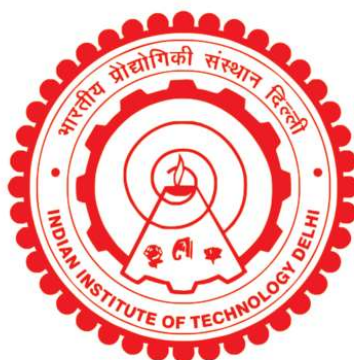


**STORIED WORLDS: ANIMAL LIVES, ANTAGONISM AND
ACTIVISM IN THE ANTHROPOCENE**

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**DEPARTMENT OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY DELHI**

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STORIED WORLDS

**STORIED WORLDS: ANIMAL LIVES, ANTAGONISM AND
ACTIVISM IN THE ANTHROPOCENE**

by

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Department of Humanities and Social Sciences

Submitted

in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

to the



INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY DELHI

February 2024

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled “**Storied Worlds: Animal Lives, Antagonism and Activism in the Anthropocene**” being submitted by Ms Susan Haris to the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi for the award of **Doctor of Philosophy** in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences is a record of the bonafide research work carried out by her under our supervision and guidance, and it is in conformity with the rules and regulations of IIT Delhi. She has fulfilled the requirements for the submission of this thesis, which to the best of our knowledge, has reached the requisite standard.

The material contained in the thesis has not been submitted in part or full to any other University or Institute for the award of any other degree or diploma.

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work presented here in the thesis has been carried out by me towards the partial fulfilment of the requirement for the award of a PhD from the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Delhi. The work contained herein is my own and is a presentation of my original research work. Wherever quotations from others are involved, every effort has been made to indicate this clearly with due reference to the literature. The content of this report, in full or in parts, have not been submitted to any other institute or university for the award of any degree.

Parts of chapter 2 and 4 are based on the previously published articles listed below. I am the sole author of both these articles.

Haris, S. (2022). Compassion, hunger and animal suffering: Scenes from Kerala, South India. *Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science*, 25(2), 139-152.

Haris, S. (2022). Subalterns in the house: sites for a postcolonial multispecies ethnography. *Ecozon@: European Journal of Literature, Culture and Environment*, 13(2), 6-25.

Susan Haris

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If it takes a village to write a thesis then my village has a lot of animals.

At IP 56, I was fortunate to encounter an entire dog family. Romping in the garden during the early mornings with Steven, Rufus, Max, Spotty, Lucky, and others made me so happy. Alexie and Duke are honorary members of this family, and so is Tiger, who understands me perfectly. I can measure the last five years with significant events— injuries, diseases, and the deaths that befell this family. They are the thesis's secret inner world.

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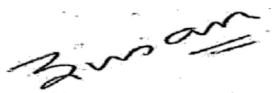
Thanks are also due to my friends Ramya, Arya, Nandan, and Anu, with whom I organize “Table talks” for the Indian animal studies collective; it has been so satisfying so far. Ajay’s creativity is constantly on the mark, and I am grateful for his, risking banality, “being there for me”.

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Ankur, in reading what I write, tells me every day that everything including life is possible in small steps. Even though I rail against metaphors in this thesis, “Ankur’s metaphors” is a poem that I will one day write for all that his friendship reveals to me.

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Susan Haris

Abstract

This thesis interrogates the marginalization of animal lives in postcolonial India. Such marginalization is, for the most part, invisible. It can perhaps be best understood as indifference to animal lives, a lack of acknowledgment of the fact that animals are ensnared in various pre-colonial, colonial and neo-colonial networks of ecology, development, and agriculture, almost all geared towards human well-being. Yet, bringing forth or narrating a perspective that includes animals becomes challenging due to the overwhelming extent of human suffering related to hunger and poverty in postcolonial India. In this formulation, the well-being of animals appears to be pitted against human flourishing. This thesis argues for a more nuanced ethical position: its central contention is that the difficulty of conceptualizing animal life in postcolonial India is a barrier to discussing the actual treatment of real animals under existing circumstances. With the overarching goal of crafting a more precise conceptual analysis, attentive to the lived realities of both humans and animals, this thesis focuses on themes at the intersection of postcolonial studies and multispecies ethnography. I illustrate these interconnections through a multispecies ethnography of three species in Kerala: wild boars, street dogs, and elephants. My ethnographic exploration of animal lives in Kerala reveals that postcolonial development politics fosters a deep but often perceptually invisible antagonism towards animals, resulting in increasingly violent encounters labelled as ‘human-animal’ conflict. In response, I propose two complementary approaches to re-dignify animal lives: activism and storying. The embodied ethical praxis of animal activism is grounded in a radical acceptance of animals as agents alongside humans in a multispecies environment. This is most conspicuous in activists’ everyday activities of animal rescue, which welcome injured animals as integral members of a shared moral community who do not deserve cruelty or suffering. Storying illuminates the intricacies of animal sociality within multispecies worlds, showcasing the interweaving of animal lives with our own in liveable worlds in the age of the

Anthropocene. It fosters hope by envisioning alternative futures. In a world gravely damaged by Anthropocene interventions, this thesis strives to facilitate regenerative conversations about ethical modes of human-animal relations, activist praxis, and their relationship to multispecies ethnography in a postcolonial context.

Key words: animal; multispecies ethnography; postcolonial; activism; storying; antagonism

सारांश

यह थीसिस उत्तर-औपनिवेशिक भारत में पशु जीवन के हाशिए पर जाने पर सवाल उठाती है। इस तरह का हाशियाकरण, अधिकांश भाग के लिए, अदृश्य है। इसे संभवतः जानवरों के जीवन के प्रति उदासीनता के रूप में सबसे अच्छी तरह से समझा जा सकता है, इस तथ्य की स्वीकार्यता की कमी कि जानवर पारिस्थितिकी, विकास और कृषि के विभिन्न पूर्व-औपनिवेशिक, औपनिवेशिक और नव-औपनिवेशिक नेटवर्क में फंस गए हैं, जो लगभग सभी मानव कल्याण के लिए तैयार हैं। प्राणी। फिर भी, उत्तर-औपनिवेशिक भारत में भूख और गरीबी से संबंधित मानवीय पीड़ा की अत्यधिक सीमा के कारण जानवरों को शामिल करने वाले परिप्रेक्ष्य को सामने लाना या उसका वर्णन करना चुनौतीपूर्ण हो जाता है। इस सूत्रीकरण में, जानवरों की भलाई को मानव समृद्धि के विरुद्ध खड़ा किया गया प्रतीत होता है। यह थीसिस अधिक सूक्ष्म नैतिक स्थिति के लिए तर्क देती है: इसका केंद्रीय तर्क यह है कि उत्तर-औपनिवेशिक भारत में पशु जीवन की अवधारणा की कठिनाई मौजूदा परिस्थितियों में वास्तविक जानवरों के वास्तविक उपचार पर चर्चा करने में बाधा है। मनुष्यों और जानवरों दोनों की जीवित वास्तविकताओं पर ध्यान देते हुए, अधिक सटीक वैचारिक विश्लेषण तैयार करने के व्यापक लक्ष्य के साथ, यह थीसिस उत्तर-औपनिवेशिक अध्ययन और बहु-प्रजाति नृवंशविज्ञान के चौराहे पर विषयों पर केंद्रित है। मैं केरल में तीन प्रजातियों की बहुप्रजाति नृवंशविज्ञान के माध्यम से इन अंतर्संबंधों को चित्रित करता हूँ: जंगली सूअर, सड़क के कुत्ते और हाथी। केरल में जानवरों के जीवन की मेरी नृवंशविज्ञान संबंधी

खोज से पता चलता है कि उत्तर-औपनिवेशिक विकास की राजनीति जानवरों के प्रति एक गहरी लेकिन अक्सर अवधारणात्मक रूप से अदृश्य शत्रुता को बढ़ावा देती है, जिसके परिणामस्वरूप तेजी से हिंसक मुठभेड़ों को 'मानव-पशु' संघर्ष के रूप में जाना जाता है। जवाब में, मैं पशु जीवन को फिर से प्रतिष्ठित करने के लिए दो पूरक दृष्टिकोण प्रस्तावित करता हूँ: सक्रियता और कहानी। पशु सक्रियता का सन्निहित नैतिक व्यवहार बहु-प्रजाति के वातावरण में मनुष्यों के साथ-साथ एजेंटों के रूप में जानवरों की मौलिक स्वीकृति पर आधारित है। यह कार्यकर्ताओं की पशु बचाव की रोजमर्रा की गतिविधियों में सबसे स्पष्ट है, जो घायल जानवरों को एक साझा नैतिक समुदाय के अभिन्न सदस्यों के रूप में स्वागत करते हैं जो क्रूरता या पीड़ा के लायक नहीं हैं। कहानी बहुप्रजाति की दुनिया के भीतर पशु सामाजिकता की जटिलताओं पर प्रकाश डालती है, एंथ्रोपोसीन के युग में रहने योग्य दुनिया में जानवरों के जीवन और हमारी अपनी दुनिया के बीच के अंतर्संबंध को दर्शाती है। यह वैकल्पिक भविष्य की कल्पना करके आशा को बढ़ावा देता है। एंथ्रोपोसीन हस्तक्षेपों से गंभीर रूप से क्षतिग्रस्त दुनिया में, यह थीसिस मानव-पशु संबंधों के नैतिक तरीकों, एक्टिविस्ट प्रैक्सिस और उत्तर-औपनिवेशिक संदर्भ में बहु-प्रजाति नृवंशविज्ञान के साथ उनके संबंधों के बारे में पुनर्योजी बातचीत को सुविधाजनक बनाने का प्रयास करती है।

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