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Anthropomorphized Animals in Literature: A Strategy for Animal Welfare and Conservation

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ABSTRACT

Background: Animal welfare and conservation of species and their natural habitat, has been a primary concern of the scientific and environmental studies. While scientific research and technological advancements are vital for developing ways to tackle environmental challenges and conservation of animal species and welfare, the discipline of humanities also play a crucial role by offering unique perspectives and insights into human-environment relationships, ethical considerations and cultural aspects that influence conservation behaviour and attitude. The academic disciplines of humanities highlight the role of humanities in fostering environmental awareness along with inspiring collective action towards a more harmonious coexistence with nature, by engaging learners through storytelling, art and other humanistic approaches. Integrating the humanities into environmental education cultivates empathy and environmental literacy, empowering individuals to make informed decisions and participate in conservation efforts.

Methods: Through close reading and textual interpretation of selected stories from the anthology *Animalia indica* using the theoretical lens of Animal Studies, the author aims to draw attention of the general public as well as academicians on the effective role of humanities especially literary texts in dealing with environmental issues, which is a global concern and requires a multidisciplinary approach to tackle with.

Result: The aim of this research paper is to highlight the role of anthropomorphized animal characters in literature as a humanist strategy to evoke sympathy and concern for the animal species and thereby act as an instrument for animal welfare and conservation.

Key words: Animals, Anthropomorphized, Conservation, Literature, Multidisciplinary, Welfare.

INTRODUCTION

The human society is basically structured based on the interactions with other living beings especially non-human animals. The non-human animals play a significant role as they are meant to serve the needs of human beings. The anthropocentric worldview considers that all the other living beings existing in the world are meant to serve the needs of man and that humans alone possess intrinsic value. The anthropocentric world view, takes human capacities as the benchmark to separate the humans from the other nonhuman species, thereby positing man as superior and the 'one'. The other creatures can then only be seen as lacking in comparison and hence been relegated to the peripheral position as the 'other'. Othering refers to the practice of making people- or animals- different in order to justify treating them differently. Two groups are created-one that embodies the norm and the other that is defined by its lacking of certain attributes, which then may become a cause for devalue and discrimination. With the rise of the human-animal divide, in which a border was erected that separated all the animal species from a single animal species- human- and gave that species power over all others. Without the border, human domination over animals could not occur (DeMello, 2021).

The academia has largely ignored these interactions between humans and non-human animals, limiting the study of the non-human animals as subjects only in the disciplines of biology, zoology, anthropology and medical science. With the magnitude of animal representations as symbols in stories, myths, art and culture across the globe and the increasing presence of the non-human animals in human society and culture, the academia is gradually turning its focus on the representation of the non-human animals as subjects of study across different disciplines of humanities and social sciences. The academic discussions and scholarly investigations should not be restricted to the human world and be anthropocentric in its outlook. Peter Singer in Animal Liberation: A New Ethics for Our Treatment of Animals urge people to expand their range of moral concerns to include animals. He underlines that human beings should stop discriminating non-human animals just because they do not belong to human species. Singer opines that animals have inherent values and are not merely means to human ends (Singer, 1990). The Animal Rights movement of the 1970s has subsequently

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led to the animal turn where scholarly discussions and investigations about animal concerns, issues, their rights and preservation have been given due attention. Roland Borgards, too, in 'Introduction: Cultural and Literary Animal Studies' emphasizes that animals must be seen as independent topics in literary history and rethink the kind of relationship that exists between man and animals (Borgards, 2015).

The academic disciplines of humanities highlight the role of humanities in fostering environmental awareness along with inspiring collective action towards a more harmonious coexistence with nature, by engaging learners through storytelling, art and other humanistic approaches. Integrating the humanities into environmental education cultivates empathy and environmental literacy, empowering individuals to make informed decisions and participate in conservation efforts. The aim of this research paper is to highlight the role of anthropomorphized animal characters in literature as a humanist strategy to evoke sympathy and concern for the animal species and thereby act as an instrument for animal welfare and conservation. Through selected stories from the anthology *Animalia Indica*, the author aims to draw attention of the general public as well as academicians on the effective role of humanities especially literary texts in dealing with environmental issues, which is a global concern and requires a multidisciplinary approach to tackle with.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present research paper relies both on primary and secondary sources to conclude the role of anthropomorphism in literature as a strategy for animal welfare and conservation. Sumana Roy's anthology *Animalia Indica* is chosen as the primary text, where the author employs close reading and textual interpretation. The theoretical lens of Animal Studies in literature which is an emerging academic discipline in humanities is used as a methodology to show the impact of storytelling from the animals' perspective in bridging the gap between humanities and animal welfare and conservation. The research study has been carried out in the Department of English, Dibrugarh University, Assam, India since 2022.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Animal welfare and animal conservation

Animal welfare and animal conservation has gained significant attention in the recent years from academicians, researchers, conservationists, animal rights activists and the general public as such. The growing awareness of the ethical, environmental and societal implications of the treatment of animals by humans and the significance of animals for achieving environmental sustainability have contributed to the increasing significance of animals as subjects of study across different academic disciplines. International Fund for Animal Welfare defines animal welfare as the physical and mental wellbeing of animals. It refers to the quality of life experienced by animals. The animals possess intrinsic value and hence they deserve to be treated ethically regardless their utility to the humans. The well-being of the animals and the protection and conservation of their life and habitat must not be guided by their utility but must be considered as a basic value of human society. The welfare of the animals aligns with the principles of justice and empathy and reflects the respect towards the animals with whom we share our time and space. Different forms of animal exploitation such as pet trade, commercial farming practices *etc*. have significant environmental consequences which have its impact on all the beings that exist in this planet. Hence, promoting animal welfare and the conservation of the animals and their habitat will help to mitigate certain environmental issues and promote sustainability. Animal welfare includes enriched habitat and ethical treatment of the animal including not just the physical but also the psychological needs of the animals (Arya *et al*., 2025). Understanding the psychological needs of the animals and their experiences can be effective in raising empathy and concerns of humans and be instrumental in implementing the welfare and conservation strategies of animals and their habitat.

Nexus between humanities and animal welfare

The conservation of the biodiversity and maintaining sustainability requires multifarious efforts involving local knowledge, institutional mechanism, collective and coordinated approach among institutions, information sharing and creating awareness, sensitization for protecting nature and knowledge transfer (Ghritlahre *et al*., 2025). The disciplines of science and technology play a crucial role in providing the knowledge and tools necessary to understand, protect and conserve the environment and maintain sustainability. The subject of academic discussion and research for the disciplines of science and technology delves into approaches addressing complex environmental challenges and advocating practices and technologies for the well-being of all the living beings on the planet, humans, animals, plants included. Animal welfare and conservation of species and their natural habitat, has been a primary concern of the scientific and environmental studies. While scientific research and technological advancements are vital for developing ways to tackle environmental challenges and conservation of animal species and welfare, the discipline of humanities also play a crucial role by offering unique perspectives and insights into human-environment relationships, ethical considerations and cultural aspects that influence conservation behaviour and attitude. As Lawrence Buell in *Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture and Environment in U.S and Beyond* states, "the success of all environmental efforts finally hinges on not some highly developed technology or some arcane new science but on

a state of mind" (Buell 2001). The different branches of humanities such as literature, philosophy, arts and the social sciences recognize the interconnectedness between human societies and the environment and various elements of it. The academic disciplines of humanities highlight the role of humanities in fostering environmental awareness along with inspiring collective action towards a more harmonious coexistence with nature, by engaging learners through storytelling, art and other humanistic approaches. Integrating the humanities into environmental education cultivates empathy and environmental literacy, empowering individuals to make informed decisions and participate in conservation efforts. By recognizing the interconnectedness between human societies and the environment, the humanities pave the way for interdisciplinary approaches to address complex environmental challenges. Thus, the environmental humanities aim to bridge the gap between scientific understanding of environmental problems and humanistic perspectives on values, meaning and ethics, thereby playing a crucial role in environment conservation and sustainability.

Literature, poetry and the arts have the power to evoke emotional connections with nature, influencing individuals' perceptions and attitudes towards the environment, fostering a sense of respect towards the natural world. Italo Calvino in 'The Right and Wrong Political Uses of Literature' states that literature is necessary to politics above all when it gives a voice to whatever is without a voice, when it gives a name to what as yet has no name, especially to what the language of politics excludes or attempts to exclude. Literature is like an ear that can hear things beyond the understanding of the language of politics, it is like an eye that can see beyond the colour spectrum perceived by politics (Calvino, 1986). Literary works can be instrumental in providing a platform to voice the experiences, struggles and the issues of the animals which can raise awareness and empathy among the humans.

Representation of non-human animals

Non-human animals have been playing an important role in human cultures for millennia through their representations in art, literature, folklore, religion and language. Margo DeMello refers to Biologist Edward Wilson, in Animals and Society-An Introduction to Human-Animal Studies (Animals in Symbol and Art), who writes "animals are agents of nature translated into symbols of culture" (DeMello, 2021). The ways animals are represented in different works of art and culture shape the way humans treat them in turn. Steve Baker in *Picturing the Beast: Animals, Identity and Representation* examine how the multiple representations of the nonhuman animals in different media affects the ways real animals are perceived and treated. He also maintains that until the nonhuman animals are liberated from the symbolic images they represent, animal identity, suffering and welfare cannot be addressed clearly (Baker 1993).

Language is an important tool which shapes human perspectives about the things surrounding us and also categorizes them in a particular way. It reflects the cultural values and practices and shapes those same values and practices. The use of animal names to refer to human beings, or animal pejoratives which are present in almost all languages reinforce attitudes towards the marginalized humans by comparing them with the non-human animals, which are another class of marginalized group. For instance, the negative animal imagery used to refer to the females implying a number of negative traits, is disdainful not only for the animal but for the woman as well. Anthropologist Edmund Leach noted that by creating pejoratives from the names of animals, humans establish distance between themselves and the animals they regularly abuse (DeMello, 2021). Thus, linguistic representation of the non-human animals in the forms of idioms, metaphors, similes and proverbs socially construct the image of animals in human society and also demonstrates the violence committed over the animals. Thus, animals are used mainly as symbols whose meaning depends upon the cultural context.

Anthropomorphism of animals

Animals and their representation abound in different art and literary forms ranging from sculpture to painting and from folktales to poetry and music. In the literary texts animals may be represented in a variety of ways. In poetry, animals are often personified to represent certain complex human concerns and ethical values and positions. In the fables they are used to convey a moral lesson through the depiction of speaking animals that are given the status of the protagonists of the narrative. The following Table 1 shows the common human traits represented by different species of birds and animals in literature.

The use of animals in the narratives is an instance of anthropomorphism, where the animals are made to represent human types and values. Authors of children's literature use anthropomorphism as a narrative technique because as N. Azmiry, reveals that "animals are the perfect medium for conveying tangible concepts in an entertaining

Table 1: Common human traits represented by animals and birds in literature.

Species	Common human traits represented
Wolves	Loyalty, strength, family bonds
Foxes	Cunning, trickery, intelligence
Lions	Courage, power, leadership, pride
Eagles	Freedom, vision, strength
Snakes	Deceit, temptation
Lambs	Innocence, gentleness, sacrifice, vulnerability
Horses	Freedom, strength, wildness
Dogs	Loyalty, friendship, protection, companionship
Owls	Wisdom, knowledge
Pigs	Greed, dirtiness
Bats	Mystery, supernatural

way" (Azmiry, 2014). Juliet Kellogg Markowsky in 'Why Anthropomorphism in Children's Literature?' notes that animals have always a place in literature. Referring to William Magee's article 'The Animal Story: A Challenge in Technique' Markowsky writes that primitive storyteller used animals as antagonists to dramatize man's ceaseless struggle against the forces of nature (Markowsky, 1975). Anthropomorphized creatures of every kind are as old as literature itself and can be found in tales from Ancient Egypt, Greece and India (Saccardi, 2014). The use of nonhuman animals as characters started from the narration of Aesop's Fables (c550 BCE) and Panchatantra (200 BCE). Fig 1 shows Capuchin monkeys which have very human-like features, making it easier for people to ascribe human emotions to them.

Anthropomorphism is basically used as a learning strategy since its initial adaptation in the folktales and fables. They were used as effective scaffolding tools to educate and instruct the young readers by providing a suitable learning environment. The stories of Panchatantra narrate about wisdom and values for a meaningful life. Sakshi Kaushik and Dr. Aditi Bharadwaj in "Analysing the Classical Panchatantra Stories from A Postmodern Perspective: Deconstructing Fabulist Anthropomorphism" writes about the use of animals in fables as,

The fabulists' deliberate selection of talking animals stems from the belief that humans are more amenable to accepting their own foibles if they are presented humorously, configured in the form of stories about beasts that they believe to be inferior to themselves in many aspects and this allows the storyteller ample opportunity to insert bits of social and political criticism into the process of instructing young minds (Kaushik and Bharadwaj, 2022).

Nonhuman animals are often anthropomorphized and attributed with human-like physical as well as emotional states, in order to critically explore certain complex and crucial socio-political and religious issues. The anthropomorphized animals provide an intellectual and psychological distance along with a buffered engagement with a message of cultural significance. These animals ease the tensions raised by dealing with issues which might be socially controversial and where a human character would further complicate the issue. The anthropomorphized animals especially in the works meant for the children and young audience are crafted very subtly to preferred morals and social values amongst the audience. The anthropomorphized nonhumans are represented as social agents propagating social messages, values and viewpoints which may be far removed from reality.

Although, the anthropomorphized animals in various cultural and literary texts are used as symbols to disseminate certain humanist ideas and explore certain crucial socio-political and religious issues, the same images of the anthropomorphic animals can also be used as a strategy to promote wildlife conservation and animal welfare. Many empirical studies highlight that anthropomorphism of animals or other objects of the environment affect individual behaviour and environmental awareness. Existing studies report that one tends to be reluctant to hurt a non-human being or object when one thinks of it as having senses or feelings. Anthropomorphism can be used as a strategy to rouse empathy towards animal species, thereby boosting public support for wildlife conservation and animal welfare. The projection of appropriate human emotions and attributes to the non-human animal in appropriate contexts, can be used as a mechanism to create empathy among the masses, which in turn will lead the general public to be more considerate towards the animal species. Alvin and Chan (2012) in "Anthropomorphism as a Conservation Tool", states that encouraging anthropomorphism toward wildlife and target species would promote animals as being similar to humans. Quoting authors Alvin and Chan (2012) opines that human beings are naturally attracted to those that are similar to us and these similarities enhance empathy between humans and animals. Therefore, encouraging public to recognize similarities between themselves and animals, may help them to understand the perspective of the animal species and would be willing to protect those species and their ecosystem.

Anthropomorphism which attributes human emotions and feelings to the non-human animal species, can be considered as a valuable tool for animal welfare and conservation. The use of anthropomorphism of animals in cultural and literary texts, turn non-human animals into moral agents who are worthy of respect. The representation of the animals as characters in varied texts such as stories, fables, poems, art and films, exhibiting human emotions helps to understand the animals' perspective, their pain and suffering and as such rouse empathy for them. This empathy can be instrumental in improving individual's behaviour towards animals and working towards their welfare and protection.

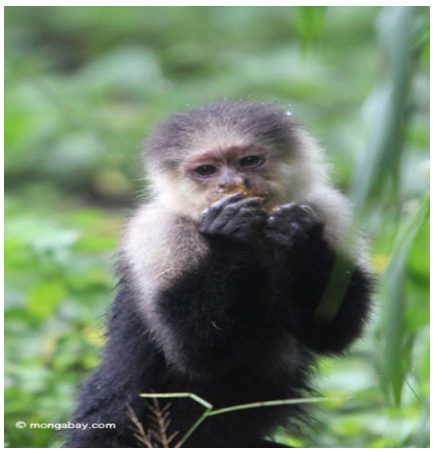


Photo by: Rhett A. Butler.

Fig 1: A capuchin monkey which exhibits human-like characteristics.

The stories with anthropomorphized animal characters can also be analysed as strategies which highlights the narratives from an animal perspective, aiming to rouse the feelings of empathy and concern towards the animal species. These tales narrated from an animal's perspective centralises the animals focusing on their inner thoughts and their feelings. This strategic use of anthropomorphism will draw a parallel between human and non-human animal conditions, bringing them closer and thereby challenging the human-centric or anthropocentric world view. It will enable the general public to value the animals for their intrinsic qualities and not for their utility and consider them as co-existents of the planet.

Sumana Roy's *Animalia Indica: The Finest Animal Stories in Indian Literature* is the first anthology with stories about goats, cows, birds, dogs, horses and snakes. The stories narrated from the animals' perspective "challenge the centrality of the human figure, an inheritance from the Renaissance that now control our storytelling impulses" (Roy, 2019). The stories portray the perspective and feelings of the otherwise silenced animals. The anthropomorphic projection of the animals' thoughts and feelings, their pain and sufferings in the stories of the anthology can also be considered as a strategic technique to rouse the feelings of care, concern and empathy among the general public towards the animal species depicted therein. For instance, *A Tale of Two Bullocks* by Premchand which has been translated by Rohit Manchanda is a story about two bulls, Heera and Moti, who were raised with great love by Jhuri. Through the story of two bullocks, the author has described the emotional relationship between animals and humans and within animals themselves. Heera and Moti are both bullocks of a farmer named Jhuri who loves his oxen very much and being captivated by this love, Hira and Moti do not want to leave their master Jhuri and live anywhere else. In this story, Premchand has focused the ethical value that whether an animal or a human being, everyone needs love and should be treated with love. We have no right to harass anyone. Heera and Moti both bulls had a deep friendship. This is clear through some episodes of the story where we see, both used to express their love by licking and smelling each other. When these two bullocks were plowed in a plow or cart, both would try to bear the maximum burden themselves and give less burden to the other. When Hira refused to run away when the wall of Kanjihaus was broken, Moti did not run away despite having the opportunity. This bonding between the two bulls, their mutual love and affection, concern for each other and bearing all the pain together, are no different from that of human feelings and attributes. Thus, the story brings the two animals closer to the human beings and that animal too experience love and pain. The story demystifies the notion that animals are not sentient beings, unable to feel or perceive. This challenges the human centrality which prioritizes human beings over all other beings, considering humans to be the only sentient beings of the planet.

R.R Borade's *Labour*, translated from Marathi by Anjali Nerleker is an account of the pain of a pregnant cow who struggles to give birth in the midst of a storm. The story describes the pangs of childbirth experienced by the cow and the struggles of the lone non-human animal. "Her entire body was trembling and her legs were about to collapse...She was scarcely able to carry the weight of her heavy belly on her shaky legs" (Roy, 2019). The writer describes the plight of the heavily pregnant cow lonely amidst the rain. The cow being lonely, tried to find a shelter despite her difficult and painful condition. "Putali glanced again at the cattle walking in the direction of home and she began to low intensely. She bellowed as if her voice were being squeezed out of her and she suddenly felt nauseous because of that effort" (Roy, 2019). The description of the pangs of childbirth experienced by the cow is no different from that of a woman. The writer's in-depth description of the entire experience of childbirth by the cow projects that pain and suffering, love and affection are experiences not restricted to the human beings. The animals too are sentient beings experiencing pain, love and affection and hence they cannot be ignored as species of lower order. Not only the animals experience feelings and pain like their human counterparts, they do share a close bonding with them based on love and trust. The pet and companion animals share an emotional bond with their owners and become a part of the family. The story titled *The Flood* originally written in Malayalam by Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai translated by O.V Usha narrates the tragic end of a loyal dog who was deserted by its owners during the time of flood. The story throws light on the life of the abandoned pet animals who suffer from hunger and shelter and ultimately meet a tragic end. The rescuers did not even pay any heed to the cries of pain of the poor and helpless animal who was left behind by its owners. Nevertheless, the poor animal still hoped to be rescued and unite with his owners only to be met with a tragic death. The story throws light on the issue of pet abandonment by the owners in order to fend for themselves. Abandoning pet animals have far-reaching consequences for the animals as they are exposed to uncertain fate and the animals suffer hunger, thirst, injuries and even death. In the story, the loyal dog despite being abandoned by its owners in the flood, hoped that it will be eventually rescued, which however did not happen. The dog died amidst hunger and hopelessness. The plight of the dog caught in the flood situation, abandoned by its masters, represents the miserable end of many abandoned animals.

These three stories from the anthology are representative of the voices of the animals, their plight and feelings which are often ignored in most of the literary and cultural texts. These stories not only express the plight of the animals, but also plays a significant role in raising concern and sympathy for the animals among the human beings. It helps in bridging the gap between human-animal divide, considering the animals as sentient beings who

co-exist with humans in this planet. John Berger in 'Why Look at Animals' encourages human to reconsider their relationship with animals and recognize its impact in understanding the interconnectedness between different species that live in this planet (Berger, 1980). By looking animals with empathy and respect and not just as mere spectacle, will help in conservation and welfare strategies more effectively.

The literary texts through its narrative about animals and their experiences and feelings which bears much resemblance to the humans, can be an effective strategy to raise consciousness among the general public about animal welfare and protection. They can bring about changes in the public attitude and opinion towards animals and thereby be instrumental in the implementation of various animal protection and conservation acts. As Freeman (2010) in 'Embracing Humanimality: Deconstructing the Human/ Animal Dichotomy' argues for breaking the binary between human and animals and recognize the shared animality and interconnectedness between both. This recognition can be effective in advocating for the welfare and protection of the animals. Literary texts with animal narratives can be influential in bridging the binary between the human and animals and pave way foe effective implementation of the welfare strategies by generating public empathy and awareness.

CONCLUSION

Animal welfare and conservation is therefore an issue that should not be limited to the disciplines of science or the animal welfare societies and organisations but should be interdisciplinary as well as multidisciplinary in its approach. The disciplines of humanities and social sciences can contribute in the animal welfare and conservatory acts. The cultural and literary texts can be effective in bringing about a change in the mindset of the masses and raise awareness about the importance of different animal species foe maintaining environment sustainability. The changed mindset of the public, their understanding of the animal emotions, experiences and plight may reduce cruelty towards animals and any other kind of injustice or exploitation towards them. This will be beneficial in effectively implementing the various animal welfare and conservatory schemes with cooperation from the general public.

Disclaimers

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Conflict of interest

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