



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

“The post-humanist logos”: The Political Dogs in Nabarun Bhattacharya’s *Lubdhak*.

Krishnapada Mandal

Assistant Professor of English Nistarini College, Purulia, W.B.

Abstract:

Posthumanism takes a critical stance towards humanism and it urges humans to respect and respond to non-human worlds and to reject the essentialist and hierarchical divisions between culture and nature. The aim of my article is to explore how the dogs in Nabarun Bhattacharya’s *Lubdhak* (2006) take part in the *post-humanist logos* and interrogate the exploitation of animals. The novel opens a new discourse regarding animal life and rights and situates the animals at the centre of the text. The essay aims at recognizing the power of animals to interrupt, surprise, and reconstitute human commonality. Its focus is on how the street dogs’ organization and their discourse on Human (its development, rationalism, invention, use and misuse of scientific knowledge) challenge and interrupt anthropocentrism. It will be argued how far the gaze of the animal breaks the hold of reason’s plan by admitting an “alterity” to reason within the temporal continuum.

Keywords: Nabarun Bhattacharya; post-anthropocentric subject; animal gaze; empathy; alterity.

In the “Foreword: The Political Animal” (2008), Chris Danta and Dimitris Vardoulakis write: “The political animal is neither the subject who writes each article, nor the subject matter of each contribution. Rather, it is that which enables both the subject of writing and writing itself to belong to the *polis*. As we imagine it, the act of writing begins with the gaze of the political animal.” (5) Nabarun Bhattacharya’s *Lubdhak* is a text that engages ‘the gaze of the political animal’. This paper intends to explore how the novel *Lubdhak* addresses and presents the dogs, principally, through the analysis of the animal gaze. Keeping Jacques Derrida, Cary Wolfe, who demonstrates that to adopt a posthumanist approach to animals is to address the unexamined framework of *speciesism*, Chris Danta and Dimitris Vardoulakis’s study of animals as a backdrop, I would proceed to evaluate how the dogs in Nabarun Bhattacharya’s *Lubdhak* (2006) take part in the *post-humanist logos* and interrogate the exploitation of animals. It would be an assessment of how the said novel opens a new discourse

regarding animal life and rights and situates the animals at the centre of the text. The human characters in the novel of Bhattacharya will be viewed from Posthumanist stance that urges humans “to respect and respond to non-human worlds” (Ryan 69). Adopting Chris Danta and Dimitris Vardoulakis’ “The Political Animal” (2008) that opines that, “the animal also becomes political, in the sense that it conditions the possibility of singularity and of identity” (Danta and Vardoulakis 5), I would aim at recognizing the power of animals to interrupt, surprise, and reconstitute human commonality. This essay’s focus is on how the street dogs’ organization and their discourse on Human (its development, rationalism, invention, use and misuse of scientific knowledge) challenge and “interrupt” anthropocentrism. It will be argued how far the gaze of the animal breaks the hold of reason’s plan by admitting an “alterity” to reason within the temporal continuum.

The oppression of the non-human animals is ensured in the current conceptualization of human. What Derrida does in philosophy, Bhattacharya does in literature. Derrida’s speaks of the capacity of the animals to perceive ‘our’ existence, to acknowledge ‘our’ presence, without which, ‘I’ (the human) would not exist. In his *foreword* about the novel *Lubdhak* (2006), Nabarun Bhattacharya writes: “the right to the sphere of life is not only of man, but of all (living being)” (translation mine) (10). Both Derrida and Bhattacharya want to “move from ‘the ends of man’, that is the confines of man, to ‘the crossing of borders’ between man and animal.” (Derrida 372) In short, while Derrida’s interest is in what the animal gaze says about human consciousness, Bhattacharya, in some different context, continues deconstructing the established meaning of life in a language which is completely human (language): “by the loss of life, what do we mean? Of course, we mean human life” (Translation mine) (Bhattacharya 10). This is how the novel opens a new discourse regarding animal life and rights and situates the animals at the centre of the text.

While describing the gradual growth of *Kaan-Gojano*’s (name of dog) ear, Bhattacharya comments that, “...the dormant power of the multidimensional life is a magical realism.” (Translation mine) (17) This opinion of Bhattacharya addresses Posthumanism that takes a critical stance towards humanism and urges humans to respect and respond to non-human worlds and to reject the essentialist and hierarchical divisions between culture and nature. Bhattacharya’s text is written in the Posthuman condition that, as in her *The Posthuman* (2013) Rosi Braidotti comments, “introduces a qualitative shift in our thinking about what exactly is the basic unit of common reference for our species, our polity and our relationship to the other inhabitants of this planet.” (1-2)

Lubdhak was first published in the festive season edition of Bengali Magazine *Disha*, later being published as a stand-alone book from Abhijan Publishers on January, 2006. Set in a city, Kolkata, the novel thematizes on the organization and revolution of the street dogs. At the turn of the century, the city undergoes beautification for which the street dogs must be driven out. After a long debate on the economic feasibilities and other associated issues, the authority has decided to imprison the dogs within Pinjrapoles (a place for encaging the abandoned animals). These Pinjrapoles resemble the concentration camps. A single Pinjrapole can accommodate more than hundred and seventeen dead dogs the body of which would become food for the

worms. These ‘wounded animals’ capture our attention and divest us of our sovereign political gaze. This political gaze has a long history. As Derek Ryan, in *Animal Theory: A Critical Introduction* (2015), remarks that the history of western philosophy “presents many examples of animals caged in anthropocentric...modes of thought that have had a dominant influence on thinking about the capacities of animals, how they should be treated, and how they are commonly judged to be lower in status than humans.” (5). Two periods— the Ancient Greece and seventeenth-century Europe— reveal the anthropocentric assumptions that would become influential in preparing the human mind which would separate the nonhuman life from its life and cage them as ‘other’. The members of Plato’s Academy defined man as “a wingless biped” and in Aristotle’s *Politics* (1995), “the human is a political animal” (Aristotle 1253 a 3). Thus, at the beginning of the history of Western Philosophy, the humans are *above* the nonhuman animals who are kept aside from the *polis* the denizens of which are the humans having ‘reason’, ‘language’, and ‘ethics’. In *Discourse on Method* (1968), Descartes’ tone echoes almost the same as he says that “not only that animals have less reason than men, but that they have none at all”; “they do not have a mind” (Descartes 74-6). By the end of seventeenth century and into the early eighteenth century, philosophers like Leibniz, Spinoza, John Locke, and David Hume had offered challenges to Descartes’ theorization of animals, and responded to the ‘lively’ capacities of the animals. Discarding Cartesian mind-body dualism, Spinoza and Leibniz offered a creative *monism*. In his *Ethics* (1996), Spinoza disapproves human superiority and the human/animal boundary. But his “desire to distinguish... human affects and animal affects” admits anthropocentrism. Whereas Leibniz concentrates on the ‘souls’, ‘heightened perceptions’ and ‘memory’ that ‘resembles reason’, Locke perceived the capacities of ‘sensation’, ‘perception’ and ‘retention’ in all sorts of animals. The latter is also aware of the variety and degree of sensations in different animals and doing so rejects generalization of all animals. He recognizes the knowledge gaining capacities in animals, like ‘birds learning of tunes’, other than humans. For Hume, “animals, as well as men, learn many things from experience” (Hume 76). Immanuel Kant’s opinion is worth mentioning here as he thinks that human beings deserve moral consideration for their rationality which is a ‘lack’ in animal, though he appeals us not to be cruel to animals as it would become a habit. In the post-Darwinian modernity, animals often feature as metaphors and symbols. Freud and Lacan’s interest in animality is often undermined by the use of animal figures as ‘substitutes for human fears and desires’, or as points of contrast for an ‘exploration of human language’. The moral philosophy of Peter Singer, Tom Regan and Martha Nussbaum focus on animal ethics and criticizes anthropocentric attitude to animals. Nietzsche’s ‘Superman’, Deluze and Guattari’s ‘becoming animal’ and Harraway’s ‘becoming-with’ are the concepts that engage with animality in order to affirm a materialist and immanent understanding of life, Heidegger’s thesis of the animal as ‘poor-in-world’ and Merleau-Ponty’s conceptualization of animals as part of ‘the flesh of the world’ add new perspectives to animal studies. This long history of animal theory becomes crucial to the reading of *Lubdhak*.

The novel *Lubdhak* begins with a commentary on historically devastating earthquakes, mainly focusing on earthquake in Kolkata in 1737, which killed 300000 people. It was one of the three most disastrous earthquakes in history. Bhattacharya is critical of the metanarrative of the history which records the loss of only human beings, excluding the other non-human animals and rest of the fauna. Hence, he raises the issue of the marginalization of the animals from the human history and puts a question: “Certainly, not only the human lives in a city...where have the dogs gone? Is it possible that someone has tied crackers to their tails and they took off and have become stars?” (Translation mine) (Bhattacharya 10-11) Bhattacharya’s concern is not only in the physical dislocation of the dogs from human-built city, but also in the dislocation of the animals from the history. Is it because, as Aristotle thought in his *Politics* (1995), “only the human possesses the *logos*” (Aristotle 1253 a 10-11)? Yes, it is by this *logos*, the human beings “rationalize, normalize and eventually codify their behavior.” (Danta and Dimitris 4) It is for this *logos*, the ‘active’ human and ‘passive’ animals are separated. But in the *post-humanist logos*, the animals are not to be seen as ‘Others’; rather, there is a subjective kinship between human and animal. As we observe, *Lubdhak*’s posthumanist animals, unlike the humanist animals lacking “language, consciousness and self-consciousness”, create a platform where we can and need to rewrite the history and “learn about animal consciousness” (Driver 2).

Bhattacharya is famous for his powerful language having force to challenge and attack any dogmatic culture. He clamours against the cruelty of Science and its slaughterous invention, saying: “the scientists have proved that the dogs can be taught helplessness.” (Translation mine) (13) He, thus, interrogates the practice of applying Science which has no right to destroy the world to which every species has equal right and contribution. In Bhattacharya’s narrative, the description, of both the subject and the object, becomes crucial. He deeply studies the things, belonging to different fields of knowledge, before applying them in his text. For example, he mentions the Shuttle Box experiment, a scientific experiment, used for shocking and killing the animals slowly. The description of the Shuttle Box experiment hints at the ‘animal cruelty’, the sadist human’s pleasure in the innovative killing process. After ten to twelve days the ‘active’ dog, learning and accepting defenselessness, does not try to jump or escape the Shuttle Box. This is the process how, according to Bhattacharya, the dogs help science develop. The language here takes the side of the animals and we have to respond to the presence and importance of the animals. Before ‘their’ ‘silent’ presence, ‘we’ are ashamed of our treatment of and attitude to the animals, during the process of reading the text.

In the second chapter, Bhattacharya introduces the characters of the novel. One of them is *Kaan-Gojano*, (meaning the growing of new ear) a petrified black bitch, having history behind her name. It was an acid attack. Out of personal rage somebody poured acid on her head. Somehow she could save her head but lost one of her ears and had to wait for a new ear to grow. Within her name she bears the cruel memory. Now, she finds herself a pocket of space near a garbage dump yard. The space behind the vat is relatively safe. Chapter three presents five schemes prepared by the city authority to drive out dogs from the city. Every scheme is impeded with a counter discourse describing the drawbacks of the concerned scheme. Thus, human

logos is countered by another human *logos*, and, finally, the last one is accepted, which holds the strongest logic. The Pinjrapoles invented during colonial era would be utilized because it would run the whole process smoothly and silently.

Chapter five gives a description of the political preparation of the dogs. They draw a blue print of their attack on the human. They would not let the dog-catchers catch the dogs. They would hide. They create group for hiding. They, thus, apply their political knowledge of saving life. Remaining under the pressure, the dogs unite under the leadership of Bahanno, a yellowish bitch, who bit fifty two people for their causeless disturbance. *Kaan-Gojano*, who could not forget the acid attack, befriends Gypsy, who, once a pet, having been fed well, now rejected, has to find some place to live, and to have a society that would accept him. The dog realizes and interprets the aggressive attitude of the human towards animal. After a long conversation, *Kaan-Gojano* accepts and shares the place with Gypsy. *Kaan-Gojano*, Gypsy and the Cat feel safe here under the vat, showing their consciousness of the confidence in inter-species relation and communication. *Kaan-Gajano*'s makes other understand, "The way in which they (the human) are trying to beautify the city, we are a misfit to that beauty" (43). The dogs are in a conversation and they talk on Pinjrapole and its impact, and on the politics of the human beings. They spot the power operated by the humans in such a complex manner that the dogs can hardly comprehend it. Before this recognized power they feel hopeless and start believing in magic and see a vision. The Shadow- Dogs (*Chhaya-Kukur*) are hovering above the twenty storied, thirty storied houses. Why is this happening, they do not know. But they assume that something dangerous is going to happen.

Badami, one of the canine messengers, is risking her life day in and day out to ferry messages to different parts of the city. Recognizing the bureaucratic nature in the politics of the human, Badami says: "they are plotting in their own way. We don't have that power. So, we have to manage the way ourselves." (Translation mine) (44) At the Pinjrapoles their friends are dying because of hunger and dehydration. There is no other option but to escape. The number of dogs on the run increases. They do not know whether the dogs will be able to escape. They now believe in magic. Determined about fighting for their survival, the dogs patiently hold their breath while Alpha Canis Majoris aka the 'Dog Star' or the brightest star on the earth's night sky, starts shining more brightly than ever before.

The dogs' rejection of the human world is beyond human explanation. The scientific knowledge cannot explain the massive dog-killing. At the end of the novel, one of the scientists says, "I do not find any explanation of this incident in Science." (Translation mine) (67) With this, Nabarun Bhattacharya challenges the humanist *logos* which is unable to comprehend the 'vision' of the animal. The dogs' leave, again, challenges the power and knowledge, or the power of anthropocentric understanding of the world. Their escape demands redefinition of the 'human' and the 'world' which, dissolving human-animal binary, must include the animals.

Works Cited

- Aristotle. *Politics*. Translated by Ernest Barker, OUP, 1995.
- Bhattacharya, Nabarun. *Lubdhak*. Abhijan Publishers, 2006.
- Braidotti, Rosi. *The Posthuman*. Polity, 2013.
- Danta, Chris and Dimitris Vardoulakis. "Foreword: The Political Animal." *SubStance*, vol. 37, no. 3, Issue 117, University of Wisconsin Press, 2008, pp. 3-6, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25195183>, Accessed: 10-05-2018.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari. "Becoming Animal." *The Animals Reader: The Essential Classical and Contemporary Writings*, edited by Linda Kalof and Amy Fitzgerald, Oxford, 2007, pp. 37-50.
- Derrida, Jaques. "The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)". Translated by David Wills, *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 28, No. 2, Winter 2002, pp. 369-418, <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0093>. Accessed 10 May 2018.
- Descartes, René. *Discourse on Method and The Meditations*. Translated by F. E. Sutcliffe, Penguin, 1968.
- Driver, Dorothy. Review of *The Animal Gaze: Animal Subjectivities in Southern African Narratives*, by Wendy Woodward. *Transnational Literature*, Vol. 2, no. 2, May 2010, <http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>. Accessed 22 Nov. 2018.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Totem and Taboo: Some Points of Agreement Between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics*. Translated by James Strachey, Routledge, 1960.
- Harraway, Donna. *When Species Meet*. University of Minnesota Press, 2008.
- Heidegger, Martin. *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*. Translated by William McNeill and Nicholas Walker, Indiana P, 1995.
- Hume, David. *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. OUP, 2007.
- Kant, Immanuel. *The Metaphysics of Morals*. CUP, 1996.
- Lacan, Jacques. "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis." *Ecrits*. Translated by Bruce Fink, W. W. Norton and Company, 2006, pp. 197-268.
- Leibniz, G. W. *Monadology: An Edition for Students*, edited by Nicholas Rescher, Routledge, 1991.
- Levinas, Emmanuel. "The Name of a Dog, or Natural Rights." *Animal Philosophy: Ethics and*

Identity, edited by Peter Atterton and Matthew Calarco, Continuum, pp. 47-50, 2008.

Locke, John. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Wordsworth, 2014.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *The Visible and the Invisible*. Translated by Oliver Davis, Routledge, 2008.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Translated by R. J. Hollingdale, Penguin, 2003.

Nussbaum, Martha. *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership*. Harvard UP, 2007.

Regan, Tom. *The Case for Animal Rights*. Routledge, 1983.

Ryan, Derek. *Animal Theory: A Critical Introduction*. Edinburgh UP, 2015.

Singer, Peter. *Animal Liberation*. 2d ed., Pimlico, 1995.

Spinoza, Benedict de. *Ethics*. Translated by Edwin Curley, Penguin, 1996.

Wolfe, Cary. *What is Posthumanism?* University of Minnesota Press, 2010.

---. *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory*.

University of CP, 2003.

