harel also reasserts the importance of this anthropomorphised representation of the first person animal narrators while quoting Erica Fudge, who categorically placed the huge significance these anthropomorphised renditions hold in cultural studies of animals. By incorporating and appropriating the symbolical and literal renditions of escaped animals and a stylistic narrativization of 'animal resistance', this novel hints at the retaliative potential of other-than-human animals' perception of the world and existence.

³⁴³ David Herman, "Animal Minds in Nonfiction Comics," in *Animal Comics: Multispecies Storyworlds in Graphic Narratives*, ed. David Herman (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 201–24.

³⁴⁴ David Herman, "Storyworld/Umwelt: Nonhuman Experiences in Graphic Narratives," *SubStance* 40, no. 1 (January 1, 2011): 156–81, <https://doi.org/10.1353/sub.2011.0000>, 166-167.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*; Laura Gilpin, "The Two-Headed Calf," illustrated by Adam Ellis.

³⁴⁶ Naama Harel, "Investigation of a Dog, by a Dog," in *Speaking for Animals: Animal Autobiography Writing*, edited by Margo DeMello (New York: Routledge, 2013), 49-59.

These three texts together also demonstrate the need for our remodelling of the terms we have used in describing the animal lives. They show the transition from the changes in our perception towards animals as 'nonhuman' to 'more-than-human' figures in the literature. In discussing this transition, I have based my argument on Sophie Chao's demarcations of these terms and how they structurally construe the perceptions towards animals from an interdisciplinary angle essentially embedded in discourses on consciousness, biology and cultural paradigms. These canine-centric texts force us, human readers, to look beyond our perceptual experiences restricted by our species-specific narration. Chao further noted another term, which may be more apt in delineating the contribution of these texts in the South Asian Literary domain. She calls this type of worldview 'multi-being', which is more pervasive and encompassing in its capacity to articulate the other-than-human dimensions of life experiences.³⁴⁷ The binary discrimination of 'nonhumanness' and the hierarchical ambivalences of 'more-than-human' identity are perfectly countered with the experiences of this multispecies perceptions of life, deftly portrayed through these three texts.

When we position these three texts in contemporary socio-historical context, we find that all of them belong to the timeframe between 2000 to 2020, a period marked by its rapid popularisation of animal rights and street animal welfare, at least in India. These three texts attest to the impacts of this pro-canine, pro-animal spirit, in popular psyche, which has grown to be a considerable pervasive force on its own. The founding of multiple animal shelters in several cities reinstates a more tolerant, and inclusive attitude in the populace.³⁴⁸ These texts together simultaneously undercut and perform a

³⁴⁷ Catherine Price and Sophie Chao, "Multispecies, More-Than-Human, Non-Human, Other-Than-Human: Reimagining Idioms of Animacy in an Age of Planetary Unmaking," *Exchanges: The Interdisciplinary Research Journal* 10, no. 2 (2023):182.

³⁴⁸ Merritt Clifton, "Chronology of Humane Progress in India: Part III," *Animal People* (blog), November 1, 2011, <https://newspaper.animalpeopleforum.org/2011/11/>.

continuance of plurality of life forms, and elicit a vision into this multiplicity of interconnected multispecies existence.

Conclusion

This thesis has begun with the questions of the striking absence of canine presence in South Asian literature and the fundamental necessity in looking at the human civilisation from the angle of interspecies relationships and its expressions in literature. Deep down, more than a researcher, I was captivated with the enormous significance that these four-legged mentors hold in our lives, and the dearth of considerable sincere, academic enquiry motivated me to contextualise their crucial marks within the mainstream academic ambit. The fictional works discussed and analysed in this thesis, document in a crucial way the question of how the canine-subjects have been represented within the matrix of the mainstream literature, the voice of the underdogs and its significance within a majoritarian, dominant culture intolerant to the other forms of life. Dogs, specifically street dogs emerge as the companions and unspoken guardians of the households, located towards the fringes of the society. Seen from that perspective, the street dogs have become the synonymous entities with the marginalised and the oppressed. The transformative status of the ownerless dogs from their transition of existence evoking sentiments of indifference, disgust or aggression to the beloved ‘community animals’ within the human habitat, has been a long journey, a journey which could have been only possible through multiple socio-historical markers over the times of a few decades in the track. As already discussed, and established by Samanta and Chakrabarti, our current legacy of animal welfare has been crucially rooted in the colonial structure itself.³⁴⁹ But what also has been significant in structuring these pro-animal attitudes, is people’s general attitudes towards the notions of agency and autonomous identity, for which the transformations in their movements are constructed from the

³⁴⁹ Pratik Chakrabarti, "Beasts of Burden: Animals and Laboratory Research in Colonial India," *History of Science* 48, no. 2 (June 2010): 125–51.

ground, from the grassroots levels to the upper tiers of the society. It is also a fact that the legislatures and socio-cultural perceptions construe these interspecies relationships in broader, more accepting purview. This is not only an inquiry into the positionality of dogs in the South Asian culture from the vantage point of an animal historian. It is more like seeing certain literary works with their canine characters at certain specific historical moments, which also illuminate the entangled existence of both humans and dogs in a climate of geo-political, and cultural paradigm shifts. Most of the works selected in this research project, for example, the narratives by Subodh Ghosh, Gangadhar Gadgil, Rabindranath Tagore, Atulananda Goswami, Abu Kaiser, Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay centre around characters who have been surrounded with a wall of exclusion and individuality. The depictions of the isolated or solitary individuals with canine characters reinforce an articulation and necessity of registering these micro-narratives, which are centrally rooted in interspecies companionship. This work attempts to question whether this societal exclusion plays a significant role in shaping the interspecies relationships.

In the course of the duration of this entire research project, a critical pointer emerged from the corpus of literature dealing with animal presence. It is the locus standi of street dogs as a symptomatic of intersectional, marginalised existence constantly under threat for its associated implications of agency, symbolic insurgent spirit challenging the status-quo. Throughout this work, I have used ‘nonhuman’, ‘more-than-human’, ‘other-than-human’ terminologies interchangeably. In this chapter, I will incorporate the term ‘more-than-human’ subjects intentionally as I believe it underscores one of the basic purposes of this thesis.

This work to some extent, bridges the lacunae amongst the various discourses and through them constructs a semi-comprehensive picture of dog and human co-dependence and coexistence in fictional works. In the course of this entire thesis, what also emerges

is not the absence; rather the presence of the canine characters in mainstream literature, and how this presence throws into relief, the questions on agency, domination over animal individuals, and the notions of class-consciousness from the angle of interdependent, multispecies existence.

Dogs were perceived through the lenses of the history of medical sciences and also through their underlined implications to the associations with the class consciousness. There were references to dogs from the early part of the Twentieth Century in literature only as a distraction or a ‘minor character’.³⁵⁰ In multiple literary works, they are seen as one of the elements or props who create the appropriate ambience- for example, the sounds of their barking at night, or the references to them as mad dogs in order to scare some characters within that specific work. A considerable body of researches have already been conducted the cross-sectional space between dogs’ historical positionality in respect to the proper diagnosis of hydrophobia or rabies and the discovery of its vaccines.³⁵¹

In our times, the mainstream media reveals a very critical point of animal-human coexistence in the populist culture. The issue of confrontation between pro-canine and anti-canine sentiments, that explodes from time to time, in public mindset. As I have explained in my second and third chapters, these vulnerable aspects of multispecies living within human habitat, free-ranging dogs with their spontaneous human companions and care-givers, become the direct venting ground for this anti-animal propaganda. The existence is not delineated with species-specific separation, that anti-animal, speciesist narrative intends to forcefully channelise in the populist trends. The counter-culturist,

³⁵⁰ Ivan Kreilkamp, *Minor Creatures: Persons, Animals, and the Victorian Novel* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2018).

³⁵¹ Bill Wasik and Monica Murphy, *Rabid: A Cultural History of the World’s Most Diabolical Virus* (New York: Penguin Books, 2013).

pro-canine attitude, in our recent times also brings up those news stories, which are only the bare, miniscule surface narrative of countless micro-narratives, that serve as the reminders of other-than-human animals' continuing contributions to our society. The news stories like stray dogs saving woman from a potential assaulter, or dogs saving abandoned babies, or dogs rescuing a child from being abducted, hint at the crucial change that our anthropocentric narrative requires to change.³⁵²

These news stories also underscore a certain sub-narrative out of these incidents. It is the way the street dogs, or community canines have been integrated in our societal and geographical space organically, and their position is critically intertwined with the shared space of the underprivileged, dispossessed. The incidents expressed and covered by some news articles regarding the presence of street dogs within the compounds of the gated high rise of urban India accentuate the culpability on the onus of the privileged, populist notions on the organic, cohabitants of our geographical space.³⁵³ This glimpses of the contemporary confrontational incidents also highlight the fact that, the indie dogs, or the native breed dogs still carry with their presence, a hint of the class conscious prerogatives that marginalise them from the upper class, westernised, privileged segments of the majority in contemporary urban India. The issue that separates these pariah dogs from

³⁵² FPJ Web Desk, "Indore: Street Dogs Foil Bikers Bid to Abduct 10-Year-Old Girl; Chased till the Accused Fell Down," Free Press Journal, November 6, 2024, <https://www.freepressjournal.in/indore/indore-street-dogs-foil-bikers-bid-to-abduct-10-year-old-girl-chased-till-the-accused-fell-down>; "Stray Dogs 'Save' Baby Girl Dumped in Drain in Haryana - Times of India," *The Times of India*, 2019, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/stray-dogs-save-baby-girl-dumped-in-drain-in-haryana/articleshowprint/70312984.cms>; Samiullah Khan, "Mumbai: Dog Saves Vasai Woman from Rape by '7-Ft' Monster," *Mid-day*, 2024, <https://www.mid-day.com/mumbai/mumbai-news/article/mumbai-dog-saves-vasai-woman-from-rape-by-7-ft-monster-23360121>.

³⁵³ Riya Sharma, "Feeding Strays: Residents of Gated Societies Lock Horns," *The Times of India* (Times Of India, March 27, 2021), <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/delhi/feeding-strays-residents-of-gated-societies-lock-horns/articleshow/81709539.cms>; Saikat Ray, "Kolkata: Stray Issue Divides Residents of Bypass High-Rise Complex," *The Times of India* (Times Of India, January 10, 2021), <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/kolkata/stray-issue-divides-residents-of-bypass-high-rise-complex/articleshow/80203645.cms>; Shubhi Mishra, "It Is an All-out War between Scared Residents inside Noida's Gated Societies and Stray Dog Lovers," *India Today*, October 18, 2022, <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/it-is-an-all-out-war-between-scared-residents-inside-noidas-gated-societies-and-stray-dog-lovers-2286862-2022-10-18>;

their homely, exotic yet completely domesticated fellow canines, is the way they had been made to appear as intruders or invaders into the urbanscape. What has actually been done through this process is the way, their own intertwining of our lives, the coexistence with people living on the streets, the organic connection between dogs and human, are pushed to the back, out of the corpus of the socio-cultural visibility, a theme that I have discussed and explored in my second and third chapters. Karlekar has also maintained that the street dogs of India have a far more warm and hearty interspecies connection with the underprivileged, downtrodden section of the human populace.³⁵⁴ By alienating the urban canines is also an extension of alienating these groups of people, who have already become organically integrated into the urban networks, yet this process of exclusion labels them along with their spontaneous animal companions as illegal invaders within the urbanscape and thus the privileged, speciesist system plays its hegemonic power on these individuals. Another factor that appears here is the way, these street dogs or community dogs are always essentially perceived as herd or pack, and rarely as individuals. This is why most of the narratives of pro-animal, specifically pro-canine campaigns of our contemporary times, put emphasis on the individuality of the canine persons. A sweeping glance at the adoption posts, fund appeals, donation drives or help posts take on this individual-centered approach to construct an alternative narrative, where people gradually learn to see other beings of different species as more of persons and less as just a part of commodities or beings at the end of human mercy or violence. This is where the life writing becomes an important segment of canine activism within South Asian socio-cultural parametres. As pointed out by Cynthia Huff and Joel Haefner, the animal life writings can be termed as 'Animalographies', which also explains the transition of animals in cultural medium, from passive recipients or

³⁵⁴ Hiranmay Karlekar, "The Caring Poor," in *Savage Humans and Stray Dogs: A Study in Aggression* (Delhi: Sage Publications, 2008).

representations of human emotions or attributes to the active agents of autonomy, with covert or political stands.³⁵⁵ The fourth chapter hinges on this aspect of canine-human interspecies coexistence. In the organic, spontaneous, coexistence of underprivileged humans with dogs on the street, also underscores the narrative of this mutually dependent, intertwined multispecies existence, that the extremely anthropocentric, speciesist lifestyle intends to undermine. The identities of these loyal, community canines are eclipsed and overshadowed by their apparent lack of formally introduced domesticity; the point emerges is that the notion of ownership is very dynamic when it comes to animal-human relationships. For street children, who constantly share their lives with apparently unowned puppies, the ownership is mutual and codependent, without any official tags of domesticity. The established administrative or authoritative agencies are willing only to locate the officially declared labels of domestication on canine bodies, hence all the others who are outside this margin, become by default, illegal trespassers. In this way, the populist mainstream narrative also works in constructing an intruder labelling on animal as well as associated human individuals.

This thesis is aimed to locate the alternative narrative that gradually builds its way of finding the authentic voices of both the nonhumans, i.e., canine as well as humans, within a system, that is intended for the invisibilisation of their presence. By actively locating their presence, this work aims to unearth these silenced resistances and intends to construct a historiography of canine representation in South Asian Literature, from the alternative angle, a perspective that will promote in seeing them as authentically as possible, without the filters of anxiety of zoonotic diseases and commonly given

³⁵⁵ Cynthia Huff and Joel Haefner, "His Master's Voice: Animalographies, Life Writing, and the Posthuman," *Biography* 35, no. 1 (2012): 153–69.

superimposed negative human attributes. In that way, this work contributes to the emerging discourses of critical animal studies from South Asia and its peripheries.

The Historiography of Canid-Human Interspecies Relationships and Its Changing Dynamics

It should be noted that an overview of this thesis in its entirety, captures within its ambit the changing attitudes towards dogs, through the different decades. The societal conditionings, shaped by the legal, cultural, and the demographic transformations have critically informed, influenced and restructured our narratives around the companion animals.

In the post-1947 India, during the formative years of the Animal Welfare Board of India, street dogs received a considerable attention from the animal rights activists, journalists and even in popular literature. A number of journals and magazines, which used to record and document the development of the animal welfare in India, started emerging. This also accelerated the movement in favour of the street dogs considerably. Although the analysis is geographically limited, still Prashanth Krishna's delineation of the animal welfare movement in the Southern parts of India, namely Madras- Chennai is informative in structuring the historiography of the urban animals during the second half of Twentieth century.³⁵⁶

The Bombay Blue Cross Bulletin, The Animal Citizen, and some sporadic stories in the newspapers during the 1960s or 70s were very miniscule regarding the statistical data, but they are significant in terms of articulation of this emerging consciousness towards animals. Though it should also be noted that the seed of the animal welfare, specifically the canine-welfare in the long run is also equally rooted in the welfare of human beings,

³⁵⁶ Prashanth Krishna, *History of the Animal Welfare Movement in Madras- Chennai* (Chennai: C.P.R. Publication, 2023).

a point that has already been discussed by Krithika Srinivasan and analysed in the fourth chapter of this thesis. In the course of different chapters, specifically in the third and fourth chapters, I have cited some sporadic references to these nonfictional works and the stories covered in various public mediums, because they collectively contribute in establishing the human-canine contact zones, which is also fraught with different fault lines. The lack of duly preserved data related to the judicial, public health and urban management is one of the factors which pushes for a more conjectural outlook in constructing this canid-human interactions from the perspective of socio-historical parametres.

A Bark in the Distance: Literary Representations of Canine-Human Relationships as a Disruptive Point in the Cultural Politics

Suddenly,

The barks of dogs, slice through the air of nights, we go to the windows,

But in stealth, almost shadowlike.

We see the dogs,

Those emaciated dogs of streets are

Charging at those olive-coloured jeeps;

Those jeeps carrying heavily armoured soldiers.

I wonder,

If only I were one of those dogs on the streets!

Pother Kukur (The Dogs of the Streets) written by Shamsur Rahaman. (My Translation)

This poem is originally written in Bengali by Shamsur Rahaman against the backdrop of the Liberation War of Bangladesh in 1971. The name of this poem is *Pother Kukur* which literally translates into English as *The Dogs of the Streets*. Throughout the entire poem, the authorial voice construes the subjectivities of the street dogs in the most abject manner- they are extremely malnourished, out of sheer starvation they frequent the dustbins. But through a symbolic gesture, it is only these street dogs who go after the men in the green uniform, the people who kept on terrorizing everyone. This poem can be read in connection with the second chapter, which also sheds light on the negative cultural portrayal of the dogs in popular mindset. The courage of voicing the protest shown in the figures of these impoverished yet striking street dogs countering the tormentors, is not only a symbolic depiction, but also a counter argument of the established, popular concept of street dogs. It is a far deeper commentary on the notions of the maligned propaganda about the cowardice nature of the street dogs, in stark contrast with the reality. There is a particular reason of starting this subsection with the reference of this poem and its depiction of street dogs of Bangladesh during the Liberation War of 1971.

Each chapter of this thesis attempts to reappropriate and rewire the popular, expected yet reductionist assumptions of canine-human interconnections. The first chapter, in its analysis of the intersectional overlapping of differently-abled animal as well as human characters, constructs the exposition of the special situations of these individuals, while the second chapter critiques the popularist notion of dogs as violent and places it in contrast to the expansive range of unique bond of companionship during the times of political upheavals and struggles. The first chapter with four literary works together cumulatively throws into the relief not only the alternative, unique way forward, as a consequence of their special conditionings, but also enabling a cultural narrative that

is focussed on the ‘discourse of care and mutual empathy’.³⁵⁷ The second chapter analyses the dog-human bonding during the troubled times from the angles of collective socio-political transitions. The third chapter examines this companionship further in terms of accidental interactions developing into lifelong companionship from the perspective of vulnerable existence. The third chapter is also crucial in the way it proposes a parallel reading of human individuals staying in the fringes and becoming intertwined with canine or other animal companions. These works in a crucial manner uphold the voice of resistance and difference through portrayal of marginal existence. The fourth chapter deals with those specific literary works which demonstrate dogs as their central characters in its authentic animal perceptions and thus registers a break-away from the anthropocentric perception pervading most canine stories.

Scope of Further Research

In the breadth of this narrative, there are certain areas which I was not able to accommodate within the research question of this thesis. A more expected pathway would have led me to the class dynamics already embedded in the dichotomy of the street or mongrel dogs in contrast to the breeds imported during the period of the British colonialism in India, and the socio-cultural repercussions that this difference creates in public mindset. A considerable length of research has already been completed and explored this specific aspect of literary canines in South Asia. The analysis and observation of Anuradha Roy comments on this culturally vibrant aspect of the class consciousness through specific breed fascinations in our Bengali, vernacular literary

³⁵⁷ Marty Kheel, "Ecofeminist Holist Philosophy," in *Nature Ethics" an Ecofeminist Perspective* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008), 207–74; Alexandra Horowitz, *Our Dogs, Ourselves* (New York: Scribner, 2019); Rachel Adams, "The Art of Interspecies Care," *New Literary History* 51, no. 4 (2020): 695–716, <https://doi.org/10.1353/nlh.2020.0043>.

landscape.³⁵⁸ This tendency again traces back to the succinct analysis of Kathleen Kete and Harriet Ritvo and how the public opinions and preferences undergo changes along the popular zeitgeist of the times.³⁵⁹ As researcher based from a third world country, in my research I intended to contextualise how these notions of class dimensions can play out in the matrix of administrative and judicial structures related to the animal rights activism in independent India. Taking cue from Anuradha Roy, Kete and Ritvo, I attempted to locate the socio-cultural parametres that controlled and shaped not only our perceptions towards native dogs of India, but also their representations in the cultural field, and how that representation also maps out an evolution of canine-human interspecies relationships.

In the spectrum of this thesis, out of the fourteen literary works, which I have selected as the primary texts of this thesis, only two of them, centre around clearly demarcated within the domesticated status, given their physical spatiality and proximity to human beings. The notion of subterranean class-consciousness according to the preference and prioritization of the specific breeds, I have not explored in this thesis, as the majority and the central focus of attention is the free-ranging yet extremely amicable indie or mongrel or pariah dogs, mostly native to the South Asian countries. This aspect of the cultural parametres towards indie/ pariah/ street dogs, I have tangentially touched upon in the third chapter at one point, but have not gone into the details, neither the implications of these mindsets in determining the living conditions and societal approval of the mainstream cultures, on which the safety and presence of the street dogs depend to a certain degree.

³⁵⁸ Anuradha Roy, *Rethinking Human-Animal Relationship: Reading Stories from Bengali Literature* (Delhi: Primus Books, 2023).

³⁵⁹ Kathleen Kete, *The Beast in the Boudoir* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Harriet Ritvo, *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2005).

The apparently sporadic yet significant presence of dogs in South Asian literature also performs another crucial aspect of animal-human contact zones. But it is also one aspect that I could not touch in this thesis sufficiently. It is the intersectionality of gender and animal rights in relation to presence of dogs in literature. The rise of animal rights as a significant movement articulates why movements against gender-based discrimination have always been so instrumental in voicing out the concerns of the oppressed. I initially intended to capture the areas where people with marginalised identities are not only dominated but also took part in active, direct change in their circumstances after countering it, surpassing the obstacles. In tracing the personal and transformative relationships formed by dogs and women in society, it is necessary to take an analytical approach towards the narrative of animal rights as a considerable movement. Carol J Adams in her seminal work *Animals and Women: Feminist Theoretical Explorations* categorically analyses so many ways women and animals share a similar position in terms of power, agency, and societal hierarchy, and both animals and women share a secondary position of reference in this anthropocentric, speciesist, male dominated society within this matrix of agency and socio-cultural hierarchy.³⁶⁰ Emily Gaarder in her seminal work, *Women and the Animal Right Movement*, charts the emergence and evolution of women's active participation in the Animal Rights Movement, since the 19th Nineteenth Century, specifically the anti-vivisectionist movement under the leadership of Francis Power Cobb.³⁶¹ Gaarder points out how Fergusson established a significant connection between the intrusive, "invasive medical procedures performed on women's bodies" were very much akin to the types of laboratory experiments, that animals used to be put to undergo

³⁶⁰ Carol J Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory* (1990; repr., New York & London Bloomsbury, 2019).

³⁶¹ Emily Gaarder, "Connecting Inequalities," in *Women and the Animal Rights Movement* (New Brunswick, New Jersey, and London: Rutgers University Press, 2011), 1- 18.

through.³⁶² from a Third world country, and from a working woman's relationship with community dogs, can be a very significant angle which this thesis looks forward to as a future area of work. While discussing the representation of free-ranging semi-domesticated and feral animals in the Victorian literature, Sarah Cathryn Henderson has pointed out the presence of stray animals in the literature of the Nineteenth Century carried within itself an idea of disruptive energy, which was sufficiently capable disturbing the stable grounding of the societal hierarchy and order, a point that I have already in parts of the second and third chapter.³⁶³ The spontaneous or effortless of changing of the ownership to the ownerless state of a street dog presupposes a constant state of restless movements and the spatial insecurity that accompanies the homeless humans as well as dogs in a steady yet strictly hierarchical society. When I was looking for the canine representations in literature, I found to my surprise that our canine narratives are also majorly a series of testament to these homeless animals in their interdependent companionships to their equally vulnerable, humans in states of constant change and spatial migrations. Lawrence Cohen devotes an entire chapter on the intersection of specifically old women and dogs in contemporary Baranasi in his anthropological study on the cultural and social perceptions of senility, *No Aging in India: Alzheimer's, The Bad Family and Other Modern Things*. An overview of the narratives selected for this specific chapter deals with the exploitation and violence perpetrated on women's bodies and how the association with dogs, especially street dogs played a crucial role in these narratives of violence. Seen from another angle, these stories are also the footprints of those individuals both animal and human, who were decidedly ignored or obliterated from the mainstream, but they persisted and their presence

³⁶² Gaarder, *Connecting Inequalities*, 8.

³⁶³ Sarah Cathryn Henderson, "Wandering like a Lost and Starving Dog": Representations of Human and Nonhuman Animal Straying in Victorian Literature and Culture," PhD Diss., University of Toronto, 2014, ProQuest.

lingered. In that way, the interstices between dogs and women critically contribute to the animal-human interspecies relationship in the grassroot level. In one of my articles, I have pointed out why it is critically important to contextualise Susan Griffin's argument which points out the legitimization of a dominant, masculinist culture on the feminized status of women, animals, children, disenfranchised other in the mainstream discourse.³⁶⁴ Vandana Shiva's intersectionality of environmental rights and its gendered perception is very much relevant in the discussions of contemporary canine-human interspecies correlations in urban India, as a few incidents demonstrate the companionable areas between women and dogs in quotidian existence on streets and the safety that prevails with it.³⁶⁵ This intersectionality between gender and animal activism can be an area which, I intend to take up as my future research endeavours. The native dogs, whom I have addressed as 'indie' throughout this entire dissertation, perform through their presence a reference of visibility in a culture that insists on making them invisible. The native dogs, whom I have addressed as 'indie' throughout this entire dissertation, perform through their presence a reference of visibility in a culture that insists on making them invisible. These works written mainly for children, create a unique space of negotiations between empathy and class-consciousness in these narratives, through the representation of dogs with and without pedigree and human characters from a varied background. I would like to argue that the constructed perception of 'indie' in the South Asian Literature, does not only articulate the precarity of animal existence within human habitat, but also exposes the tendency to mark and discriminate a special kind of speciesism that takes place even within the same species based on cultural association

³⁶⁴ Swatilekha Maity, "Women, Nonhuman Animals, and the Notion of Marginalization in Bengali Literature," in *Critical Animal Studies and Social Justice: Critical Theory, Dismantling Speciesism, and Total Liberation*, ed. Anthony J. Nocella II and Amber E. George (Lanham: Lexington, 2021), 155–72.

³⁶⁵ Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development* (Berkeley, California: North Atlantic Books, 2016).

and societal hierarchy. Their age, academic and socio-cultural dynamics also emerge as the conditional, factors which influence, shape and re-construct their associations with animal companions.

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Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Award of Doctor of Philosophy in 52
English Jadavpur **University** , India **By**

: Swatilekha Maity Under the Guidance and Supervision of Professor Rimi. Barnali Chatterjee Department of English Jadavpur University, India Jadavpur University Registration Number: A00EN1100918 2024. Declaration Acknowledgment i Contents I. Introduction.....1-31. II. Our Best Friend: Representation of Disability in Canine-Human Relationships in South Asian Literature.....32-66. III. Death and His Brothers: Canine- Human Coexistence and Struggling Times in South Asian Literature.....67-111. IV. Strangers, Underdogs and Magical Experiences with Our Canine Companions in South Asian Literature.....112- 166. V. A Dog's Day: The Canine Life Writing in Literature of South Asia...167- 231. VI. Conclusion.....232-246. VII. Bibliography.....247-273. Introduction The relationship between the humans and their canine co-habitants has a wide social, cultural and psychological impact in the history of our civilization.

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. My doctoral project spans from the 1930s to our present times, focussing on the representations of canines in the fictional literature of South Asia. This thesis aims to be an exploration of representations of canine-human interspecies



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