

Beyond Species Boundaries: Study of Power, Pain and Politics in Nabarun Bhattacharya's *Lubdhak*

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Abstract

Heidegger's fundamental ontology suggests that animals exist in a state of 'poverty' in the world, with limited access to their surroundings. This poverty stems from the animals' inability to apprehend the world's openness, which in turn diminishes their agency and reinforces human superiority. This persistent denial of animal agency in Western philosophy is part of a longstanding political fable that has distinguished humans from animals since the earliest days of civilization. This paper argues that animals, similar to marginalized humans, have limited access to their environment. The concept of 'zoe' or 'bare' biological life encompasses both peripheral humans and non-human animals, not treated as political subjects. According to Foucault, the operation of sovereignty has transformed with the shift from monarchical power to biopower in modern nation-states, but this shift hasn't altered the attitude of power toward 'bare life,' whose existence can be terminated without significant legal or ethical consequences. Derrida opines in *The Beast and the Sovereign* that any revolution against sovereignty would fail indefinitely until the demand is for the 'absence of sovereignty' instead of a fight for "a new form of the same fundamental structure". To transcend sovereignty, Derrida suggests, the sovereignty of the human

species must be challenged first. One needs to question the animal/human boundary on which sovereignty is founded. This paper invokes Nabarun Bhattacharya's *Lubdhak* to offer a vivid illustration of how power operates in the modern nation-state, affecting animals on the periphery. Bhattacharya, aligning with Derridean insights, interrogates sovereignty by acknowledging the non-exclusivity of humans. The animals in this story are often regarded as a metaphor for suppressed marginal people, but this oversimplified interpretation arises from the complex affinity between the two groups. United by their shared experience of pain and deprivation, if not by agency, marginal humans and animals become readily comparable metaphors for each other. Resistance, therefore, requires questioning the barrier between species and reimagining governance and ethics from the premise of species continuity.

Keywords: *Human-animal dynamics, marginality, bare life, ethics of animal treatment*

Introduction

I must admit that all ultimate problems cannot have ultimate answers, but we can at least be aware of the problem we have presented. We have touched the limits of our intelligence and we must stop here. (Panikkar, *Rhythm*, xxiii)

This observation by Raimon Panikkar, a theologian renowned for his work in interreligious dialogue, emerges while examining the intersection of time and its culmination. In his meditative examination of eschatology, Panikkar has reinforced the inherent limitations of human intelligence that, despite its vast potency fails, to anticipate the true nature of the creation's end. Therefore, through his cosmotheandric vision¹, he has prescribed a way of life that draws humanity into a deeper, unified relationship with both God and the

world because man, in isolation is nothing but an abstraction (Panikkar 2019, 18). Eschatology in cosmological thinking involves two factors, 'ecological holocaust' and 'biological suicide' (Phan and Ro, 2018, 247). Both the terms hint at a large-scale destruction of the environment and the lives that depend on it. But traditional religion has dedicated eschatology to the study of the final day of humanity on Earth. Panikkar (2019) says it is the 'greatest pitfall of all religions' to focus too much on the end of humanity (172). Dualistic thinking has restricted man to imagine the end of creation in terms of good and bad. In Hinduism, creation is not a static entity with unidirectional movement towards catastrophe; it is a cycle of ceaseless creation and destruction. The universe thrives on a balance between dualities, and whenever that balance is disturbed, a cosmic power intervenes to re-establish it. The end, however calamitous it may be, is always therefore an opening for the new. Jerry L. Walls (2007) explains the phenomenon,

In such contexts, cosmic time is variously segmented. For example, fourteen ages of past and future sovereigns named Manu were titled *manvantaras*. Periods between dissolutions (*kalpas*) invoked the four dice throws of the early Vedas (*krta*, *tretā*, *dvāpara*, and *kali*) as four deteriorating world ages (*yugas*), always burdening the current time as the worst. But after annihilation and a long rest, the golden first age, the *krta yuga*, will return with cosmic order (*dharma*). Humans once again will be as wise and virtuous as they are strong. (180)

But the propositions of every religion are anthropocentric to the core. Their notions of *dharma/adharma*, *paap/punya*, are designed to determine the action of humans towards another human. Non-human entities remain neglected in discourses of religious ethics as objects to serve humans². Can the balance of the universe, therefore, falter for abusing those who reside

at the margin of the speciesist structure? Can an apocalypse befall on Earth for the wrongs done towards nature and its silent beings?

Nabarun Bhattacharya (2006) has neither placed his faith in traditional theism nor in modern interfaith dialogues. He himself has turned the anthropocentric world upside down, so that the old structures that block the way of change fall apart. Bhattacharya, the flâneur of Bengali urban life, has witnessed from close quarters the systematic oppression of peripheral lives by those in power. By its nature, power is fluid and contextual; hence, the most vulnerable among humans can rightfully exert their dominance over nonhuman others in an anthropocentric setting. Therefore, the mute, voiceless, peripheral beings in Bhattacharya's altered world are not always humans, but sometimes animals. In *Lubdhak*, the animals rise to reclaim their right. The cruelty towards animals has cast a dark cloud over humanity, of which they are unaware. In the darkness of night, the animals are, therefore, parading out of the city, leaving the humans to suffer the consequences of their own *karma*. This paper aims to study *Lubdhak* as a subversive text of resistance that dismantles the hierarchical distinction between humans and non-humans. By giving voice to the marginal animals, Bhattacharya reminds the readers that humans are merely particles in a larger ecological system and any harm done to the system at large will be paid for with a cosmic consequence.

Are Animals Political Beings?

The foundation of Western political discourse is rooted in the exclusion of animal life from *polis*, thereby making politics a prerogative of humans only. With the upsurge of biopolitics, the human-animal equation has taken a sudden turn where the species distinction has narrowed down remarkably.

Foucault (1990) writes that Aristotle has presumed man as “a living animal with the additional capacity for political existence”, but a “modern man is an animal whose politics calls his existence as a living being into question” (143). In such assertions, the animals are not being granted a political life; instead, the human status is being relegated to that of an animal, blurring the difference that Western politics has made so prominent. Giorgio Agamben’s (1998) idea of ‘bare life’ adds layers to this argument. The distinction between *bios* and *zoe*, with which Agamben initiates the discussion on ‘bare life’, is very much “species-specific” in nature. Responding to the argument of Foucault, Agamben states that sovereign and biopolitics, in some respect, are inherently similar in nature – they create an exception among subjects by suspending the authority’s juridical responsibility towards them. This community of ‘bare life’, which is strictly human by species, is included within the system through exclusion.³ People in concentration camps can be cited as a prime example of bare lives, whom Agamben refers to as “homo sacer”. They are human animals from whom the privilege of being human is robbed. Constant dehumanization has reduced them to a state where animals become a regular metaphor for their existence, yet the distinction between humans and animals has not been totally abolished. Carlo Salzani (2022) prudently remarks,

In the economy of Agamben’s oeuvre, *The Open* and the question of the animal play a very specific role: that of understanding and describing, on the one hand, the mechanisms through which human life is “humanized” (i.e., how the human animal becomes Man) and, on the other, how the human can be and has been dehumanized, “animalized,” and reduced to “bare life.” In a sense, *The Open* is a continuation of *Remnants of Auschwitz*, the book, published four years before,

in which Agamben had focused on the biopolitical apparatuses that manage and control life—exemplified by the extreme paradigm of the concentration camp—and on the “non-human” core that endures at the very heart of the human. (xi)

The analogy between the status of animals and humans, suffering in a degraded state, applies to every historical incident marked by torture, brutality, and agony. Frequent comparisons of detention camps with slaughterhouses or factory farms emphasize the suffering of humans rather than animals, making the entire outlook anthropocentric in its roots. The lice, rats or stray dogs found in the accounts of human degradation are employed as symbols that make the inhumanity of the condition prominent to the readers. They are figurative animals, not real ones, hired to mime the woes of humans. Boria Sax (2000) alludes to *The Tin Drum* to exemplify its author’s perspective problem. A massive political event like the Holocaust was difficult to ignore in a post-Second World War period, but addressing the issue directly would have affected the aesthetics of writing. Therefore, Günter Grass chose to focus on ‘alienated people’ in his work, like the dwarf Oscar Manzereth, who did not have any known affiliation in the Third Reich (17). Thus, the author eluded the necessity of commenting on both the power at centre and people at concentration camps, despite setting the plot in Nazi Germany. Gunter Grass is just one such name. Boria Sax critiques the attitude of literary personas who intend to keep a psychic distance from politically charged events,

Literature has always been used to confront problems obliquely when intellectual, emotional, or practical constraints prevent us from addressing them in a more direct way; it is a means of stepping back from events and gaining objectivity. (16)

Nabarun Bhattacharya isn't the one who shies away from the realities of life. With his radical leftist mindset, he exposes the nexus of power and corruption. The chaotic underbelly of the city in *Kangal Malshat*, the contemptible complacency of upper-middle class in *Harbart*, the sleazy lanes where prostitutes reside in "Foyarar Jonyo Duschinta", have never been so unapologetically confronted as in Bhattacharya's writings. He shatters the beguiling illusions with which capitalism and consumerism have blinded the populace and puts his faith in revolution. Fyatarus or choktars are figures from the subalterns who lead the uprising against the bourgeoisie. The fyatarus can fly. They urinate and scatter rubbish in public places, destroy properties, spoil dinner parties, rob moneyed families, and dismantle, in every way possible, the scaffold that the elites have constructed for society.

The extreme left mind set of Bhattacharya has prevented him from acknowledging the hierarchy in social strata, but it is due to the true spirit of an anti-structuralist that he also defies the species-specific hierarchy that is deeply rooted in humans. He believed that the power dynamics in every domain shall be contested, whether it is the bourgeoisie, from an economic perspective, or humans, from a biological one. Bhattacharya, in *Lubdhak*, has exposed the striking similarity between stray dogs and humans in detention camps, not in a figurative way but with attentive precision that forces the readers to imagine the dogs as humans. Suffering makes man and animal cry aloud alike, Jeremy Bentham has said.⁴ Therefore, the lives rotting in *pinjrapole* are not dissimilar to those bodies huddled together in concentration camps. The role of State in both cases is similar, but humans choose to react to the latter only. Humans pushed to the fringes by society, or exploited by those in power, often inflict brutality

towards the so-called inferior species. Humans believe it comes within their right to harm non-human beings without committing a crime. To devalue the lives of non-human others is the norm for humans, just like a sovereign devalues the lives of its human subjects. The resistance against power-privileges should also be resistance against species-hierarchy. Voices must unite against every form of torture inflicted on every being, otherwise, all reformations will end up being new appearances of old structures.

Derrida's (2010) deconstructionist perspective also suggests a revolution that would transgress the species boundaries. Derrida contends that human revolts throughout history have hitherto failed because they did not intend to dismantle all aspects of the existing system. To explain his argument, Derrida alludes to 'a famous story' that Henry F. Ellenberger mentions in "The Mental Hospital and the Zoological Garden". In 1681, Louis XIV, the Sun King, who is famous for his patronage of anatomical studies, decreed the dissection of a giant elephant under his observance. "Never perhaps was there a more imposing anatomical dissection, judged by the enormity of the animal, by the precision with which its several parts were examined, or by the quality and number of assistants" (*Beast*, 392). Derrida studies this unusual event as an occasion where the beast and the sovereign face one another in a macabre condition to produce scientific knowledge. As a second instance, Derrida refers to the Versailles menagerie, which was demolished during the French Revolution, not due to the realization that animals must not be caged as objects or those they, too, have rights to freedom, but because animals shouldn't be privileged when humans were suffering (393). Derrida observes that in both instances, it is not the Sovereign that relegates the Beast to an object but a general structure that has its predetermined

orientation. The dissection of animals for anatomy lessons regularly takes place for the sake of knowledge, but usually they “unfold(s) under the authority of an Academy of Sciences, itself created, like the Académie française, by a sovereign monarch. To whom it remains very docilely subjected” (*Beast*, 404). For Derrida, the destruction of the menagerie of Versailles was another instance of reinstatement of the same order, “since Bernadin de Saint-Pierre, who was the intendant of the King’s Garden, had the debris transported and proposed that a new establishment be founded” (405). A new paradigm can never be erected on the debris of the old.

In alignment with Derrida, Nabarun Bhattacharya prescribes an overturning shift in the existing societal structures, which would compel humans to regard nature and non-human beings as ‘messmates’, an association Donna Haraway (2013) suggested⁵. *Lubdhak* envisions a catastrophic conclusion for the anthropomorphic universe where stray dogs have risen to revolt against humanity and are leaving the city en masse. Humans have invented and employed heinous techniques to get rid of dogs, and now, the cosmos has plans to erase humans from Earth’s surface. The ‘bare lives’ have risen to power from periphery.

Dogs in India:

In India, dogs are ubiquitous beings – or so it seems, as Bibek Debroy’s reckonings tell a different tale. Regarding stray dogs, India shares a common opinion with many other developed and developing countries – dogs pose a threat to human safety. These nasty creatures, therefore, must be managed by curbing their numbers. Debroy documents the number of dogs since 1982, the year when dogs were included in livestock census, showing an apparent growth in their numbers over time, but a steady decline in annual average

increase rate. Debroy notes that due to under-reporting, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has calculated the number of dogs as 50 million in 2008, which makes the “dog/human ratio of approximately 1:20”. Debroy claims that in most of the developed countries “this ratio is between 1:6 and 1:10” (223). Interestingly, of the total stray dog population in India, rural areas contribute “23.19 million to the dog population, while urban India contributes 2.29 million” (223), making the stray dog issue evidently urban. Debroy remarks that in rural or semi-urban areas,

Dogs are never anonymous, and at best, they are semi-strays and semi-pets, with some form of collective ownership. It is in urban society, no matter how primitive, that the tension between humans and stray dogs becomes palpable. (208)

Driven by kindness, faith, or fellow feeling, stray cattle are fed and respected in India, which has been the tradition of ancient times, but the modernized, urban cities desire to adopt a different outlook. A survey conducted by Arti Sharma and Tejbir Singh Rana (2009) in the rural districts of Aligarh shows how local people appreciate and acknowledge the diversity of animals, plants, shrubs, birds, and insects around them, with their daily lives intricately linked to the preservation of surrounding flora and fauna. “Cows are the most respected and fed animal among the respondents of Aligarh District” (264), writes Sharma and Rana, “63.75% of respondents reported that they give bread to cows every day. The next most-fed animals are dogs: 57.5% of respondents reported that they feed dogs whenever there is excess food in their home” (264). The availability of food, though, depends on the willingness of the family, their economic condition, and the number of members, but it at least reflects their compassion and empathy towards non-human beings. Sharma and Rana

have observed, the attitude of these district people towards animals alters when money comes into play. Humans tend to domesticate only those animals whose by-products have monetary worth, and when the financial benefit terminates, the necessity of domestication also ends.⁶ In the case of dogs, the need for domestication often arises from a desire for companionship, extending family bonds, maintaining social status, or keeping intruders away. As a result, dogs often fall out of favour as they age. But the problem is not strictly with the feral animals; stray dogs have always been a hassle for developing India. British colonists have documented policies to confront this nuisance, which disturbed their otherwise comfortable lives. In 1813, a regulation was introduced by Bombay municipality to cull stray dogs in public and government places that pose a threat to human safety. The British dog catchers were paid eight annas for every dog, which was enough to motivate them to kill every dog they encountered anywhere. As a result, many of the peaceful, doted-upon dogs, who have become an integral member of a community, were killed mercilessly. Problems arose with the method of killing also, as dogs were being killed in sweltering summer, and the carcasses were left along the streets. This heartless drive infuriated every religious community, the Parsi community in particular, ensuing immediate protests that are renowned in history as the Bombay Dog Riots of 1832. ⁷The Parsi-led protest surely was a surprise to the British administrators, who had not anticipated a revolt over hunting down stray dogs. Jesse S. Palsetia, in her essay *Mad Dogs and Parsis: The Bombay Dog Riots of 1832*, uncovers the reason that had moved the otherwise civic-minded and peace-loving Parsis to riot. "Hindus and Jains held the caring for and feeding of stray dogs and other living creatures as an act of piety and religious merit" (18), writes Palsetia. But

for Parsis, “Zoroastrian eschatology held the dog to be the guardian of the Bridge of Judgement or Chinvat, before which every Zoroastrian is judged following death, and the faithful companion of the righteous across the Bridge to paradise” (15). Undoubtedly, religious scrupulosity was the stimulus behind the riot; still, human compassion towards non-human others was the official cause of the protest. Anyways, such protests on humanitarian grounds were not, of course, a unanimous response. Just a few years before this riot, in 1926, Gandhi published a series of eight Gujarati articles in *Navajivan*, which later got published in English as *Is This Humanity?* The articles uphold his views on ahimsa towards cattle and animals, with some exceptions. Gandhi’s animal ethics is termed as ‘progressive ahimsaist’⁸ as it approves of violence in select situations where human security is under threat. The matter of stray dogs inevitably falls into this category.

A wealthy trader from Ahmedabad, who was also a good friend of Gandhi’s, gave an order to kill sixty stray dogs roaming on his factory premises. The Ahmedabad Humanitarian League, protesting against this inhumane act, sent Gandhi a letter, to which he responded vividly, giving due seriousness to the issue of stray dogs. In Gandhi’s opinion, “Stray dogs do not drop down from heaven. They are a sign of the idleness, indifference and ignorance of society. When they grow into a nuisance, it is due to our ignorance and want of compassion” (Debroy, *Sarama*, 190) Those who take the pleasure of feeding stray dogs must also shoulder the responsibility of providing shelter to them, argues Gandhi, else they might wander about creating a menace. A city dweller commits no crime in killing a stray dog which is a potential threat to his family safety, rather they who are feeding them are committing a sin – “It is a sin, it should be a sin, to feed stray dogs, and we should save numerous

dogs if we had legislation making every stray dog liable to be shot" (188). Gandhi further added that dogs, whether in villages or cities, must not wander ownerlessly; for those who suffer with compassion should spend a part of their income to provide shelter and care to these dogs, and if they are unable to do so, then they would have to witness the dogs being shot passively (188). Even *pinjrapole* was not a viable option for Gandhi. The free movement of stray dogs has to be restricted, by any means, for the sake of society.

If we persist in keeping stray dogs undisturbed, we shall soon be faced with the duty of either castrating them or killing them. A third alternative is that of having a special *pinjrapole* for dogs. But it is out of the question. When we cannot cope with all the stray cattle in the city, the very proposal of having a *pinjrapole* for dogs seems to me to be chimerical. (*Sarama*, 172)

Fortunately, the Indian legislative system did not consider stray dogs as hazardous a presence as Gandhi did. Article 51A(g) of the Indian Constitution asks every citizen to have compassion for living creatures. Since October 6 1860, under Sections 428 and 429 of the Indian Penal Code, anyone who consciously kills, poisons, or maims animals is liable to face punishment. However, these sections do not cover the stray dogs directly as they specifically refer to animals having monetary worth. Section 11 of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act extends protection to every wild and domestic animal, including stray dogs, and Section 11(i) penalizes those who abandon animals to pain, suffering and starvation.⁹ Bibek Debroy notes that over time, the law has adopted a more humane approach towards stray dogs,

Since 1992, municipalities can no longer kill stray dogs. There must instead be a sterilization and ABC (Animal

Birth Control) programme and the Animal Welfare Board has a code of conduct for municipalities. These principles have also been upheld by assorted high courts. Nor can stray dogs be used for research. After all, it costs less to sterilize than to euthanize. (*Sarama*, 192)

A report by the Press Information Bureau, India, on the latest national-level livestock census, conducted in 2019, endorses Debroy's observation on the nation's stance towards stray dogs,

...the States are mandated to arrange the shelters and kanji house to control the stray animals population. Further, the Central Government has framed Rules for Animal Birth Control (Dogs) to control the dog population. It is the duty of the Local Bodies (sic) are mandated to implement the ABC Programme in their respective localities as per provisions of the Rules. (MoFAHD, 2022, 1)

It is no surprise, therefore, that Nabarun Bhattacharya has chosen dogs as the subject of his text where creatures relegated to the margins rise up to assert their rightful claim. Dogs are not just an ordinary nuisance in the city; they pose a potential threat to an urbanizing society that aspires to global status without self-reflection. They are simultaneously a challenge to the state-power that claims to have achieved greatness for its people. The increasing number of stray dogs nullifies their claims, exposing the shortcomings of urban development. For Bhattacharya, therefore, stray dogs have become a radical instrument of revolt, symbolizing resistance against the societal and national narratives that marginalize them. In the city's filthy corners, cemeteries, brothels, and dingy lanes where respectable humans dare not tread, stray dogs unite with outcasts.

A Parable of Dogs

Kolkata is teetering on the brink of calamity, and the narrator is counting down the imminent moment. *Lubdhok* unfurls as a ticking bomb, ready to explode. With only seven hours left in their life, humans stand powerless to the forces of time. Ironically, the most powerful of all animals, who dared to disturb the design of nature, will succumb to sleep in these final hours, which Time (Kāla) will seal with an eternal one. The narrator, intermittently, reminds us of the ticking of time. Seven hours, or four hundred and twenty minutes, or twenty-five thousand and two hundred seconds – what significance do they have when the entire city is going to get destroyed in a single blow from Time (Kāla) itself? Bhattacharya catalogues the catastrophic earthquakes in recent history which have claimed numerous lives before the invention of Richter scale. Yet, throughout history, the loss of lives has always been counted with regard to humans only, which emphasizes the insignificance of other lives on Earth. Nabarun contends that whenever the value of life is contemplated, it inevitably recalls the image of humans. For instance, street crossings or public vehicles sometimes display warnings, cautioning traffic to be mindful of their movements on the road because every life is important. The life in discussion is unmistakably human; everyone knows. Still, it has to be put up publicly, perhaps to make the disregard for other non-humans more pronounced. All the slogans of rallies, promises of ministers, emotions of poets, lectures of scholars tend to focus on lives, which are of humans only. What about the countless other lives that exist in front and around us? They are everywhere, still somehow invisible. If the piercing cries of a stray dog cannot move a poet's pen, how can their silence command attention? The city, therefore, has not noticed that the dogs are not heard anymore. The cacophony of city life barely makes the silence

of stray dogs' audible, but those who are attuned to the darkness of the city have noticed: dogs are leaving Kolkata.

Kolkata, a city of simmering lights, has traded its soul in a Faustian bargain. In an attempt to upgrade its status on global platforms, the city is busy draping a metropolitan look. The hollow, lifeless interiors of its inhabitants are being shrouded by glossy metals. The street dogs, swarming the chequered lanes of the town, are hindering the urbanisation. With its increased human population, garbage, and pollution, the city desires to rise the ladder of development without a soul. The stray dogs are therefore being effaced from the alleys. The municipal corporation is having periodical meetings to adopt the most convenient method of annihilation. Meanwhile, the citizens have started shouldering the responsibility themselves. Sporadic events were at first getting reported from various parts of the city on abusing stray dogs. Initially, such reports could not draw general attention because animal abuse is a regular practice, but the resemblance in their nature forces one to think of them as the initiation of a greater unfolding plan. Kangojano, a stray she-dog, was lured to a household premise by the scent of food one morning. While she was distracted, searching for the source of the smell, muriatic acid was thrown at her from behind iron bars. Sensing an impending danger, she instinctively waved her head aside, but that was not enough to save her entirely – the acid seared one of her ears. The narrator has named this black dog Kangojano, seeing her resilience. On that fateful morning, the dog rushed to a nearby poodle and dipped her affected ear in it. Perhaps there was some mysterious property in that mud and water that nursed her ear temporarily. As time passed, the sun and the rain helped to sprout another ear-like organ from the affected place.

The next victim was a white stray dog, Sadate. It appeared to be an accident at first, as stray dogs get regularly hit by flashing cars in a 'developing' city, but the narrator's attentive observation revealed the sinister intent lurking behind. Sadate was a weak and timid dog who used to cross roads with cautious and composed feet. One fine morning, a speeding car hit the dog while it was crossing the street and fled. The force of the car was such that the body flew to the other side of the road divider. It was a clean, shining car with sharp calculation because the pace of Sadate was impossible to go unnoticed unless he was targeted for it. The narrator only wished to see whether the blood and matter of the dog's brain could tint the car's cleanliness. The third incident happened to a mother with four children. Perhaps the multiplication of dogs was not seen favourably by humans; therefore, on a chilling dawn, the four puppies were almost drenched to death. Surprisingly, the little lives, chilled to their bones, survived this attack. Seeing them frolicking with each other, no one could imagine the kind of pain they had endured a few hours ago. Their recovery agitated the assailant so much that the next day, a large brick chunk was hurled towards them. The chunk missed its target that day, but Patkile, the mother, could easily decipher the sign it bore. She moved away with her children from those lanes.

The offences against dogs by common city dwellers increased over time, yet they seemed to appear as isolated events. Some suspicious movements were also noticed among dogs. Abandoning popular markets, common crossings, posh lanes, and broad highways, they were taking refuge in hospital backyards, dingy slums, garbage stacks, and desolate corners. Some new dogs were being noticed scouting in various areas. Keen eyes did not fail to realise that they had come to convey some message, before swiftly fleeing. Strangely, these

newcomers were being met with reverence by local dogs, which is very uncanine in nature. One who paid attention to the subtleties of the city was aware that dogs were uniting against humans. The governing body of the city was oblivious to this insurgency. Meanwhile, Municipal Corporation had undertaken the responsibility of dog eviction. All their knowledge and intelligence were being wasted in inventing the most diplomatic, economical, eco-friendly, and ethical way of annihilating stray dogs. The amount of gravity and reason that men were deploying after dogs was ridiculous. It seemed that more than human problems like, illiteracy, unemployment, poverty, human trafficking, prostitution, stray dogs have become a challenging menace to society. Under these circumstances, few proposed direct shootings, while another group asked to provide poisoned meat to the dogs at night. In the committee's discussion, the cruelty inflicted on beggars and the poor during the period of the Brazilian Miracle was also referenced for inspiration. Young dogs and puppies, in their suggestion, were to be targeted first because they will produce future nuisances. Hence, just the way a few ex-military men were hired by gold merchants of Brazil to evict poor children from the Brazilian streets, men should be appointed to kill puppies first. In another suggestion, the treatment of Jews by Nazis was recapitulated. First, dogs have to be located and brought into concentration camps. Next, gas vans will be set outside to exhaust carbon monoxide through pipes into chambers, which will approximately suffocate the dogs to death in around forty minutes. The time can be reduced to fifteen minutes through hydrogen cyanide, as several systematic killing operations in recent history have proven its efficacy. In the last step, the dead dogs in chamber can be burned down in pits without much delay. The entire plan of action pleased many from the

committee but was rejected due to its association with Nazis. It would be better, in that case, to follow the mark of the British colonialists who used to employ natives as dog-catchers. Thus, the municipality could also curb their costs because an entire department with its out-of-use appliances still existed and only a little refurbishment would make it function. The committee finally agreed unanimously to renovate existing *pinjrapoles* and build new ones, if necessary, to ensure the project's success.

Soon, the effects of the dog-hunt programme became apparent. Dogs, wherever found, were being viciously dragged into vans and then transported to *pinjrapoles*. Bhattacharya produces an evocative illustration of the wretched condition of *pinjrapoles* where hundreds of dogs were being heaped upon one another. His careful rendering of the mutilated canine bodies can confuse readers with those of sprawled, emaciated human bodies found in concentration camps. Karal Kasak, a Czech prisoner working on Freiland II illustration, has documented secretly the miserable condition of nearly two hundred Jews surviving in the plantation. The Jews were made to work with open wounds, and most of them could not even stand on their feet. Wachsmann (2015) quotes from the diaries of Kasak on May 9, 1941,

Again they have put a group of lifeless and unconscious Jews on the cart. Human flesh, the bodies of these sons of God, stacked like logs, arms and legs swaying limply – a horrendous picture that we witness daily...
(33)

The *pinjrapoles* were similarly being stacked with canine bodies, which were left there to rot without food or water. One could count one hundred and seventeen bodies of different sexes and ages piled together. The expressions on

their faces suggested that many, except for a few, had accepted their death silently. Sufferance can be taught, the narrator states, and this observation applies to both dogs and humans. The narrator draws on the shuttle box experiment¹⁰, where the dog initially jumps from one compartment to the other to escape discomfort but, after a period, gradually succumbs to silent endurance. Wachsmann, in a similar tone, recounts the silence of the inmates of concentration camps,

Their broken teeth, battered bodies, and terrified silences were often more revealing than words; it could take months for visible injuries to heal, and some victims never recovered. (68)

But Nabarun Bhattacharya has never indulged in endurance. All his writings have been burning testaments of resistance. With the awareness that a reckless, greedy, exploitative human society will finally lead to self-destruction, he has always believed that the oppressed will rise to power. Long exposure to abuse can numb the sentience of any living being, but cannot sterilize it forever. A cataclysmic reaction is mandated by history after prolonged endurance. Following the directive of time, the table turned, making the dominant ones most vulnerable. After a ravaging pursuit, the dog-hunt suddenly lost momentum. With multiple engagements at hand, which were all related to humans and their well-being, the municipality failed to notice the reduced numbers of dogs being deported to *pinjrapoles*. Surprisingly, like many humans who went into hiding during the Third Reich, the stray dogs in *Lubdhaka* decided to hide in wastes and deserted places. The dog catchers could only find groups of elderly dogs at crossroads, who sat indifferently amidst city broils. To everyone's amazement, they surrendered to the dog catchers easily and proceeded towards the dog vans voluntarily with a learned composure. This unnatural change in canine

behaviour sparked interest in scientists, who proposed placing the elderly dogs separately in the first *pinjrapole* for study. It seemed that the dogs were observing some strong austerity; heat, hunger, thirst, fatigue – not even death could affect their stern composure. At night, they were noticed raising their forelimbs towards Canis Major in the sky, in the gesture of prayer, and their tongues moved incessantly. This uncanny attitude perplexed the scientists, who could not logically explain any of these behaviours. Science, through experiments and dissection, has claimed to know all about dogs, but the collective resistance that they were exhibiting proved that science was yet to decipher many mysteries of the world.

Escaping the sight of the humans, stray dogs started uniting in abandoned tram depots, milk booths, transformer rooms, garages, graveyards, and all those filthy, dingy, narrow spaces of the city where humans dare not tread. They have been informed by dog messengers that some terrible change of event is to take place. Just as W. B. Yeats (1989), moved by the bloody upsurge in Ireland, prophesied, “Surely, some revelation is at hand”¹¹, the dog messengers prophesied the advent of a mythical being, Anubis. In Egyptian belief, Anubis, the God with the head of the jackal, guides the souls to the afterlife, weighing their deeds. The guardian of the dead soul has stepped on earth to escort the dogs to a distant land beyond human cruelty. He had come as the emissary of the Shadow Dogs. As Yeats’ antichrist is born out of *spiritus mundi* or world-spirit, Anubis has emerged from Shadow Dogs, who are the collective spirits of all those dogs whom humans have abused. The stray dogs from their hideaways can see the Shadow Dogs running across the length of the sky with every streak of lightning. Their cosmic movement prepares the mortal dogs for exodus. Their exodus is a testament to

inclusivity, where, unlike humans, the vulnerable, weak and wounded are cradled with support and care. With each suffering group of dogs, an Anubis emerges, with eyes blazing fiercely to avenge the human race. The collaborative sound of their claws scraping against *pinjrapoles* was enough to pierce the authority's pride, who finally conceded to open the gates of *pinjrapoles* out of fear.

In the closing hours, a flood of stray dogs has clogged every pavement, road and highway of Kolkata. The day of dogs has finally arrived, when human movements in the town are thwarted by canine creatures swarming everywhere. Dogs of different colour, size, age, and pattern are moving out of the city with an unknown enthusiasm and determination. Not lured by any pied piper but with the knowledge of an imminent danger that would destroy the city, the dogs are leaving. Bhattacharya, in this section, has made the young dogs address humans directly. Regional, national, and even international media have come to cover the unforeseen event that Kolkata is witnessing, and with them has started the game of accusations, speculations, and examinations. But amidst all the human broils, this section is designed as a letter that the young dogs are leaving for humans in Kolkata. It airs the dogs' frustration, grievances, and to some extent, pity for humans because human intelligence is unable to fathom what is chasing their future. The little ones themselves are not sure of what is happening and where exactly they are heading. But they are at least sure that humans are behind everything. Therefore, they warn the policemen, drivers, vendors and every onlooker who stands beside their procession to maintain a safe distance from their track; otherwise, their silent march would boil over into violent aggression, destroying everything. Lubdhaka or Sirius, to whom the old dogs in the first *pinjrapole* have prayed till the last hour of calamity, has

sent his verdict. A planetoid will be hurled upon Kolkata within seven hours, which will wipe out the city with all its false signs of development. The dog overseers will ensure that by these hours, the dogs secure a safe distance from the city, and Kolkata meets its end as a consequence of its deed.

Conclusion

The dogs, appearing in literature, are often read as metaphors for filthy, despicable beings¹², but Bhattacharya himself has noted at the outset of *Lubdhak* that this tale is dedicated to dogs, and is about dogs (Foreword to *Lubdhak*). Bhattacharya has commemorated his childhood companion Gypsy and all other birds, fish, and cats, who have prepared him to see the world from a non-human perspective. His intimacy with non-humans has ignited an understanding that the earth doesn't belong to humans only. Other non-human beings have their right to everything that man considers his own. The more humans ignore this truth, the closer they edge toward their destruction. *Lubdhak* is a parable of real dogs with real pains; whatever remains fantastic in the story is the cosmic aid that seals the human destiny with an immediate calamity. But even without those chimaeras, the final outcome for humans would not have been much different. In *Lubdhak*, Bhattacharya has gone to great lengths to place animals, specifically dogs in this case, in close proximity to humans. His attribution of human language to dogs has not emanated from a desire to maintain an anthropocentric perspective, but rather from a desire to demolish that instrument of species hierarchy that has kept animals away from the human *polis*. Only when animals become a part of the *polis* will a genuine resistance from the margins take place.

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Endnotes

1 Cosmotheandristm refers to a vision of Raimon Panikkar that believes in the coalescence of three elements of reality - universe (cosmos), God (Theos) and the human (Anthropos). The intersubjectivity of three dimensions constructs the whole universe. Panikkar's conception of the new Trinity has included cosmos actively in the discourse of spirituality, which, in turn, aids Panikkar to address the ecological problems from a spiritual perspective.

2 Humans are often held accountable for their actions towards certain animals, which are considered sacred by some religion, like the cow in Hinduism. But these offenses and the penance they invite are inherently anthropocentric in nature, designed to serve human interests. Animals, as subjects, have no special

place in religious ethics because the concept of good and evil starts with consciousness and animals, in anthropocentric beliefs, are bereft of it. Von Hartmann (1893) speaks of three stages of moral development - the natural or the beast, the moral and the super-moral. The concept of morality and immorality, he contends, is associated with the last two stages, where consciousness prevails. Every human action, whether moral or immoral, therefore, leads the universe towards its end, that is, the extinction of consciousness,

3 Vint, Sherryl (2010, November). Animal Studies in the Era of Biopower. *Science Fiction Studies*, 37(3), p. 445.

4 Jeremy Bentham, a nineteenth-century English philosopher, has spoken about the moral status of animals in society. Though it cannot be claimed that the idea he conceived could decenter humans from the center of discussion, but, regarding animal abuse, he has taken an ethical stand. claiming it does not matter whether animals can reason or talk like humans. If they can suffer, that is enough to abate humans from inflicting pain on them. As sentient beings, the suffering of humans and animals is not dissimilar. (143)

5 Haraway explains that the genesis of the word 'companion' is rooted in Latin *cum panis*, which means "with bread". She contends that messmates, of different character and identity, become companions at table. The food and resources bring them together from diverse ends. Similarly, belonging from the same species only enables animals to interbreed reproductively. Animals from these species are destined to "live and die" together as messmates, dining at the same table. (17-18)

6 *Making Cities Resilient*. (2019). Germany: Springer International Publishing, p.265.

7 Debroy, B. (2008). *Sarama and Her Children: The Dog in Indian Myth*. Penguin Books, p. 191.

8 The term "progressive ahimsaist" was used by Gandhi himself in the context of dog killing. According to him, a progressive ahimsaist will adopt violence only when their own existence or those under their care are under threat. The problem of dogs can,

therefore, be dealt with violence only after 'mature deliberation' and when it becomes obligatory (10).

9 Fasel, D. R. N., & Butler, D. S. C. (2023). *Animal Rights Law*. United Kingdom: Bloomsbury Publishing, p. 142.

10 A shuttle box is a piece of apparatus used for animal learning experiments. It is divided into two halves, and the animal within is encouraged to move between the compartments to gain a reward or avoid a negative stimulus, such as electric shocks. Sometimes, there is a small barrier between the two compartments, and the animal must jump over or push past it to move between them.

11 Yeats, W. B. (1989). *The Second Coming. The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*, United States: Collier Books.

12 In her book *On Hinduism*, Wendy Doniger (2014) has dedicated a chapter to discuss stories, from *Upanishads*, *Puranas* and Sanskrit epics, where dogs are treated as metaphors of marginalized human communities. Contemporary works like J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*, Tamil poet Gnanakoothan's 'Dog' also use canine beings and their sufferings as metaphors of human vulnerability and disempowerment.

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