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Book Review

RADHIKA GOVINDRAJAN. *Animal Intimacies: Interspecies Relatedness in India's Central Himalayas*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press. 2018, XIII+220 pp. (pb. \$27.50).

Anthropologists have been at the forefront of understanding human and other-than-human lives as being intimately entangled with each other. However, only recently have they pondered upon these lives as being equally consequential, albeit not symmetrical, in the making of their relationships and of the world. Animal subjectivity and agency, decisively, have become loci of resistance, contestation, and negotiation of antipodal categories of nature/culture; human/non-human; domesticated/wild; subject/object; or person/non-person.

Radhika Govindrajan's *Animal intimacies: Interspecies relatedness in India's Central Himalayas* is an astute, beautifully written illustration of this new direction in anthropology. Unlike other scholars, whose engagement with the animal turn has focused on a single species, Govindrajan's interrogation of human-animal relationships looks at how Uttarakhand villagers' lives become entangled in gendered, political and cultural ways with multiple species: goats, cows, monkeys, pigs, and bears. Each chapter of the book teases out how interspecies relatedness emerges from individual bodies living alongside each other and the intercorporeal intimacy they afford.

The first chapter, *The goat who died for family: Sacrificial ethics and kinship*, deals with the ethical intimation of goats sacrificed to gods, arguing that 'violence could generate ethical ways of engaging with the world' (p. 60). The sacrifice, argues Govindrajan, becomes 'truly a sacrifice' (p. 37, emphasis in original) only if met with loss and grief, brought about by an intimacy of entangling bodies in the everyday labour of care. Through everyday labour and care, the animal that is cared for by a woman becomes kin, and is further entangled in relations of reciprocal, sacrificial debt. Thus, the logic of 'systems of [sacrifice's] symbolic representation become[s] meaningful when grounded in lived material relations' (p. 39).

Chapter two, *The cow herself has changed: Hindu nationalism, cow protection, and bovine materiality*, moves away from this dialectic of kinship to pinpoint the amalgamation of material relations between species, different breeds, and ideological imaginaries. The indigenous cow of the mountains (*katu Pahari*; p. 66) has been obstinately upheld as a sacred symbol of Hinduism and of the Indian nation in general. In ideological discourse, this serves to set aside Muslims – consumers of beef – as potential threats to the sacredness of the Indian nation itself. When a new breed, the Jersey cow, is introduced, the lower quality products (e.g., thinner milk) serves in reaffirming the Pahari cow as superior. As a symbol of Hindu identity, the Pahari cow, and its perceived superiority over the Jersey cow, serves at the same time as a way of bolstering nationalism and its adjacent Pahari cow protection law. However, as in the case of one of Govindrajan's female interlocutors, the everyday care for a Jersey cow imbues individual human-animal relations with intimacy, setting aside breed differences and ideological assertions. As highlighted repeatedly throughout the book, this intense everyday intricacy between individual bodies transgresses politically infused human-animal divides. This transforms humans and animals into porous subjects, capable of affecting and being affected.

Chapter three, *Outsider monkey, insider monkey: On the politics of exclusion and belonging*, offers a perfect illustration of individual and community struggles in light of wildlife protection, and their consequential hierarchical quandaries: city dwellers over mountain villagers; rich over poor; policy and law-makers over those affected; (wild) animals

over humans. The narratives are primarily threaded around the boldness of newcomer monkeys and their aggressiveness towards humans, as opposed to their mountain (*Pahari*) relatives. The simian bodies become a site of situated difference between indigenous and foreign, outsiders and insiders. Their habituation with city dwellers is reflective, in Govindrajan's interlocutors' assertions, of a behavioural and moral deviance. In light of this, Govindrajan argues, human-animal proximity or even cooperation, is not always understood in practice in terms of promissory, positive effects, as is usually the case with multi-species ethnography.

In the fourth chapter, *Pig gone wild: Colonialism, conservation, and the otherwild*, Govindrajan examines an even more complicated relationship. She shows how India's colonial past and current modernisation efforts become entangled through wildlife conservation. The chapter begins with the story of a runaway pregnant sow, escaping into the forests from the Indian Veterinary Research Institute (IVRI), one of the most prominent (post)colonial landmarks in Uttarakhand. As Govindrajan's interlocutors describe, the sow could not be captured and its domestic progeny became mingled with wild boars. This has resulted in a bodily, ontological and political *otherwild*: 'a messy wildness that reconfigures, unsettles, and exceeds the ways in which it is framed in projects of colonial and caste domination or in fantasies of human mastery of the nonhuman' (p. 123). The *otherwild* – the fluid domestic/wild product of the sow's progeny – is consumed by superior castes as clean, wild pig meat, unlike the domestic pig meat, considered unclean and consumed by inferior castes. However, the consumption of the *otherwild* unveils the precarity of this system in postcolonial India. Thus, the mixture between domestic and wild can become a source of challenging caste hierarchy by its members. Moreover, the free roaming of domestic pigs into the wild – a common practice in Uttarakhand – articulates the fragility of these categories and their exposure to the possibilities of becoming simultaneously with and in the absence of humans.

The final chapter, *The bear who loved a woman: The intersection of queer desires*, moves to the realm of the household and the domestic contestation of patriarchal power. In Uttarakhand villages, women tell stories about married women being abducted by male bears who have sex with them, and how women end up loving their animal lovers and appreciating their tender affection. These stories voice the failure of their husbands and the caste system that supports them, who ignore women's desire and sexuality. However, these transspecies expressions of desire, as Govindrajan argues, 'are not only transgressive of patriarchy ideology, ... but also of an anthropocentric hierarchy in which the boundary between humans and animals is inked on the troubled terrain of desire. As such, what gives this genre its power is precisely the fact that it is given life in a world where human and animal bodies are porous and open to being affected by one another ...' (p. 171).

The book concludes with a reflection on the myriad ways human and other-than-human lives come to be lived in 'knotted relatedness' (p. 177), despite the sometimes-violent outcomes of their living alongside each other. This form of relatedness – of being and becoming with another, either human or other-than-human – is an ever-transformative process producing an intimate knowledge and a consequential sense of kinship in a multi-species world. Apart from being a delightful read, the book is an important addition to human-animal relations studies. On the one hand, humans do not stand against a heterogeneous 'animal kingdom', but animals are acknowledged in their unique differences across species. On the other, inter-species relations can be shaped in manifold ways by individual, inter-subjective experiences of bodily intimacies. This is, I believe, a fundamental contribution of Govindrajan's book and a direction that opens countless possibilities for conceptual thinking about, and for practices of living with, more-than-human beings.

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About the Author

Cristina Douglas is a medical anthropologist working towards her PhD at the University of Aberdeen. Her PhD research project explores the relationships between people living with dementia in Scottish care facilities and therapy-animals (dogs and owls). Currently, she is working with Dr Andrew Whitehouse as editors of a collective volume about the entanglements between ageing and more-than-human companionship (to be published at Rutgers University Press). Her research has been funded by Parkes Foundation and Elphinstone Scholarship (University of Aberdeen).