



Myth, Mind And Moral Imagination: Literary Representations Of Animal Intelligence In *The Ramayana* And *Remarkably Bright Creatures*.

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Abstract

This paper analyses how literary representations of animal intelligence and moral imagination in the ancient Indian epic *Ramayana* and the contemporary novel *Remarkably Bright Creatures* challenge and complement scientific paradigms of animal cognition. Focusing on characters such as Jatayu in the *Ramayana* and Marcellus in Shelby Van Pelt's novel, the study explores how these texts portray animals as capable of ethical reasoning, emotional autonomy, and transformative action. While the *Ramayana* situates animal agency within a mythic and divine framework, *Remarkably Bright Creatures* offers a secular, modern framework that raises philosophical questions about consciousness and moral choice. The paper argues that literary fictions containing complex nonhuman minds serves as a parallel discourse to scientific inquiry. It can expand our understanding of cognition, sentience, and the ethical boundaries between species.

keywords: Literary studies, animal studies, cognitive science, moral imagination.

Introduction

This paper intends to analyze the literary representation of animal intelligence and their moral imagination through the characters Jatayu and Marcellus. Jatayu is a familiar demigod-like character from the epic *Ramayana* and Marcellus, a Cephalopod from the novel of Shelby Van Pelt. Initially these two epochal compositions may appear distinct, but they share some common elements. Their cognitive power and proto-moral behavior makes them different from other non-human characters. By invoking the concept of moral imagination - a term coined by Edmund Burke and later popularized in literature by Martha Nussbaum. We are focusing to this term to dive deeper into this characters. This paper studies how animals serve as moral beings apart from being narrative agents and their cognitive power helps to transcend the whole story.

Discussion

In the *Ramayana*, Jatayu, the divine vulture, attempts to rescue Sita from the antagonist, Ravana, and he gets mortally wounded. Even though he was completely aware of his likely defeat, he decided to rescue the helpless woman out of his ethical reasoning. It portrays that the animals could sense danger and help the imperiled wisely. Here Jatayu is a vulture, a type bird that always associates with death and miseries, becoming a warrior and emerges as a symbol of resistance. He heard the plea of Sita and recognized her pain and fear. Like a hero, this demi-god decided to fight with a strong enemy without self prioritization. His moral imagination worked here and made him think of himself as a hero. He responded not as a mere bird, but as an ethical hero. He could have flown away, but the compassionate bird understood his duty and acted accordingly. His empathy, kindness, courage, emotional intelligence, and moral imagination made him think so. There is a traditional notion that animals lack human-like moral agency. But his intelligence is challenging these anthropocentric

views on animal intelligence and moral codes. Against all odds, he stood for the vulnerable woman. He proved that true heroism lies in empathy. Jatayu is a strong character packed with confidence, courage and presence of mind. At the end of his chapter he decides to extend his life as a truth bearer till he meets Rama to tell the abduction of Sita. His moral commitment towards justice and truth can be identified here. His perseverance and endurance helped Rama to get the news and after sharing the news he welcomed a peaceful death. Without Jatayu Rama wouldn't be able to get the news of Sita. We need these kinds of people in this chaotic world. He never ever thought like he is a bird, Sita is a human and Ravan is stronger, henceforth I should ignore this. He felt the pain and fear of Sita and sacrificed his life. He is a moral example for everyone. Because, the epic itself shows that the unwanted hate, jealousy and rivalry between human beings has ended up Rama and Sita in such a tragic situation. But this bird is just the opposite of our assumptions. Vultures are considered as ill omens, they are always depicted as creatures with evil qualities and they lie in the lowest strata of the bird kingdom. But here, Jatayu is breaking the stereotypes attributed to his groups and proves that good can be bloomed out of bad. The intelligence and imagination of Jatayu gives him heroic deeds.

Shelby Van Pelt's novel features Marcellus, a giant Pacific, with the similar qualities. This Cephalopod is captivated in an aquarium and restricted its fundamental rights. He is used to the captivity and he is existing as a life human beings have decided. Marcellus is old now and his days are dwindling. Hence, he decided to do something worthy before his death. This kind of act is human. Marcellus believes that our life should be worthy. We need to explore our life, help others, leave something behind to remember us or at least for the sake of our own happiness. So, he decided to observe his surroundings. One day, he thought about Tova Sullivan, his caretaker. Marcellus was very close to Tova. He knows something related to Tova's son and he is the sole witness of his death. Hence, he decided to reveal the truth to Tova that, she is not a lonely spirit. He uses several admirable and unique methods to disclose the secret. Those methods depict the exceptional cognitive skills of Marcellus. Only an animal with moral imagination, kindness, self awareness, empathy and courage can do so. He himself says that he is a good secret keeper. A quality very rare among humans and non humans. Marcellus was not an ordinary octopus. He understood Tova's grief and started to care about her. He himself imagined the place of Tova and it shows his capacity for moral identification. Marcellus is well planned about his actions and days inside the aquarium. Planning and execution are human attributes. He loves to explore the world outside the aquarium, he tried to escape from there several times, yet he stood there for Tova. He doesn't want to break Tova's heart. Because he loves Tova that much. Marcellus is like an old man with a young mind. He was a perfectionist also. At the end of his revelation he bid farewell to his world. He could have kept silent if he wanted to, but here Marcellus surprised human beings with his actions. He is imaginative, ethically informed and occupy cognitive depth. Marcellus proves that we can achieve anything if you are determined. Being a shoulder to the vulnerable makes him the best character.

From the systematic comparison of Jatayu and Marcellus, it is evident that, both of the characters are challenging the rationalist speciesism. They are challenging the strict human uniqueness through their cognitive capacity and loyalty. These characters' traits like empathy exhibits their cognitive Continuities. They have a shared similarity of moral depth. Jatayu's wisdom and intention to help is a result of evolutionary self. And Marcellus intentionality also demands moral accountability. These features of these two characters transcends the boundaries of the animal clan. These characters actions are deliberate and their moral compass resonates the interconnectedness of human and nonhuman species. Both the characters pause a question about our assumptions regarding animal intelligence and capabilities. Attributing empathy and moral traits to Marcellus and Jatayu is not a mere fantasy, it's ethically and imaginatively honor the uniqueness of the animals. These characters embodies remarkable attributes like sentience, Spontaneity, emotional support, care, empathy, critical thinking and problem solving capacity, which reflects their uniqueness. The inner mental state of the characters are portrayed through their behavior and communication. It helps to argue them as conscious beings. Consciousness is a scientific concept that is legitimate and identified through the flexibility of a character, their symbolic communication and problem solving skills. Attributing consciousness to animal characters without naive projection is admirable. Their ethical struggles and personal commitments, psychological complexities, moral choices and standards drive to the idea of moral imagination. These two characters help us to re-evaluate our understanding of animal capacity, behavior and their moral sides.

Conclusion

The noble vulture, Jatayu from The *Ramayana* and Marcellus, the octopus, from *Remarkably Bright Creatures* are evidence that animals can possess and exhibit intelligence and moral imagination like humans. Jatayu is the mythic embodiment of moral imagination and Marcellus is the scientifically informed version of intelligence. Griffin's idea of animal cognition and awareness echoes that animals can know and feel more than the human imagination. The same thing is re interpreted in Martha Nussbaum's concept of moral imagination. The death of Jatayu and the private speech of Marcellus evoke empathy among readers. Both characters ask the readers to reconsider the boundaries of the moral community. Together they illustrate that animals have human-like qualities and reshaping our assumptions. It is a powerful tool against the prejudice on animal intelligence. Ultimately, these two characters are dismantling the anthropocentric views. They are not mere characters in narration, they help us to understand the beautiful world of non-human consciousness.

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