

**Whispers of Coexistence: Composting Ecofeminism and
Multispecies Harmony in *The Elephant Whisperers***



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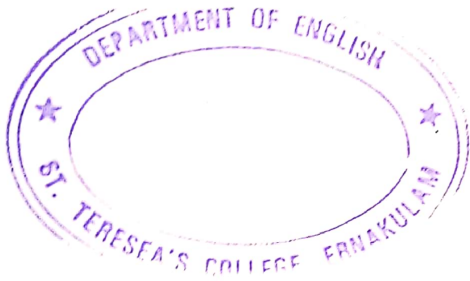
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I hereby certify that this project entitled "Whispers of Coexistence: Composting Ecofeminism and Multispecies Harmony in *The Elephant Whisperers*", is a record of bona fide work carried out by Riya Babu under my supervision and guidance.



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Introduction

In the current scenario of global societal level, multispecies, plants and animals are in a verge of extinction. Nature or non human animals have been essentially exterminated due monoculture expansion that underpines modernity, ecological destruction and climate change. The imperative measures of protecting the environment and its vital actants often bitterly foster an ongoingness of plunder. There is an intricate relationship between humanity and non-human materials, emphasizing the often-overlooked vitality that coexists with these actants. There is a need to reconsider the interconnectedness of all living entities in the shared ecosystem.

Literature has been instrumental in shedding light on the harsh realities of human existence. One of the most infamous lines from George Orwell's *Animal Farm* satirically portrays humanity's diabolical assertion over universe. In the novella *Animal Farm* the lines "Man is the only creature that consumes without producing. He does not give milk, he does not lay eggs, he is too weak to pull the plough, he cannot run fast enough to catch rabbits. Yet he is lord of all the animals" (Orwell 7). It exemplifies the humanity's desire for dominance. Humans consider themselves as the kings of all species, elevated themselves above nature, often plunder her natural resources brutally. This attitude of human dominance has resulted in the coming of monocultures, in which enormous tracts of land are dedicated to a single crop or purpose, thereby ignoring the nature's great diversity. However, one must realise that nature is not a vincible kingdom, but rather a fragile balance of interdependent lives. Monoculture, which reflects human-centric beliefs, emphasizes the danger of imposing a domination over the natural environment. However, the universe sustains not on singularities, but on a rich tapestry of living forms and ecosystems. The core of coexistence should not include the dominant force, but rather it should create a harmonic interplay of all the species. Monocultures deplete the vitality of earth, thus results in an unhealthy existence.

To thrive, universe necessitates a celebration of its various forms that contributes to the fabric of existence. True harmony and thriving can only be found through the interconnection of all species, in which humans are participants and not rulers.

The Elephant Whisperers is a 2022 Oscar-winning Indian documentary film directed by Kartiki Gonsalves. It delves into the lives of a couple named Bomman and Bellie who care for a previously abandoned and injured baby elephant Raghu inside Mudumalai Tiger Reserve in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu. The couple have been entrusted to care for the injured elephant and strives recoup the survival of the injured infant into a healthy juvenile. It showcases the sacred bond between man and the wild animal. The documentary essentially portrays how non human actants of nature has been exploited in the name of planetary transformation for commercial gains and rendered disposable.

The documentary tells the story of a couple and Raghu, an orphaned young elephant who was placed in their care. It became the first Indian film to receive the Academy Award for the Best Documentary Short Film at the 95th Academy Awards. The film focuses on the unbreakable bond between an abandoned elephant and its caretakers who rescues it from its dilapidated condition. It aims to increase understanding of the relationship between humans and animals while also advocating elephant conservation. This film was produced by Sikhya Entertainment. The documentary premiered at DOC NYC Film Festival, a renowned event for documentaries in the US on November 9th, 2022 and was released worldwide on Netflix on December 8th, 2022.

Despite several obstacles, the couple goes to tremendous extent to nurse the injured infant back to its health and assure its survival. As the story progresses, the couple develops a strong bond with the elephant, thereby signifying the importance of animal-human cooperation. Furthermore, the film highlights the forest reserve's natural splendour while also delving into the lifestyle and culture of the indigenous tribal community, which has

lived in harmony with nature for generations. The film not only depicts the emotional relationship between an animal and humans, but it also highlights the conventional Indian environmental conservation traditions. Thus it signifies a wonderful testament to nature's strength and human compassion.

This documentary film stands analogous to the realities faced by all animals and the nature. The objective of this project attempts to study the above-mentioned documentary film on the basis of theories that explore the role of non human animals in the process of evolution and constitution of societies and thereby advocates the significance of a responsible multispecies politics.

This is investigated in the light of Donna J. Haraway's theory of *composting* that critiques Anthropocene and thereby de-emphasizing human exceptionalism in favour of multispecism. Haraway, a popular Posthumanist theorist has now suggested to replace the notion of posthumanism with the *compost*. The compost metaphor shares Haraway's philosophical thinking and bring attention to non human counterparts for a harmonious existence. The dissertation also challenges the idea of an 'Aana Premi' or an 'elephantophile' in the Indian cultural milieu that often claims to revere and worship elephants. It also becomes a tragic paradox as they are not only worshipped but enslaved. Elephants are often revered to the status of God and deemed as an Indian cultural symbol. However the term 'Elephant lover' or 'Aana Premi' is quite contradicting in its nature, because of the myriad contextual meanings. In the West, an elephant lover is a person who enjoys gazing elephants in their own habitat. Whereas in the Indian context, an elephant lover is a person who enjoys its enslavement. The elephant lover celebrates the elephant being captured and dolled up in Indian festivities with bursting crackers and the crescendo of drums creates an unpleasant atmosphere for the elephants.

Ecofeminism emerged as a response to the interconnected oppressions of patriarchy and environmental degradation. Initially, ecofeminist scholars highlighted the parallels between the domination of women and the exploitation of nature, arguing for a reevaluation of the dualistic thinking that underpins these systems. Central figures such as Vandana Shiva and Carolyn Merchant paved the way for Donna Haraway's later contributions. In her seminal work *A Cyborg Manifesto*, Haraway challenged traditional boundaries between human and machine, nature and culture. This foundational text laid the groundwork for her later exploration of composting ecofeminism, as she proposed the concept of the cyborg as a figure embodying hybridity, interconnectedness, and fluid identities.

Haraway's composting ecofeminism builds upon these ideas, advocating for a radical reconceptualization of nature and humanity's place within it. Composting ecofeminism embraces the messy entanglements of human and nonhuman life. It rejects dualistic thinking in favour of realizing the intertwined futures of all beings.

Donna Haraway's work on composting becomes a metaphor for the processes necessary in destroying oppressive systems and nurturing sustainable relationships. In *Staying with the Trouble*, Haraway emphasizes the need of multispecies companionship and collaboration in developing better futures. Haraway defines composting as breaking down hierarchical structures, combining diverse materials, and promoting new forms of life from the disintegrated remains of the old. This concept goes beyond the standard recycling to include the idea of creating a rich environment for various and interdependent life forms to thrive.

In essence, composting ecofeminism is the notion of interdependence. Haraway argues that all beings are mutually dependent in each other's lives, forming complex networks of relationships. This viewpoint challenges anthropocentric views that position humans as separate and superior to the rest of nature. Instead, it calls for a rearrangement of ethics and

responsibility.

The implications of composting ecofeminism extend to the aspects of environmental ethics and social justice. By acknowledging the interconnectedness, this framework demands a more inclusive and compassionate approach towards environmental issues. It demands for harmony with marginalized communities, human and nonhuman, whose lives are mostly affected by ecological crisis.

In a world marked by environmental degradation and climate change, composting ecofeminism offers a path toward transitioning relationships with the nonhuman world. Rather than seeking domination or control, Haraway suggests embracing the messiness and unpredictability of ecological systems. This entails fostering practices of care, reciprocity, and humility in our interactions with the more-than-human world.

Analysing *The Elephant Whisperers* through Haraway's composting and multispecies companionship, it unearths numerous layers of significance. The protagonists' efforts to cure the abused elephants might be viewed as a type of composting, in which they try to remove enslavement practices while advocating connections based on care and respect. The documentary film depicts a metamorphosis tale, in which the dilapidated elephants representing the degraded condition of the forest reserve. The protagonists' interventions create a process of regeneration and rebirth, echoing Haraway's concept of cultivating rich milieu for flourishing life forms.

Several scholarly researchers have dealt with the idea of composting ecofeminism and multispecies relationships. Anna Tsing's looks at the intricacies of human-animal interactions and the potential for cohabitation in damaged milieu. Similarly, Maria Puig de la Bellacasa's study focuses on the ethics of care in multispecies environments, thereby portraying the significance of developing relationships across species.

Interdependence and coexistence challenges to move beyond dualistic thinking and embrace the complex entanglements of life on Earth. Ecofeminism is a branch of feminist theory which focuses on the intersections between gender and the natural world. This field of cultural ecology has sparked numerous speculative studies. It uncovers the parallels and interdependencies between the oppression of women and the exploitation of nature. Donna Haraway, a prominent posthumanist theorist, supported a form of posthumanism that recognizes humans within a web of relationships, where technology plays a pivotal role. However, Haraway has moved away from these earlier conceptions to embrace what she terms "composting ecofeminism." This shift represents a departure from conventional ecofeminist approaches, as it challenges the prevailing anthropocentric worldview. In this new manifestation, both human and nonhuman animals are regarded as equals within the intricate fabric of life on Earth.

Haraway asserts that the evolution of ecofeminism should transcend women's issues mirrored in nature's struggles. Instead, she propagates the urgent need to cultivate solutions and awareness that foster harmony and interdependence among all species. This call for a paradigm shift underscores the importance of acknowledging the interconnectedness of life forms, from the smallest microorganisms to the largest ecosystems (Haraway 13).

The Elephant Whisperers is a captivating story. It aligns with Donna Haraway's theory of composting and multispecies companionship within the context of contemporary ecofeminism. The documentary film demonstrates the potential for positive change by removing oppressive structures and cultivating long-term ties with the natural environment. By considering with Haraway's concepts, the study hopes to contribute to a better understanding of how composting ecofeminism might pave the way for a more equitable and prosperous future for all species involved.

This dissertation is structured on the basis of the above mentioned theories. Chapter

one outlines Donna Haraway's theory of "multispecies and composting societies" that studies about the complex interaction between humans and non-human materials, emphasizing the often-overlooked vitality that coexists with these agents. There is a need to reconsider the connectivity of all living things in our common ecosystem. Another hypothesis that integrates in the text is about a care perspective towards the flourishing of composting societies.

Chapter two and three briefly sketches the complete analyses of the documentary film and scrutinizes it within the theoretical framework. The overarching theme of this paper offers a glimpse into the potential for transformative change through the dismantling of oppressive structures and the cultivation of sustainable relationships with the natural world.

Chapter 1

Composting Ecofeminism: A Theoretical Framework

In the current scenario of global societal level, multispecies, plants and animals are in a verge of extinction. Nature or non human animals have been essentially exterminated due monoculture expansion that underpines modernity, ecological destruction and climate change. The imperative measures of protecting the environment and its vital actants often bitterly foster an ongoingness of plunder. There is an intricate relationship between humanity and non-human materials, emphasizing the often-overlooked vitality that coexists with these actants. There is a need to reconsider the interconnectedness of all living entities in the shared ecosystem.

Ecofeminism, a branch of feminism that offers learning to the diverse voices of nature and repercussions of ignoring the voices of women and other marginalized communities. It investigates the link between nature and women. Ecofeminism forges upon fundamental feminist principles advocating gender equality, revaluation of non-patriarchal or non-linear systems, and a worldview that honours natural processes, interconnectedness and cooperation. Forbye to these concepts, ecofeminism emphasizes a dedication to environmental protection and acknowledges the historical linkages forged between women and nature. One of the most significant Ecofeminist in India, Vandana Shiva also abides by the general philosophical idea of ecofeminism. However significant studies have progressed in the field of ecofeminism. There have been instances of contemporary applications of ecofeminist principles and values to the analysis of different cultural phenomena.

The current approaches to environment or non-human animals are censured as symptomatic of a brutal capitalist system that often appropriates the use of planetary resources. It is pertinent to accommodate the living organisms in the web of life.

‘Anthropocentrism’ is a belief that centers the existence of humans above all other beings and are means to human ends. *The Oxford Dictionary*, defines Anthropocentrism as “regarding humankind as the central or most important element of existence”. A philosophical viewpoint that emphasizes the significance of human centric values as over non- human entities.

Donna J. Haraway, criticizes anthropocentrism, emphasizes the self-organizing powers of nonhuman processes, and explores dissonant relations between those processes and cultural practices, rethinking sources of ethics. She reflects a broader ecological and relational perspective that goes beyond the human- machine dichotomy to consider the web of human and non human animals that make up the fabric of life on earth.

Environmental humanities stands itself as an important interdisciplinary field that concerns much more than schools of ecocriticism, green cultural studies, etc. This area generally defends the idea of “Anthropocene”, an era of current significance, an epoch that analyses the environmental impacts created due to human interference.

Donna Haraway’s book *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* is a work by that explores ways of thinking about and responding to the interconnected ecological, political and social challenges of times. She introduces the concept of “Capitolocene” for broader exploration of analysing the ways of understanding the capitalist era that dominates the non- human animals for material gains. It critiques the notion of Anthropocene which attributes environmental change due to human invasion. “Capitolocene” highlights the agency of capitalism and its associated systems of exploitation, extraction and inequality that thrives in extinction and social injustice (Haraway).

Haraway discusses the concept of “Chthulucene”, a term coined to move away from the “Anthropocene”, which Haraway deems to be human- centered. She argues for embracing a more inclusive, multispecies perspective that acknowledges the entangled

relationships between humans and nonhumans, and emphasizes the importance of "making kin" with other beings to navigate a more sustainable future. As Haraway is critical about the conception of Anthropocene she proposes to use the terms Capitocene or Chthulucene instead. She argues that the Anthropocene does not cover the actual reason behind the mass extinction events, as it considers the climate changes as a species act. The term Capitocene for Haraway is perhaps a better suited way to explain the reasons behind the mass-scale extinctions and climate changes. It gives more attention to the historical, sociopolitical dimensions of the current big-scale planetary consequences. Haraway states:

Watch what's going on in the Arctic as the sea ice melts and the nations line up their war and mining ships for the extraction of the last calorie of carbon-based fuels from under the northern oceans. To call it the Anthropocene misses all of that; it treats it as if it's a species act. Well, it isn't a species act. So, if I had to have a single word, I would call it the Capitalocene. (259)

Chthulucene indicates an 'ongoing presence of being.' With Chthulucene, Haraway points out the man-made narratives through the notion of prick tales, which echoes throughout the earth's history. The term Chthulucene draws on H.P. Lovecraft's fictional character Cthulhu. Cthulhu is a misogynist nightmare monster, but Haraway "rescues" Cthulhu (with a spelling difference) from Lovecraft's patriarchal mode as she posits it in opposition to the cynical discourse of the Anthropocene (174).

According to Haraway "Prick tales" referring to Man-made narratives. In *Staying with the Trouble*, she specifies that this tale is a tragic one with a determined actor. It is written from a restricted, human-centric, white, male perspective. "In a tragic story with only one real actor, one real world-maker, the hero, this is the Man-making tale of the hunter on a quest to kill and bring back the terrible bounty" (Haraway).

Within the future-oriented interests of arts, humanities, social sciences, works of feminist writers have provided new ways to think about the future through science fiction, storytelling, and speculative fiction. “Speculative Fabulation” describes Haraway’s approach to imagine or create alternative futures or realities to create an interconnectedness among humans and non-human species (Haraway). The act of story telling or creating fables challenges dominant narratives and envisions sustainability in the world. Story-telling acts as a weapon to explore the relationship between human and non-human animals or nature. Blurring the boundaries between fact and fiction creates narratives that center the unspoken voices of animals or nature, questions the power dynamics and emphasize the interconnectedness of beings.

The 21st century witnesses an era of extinction in plants and non-human animals, “multispecies players”, leads to risks in the life on earth for humans and all other entities. Haraway increasingly problematizes the use of technologies of domination and the domination of animals as, questioning the instrumental relations between humans and nonhumans and extending the consideration of social agency to “companion species” or non-human animals. Haraway’s famous quote from her most recent book *Staying with Trouble, Making Kin in the Chthulucene*: “It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what descriptions describe descriptions, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories” (Haraway 12).

According to Haraway, “the practices around Speculative Fabulation are activated with the urgency and importance of different modes of thinking, imagining, and acting that is urgent in the Anthropocene” (7). A goal behind thinking through the intersections provided by the practices of Feminist Speculative Fabulation, is to question and explore possibilities

for a collective flourishing in the future. Haraway envisions the ideas of care, nurturing and interdependence that resonate with feminist perspectives.

Haraway refers to the writings that inspire her in pursuing the practices of feminist SF as “multi-form worlding practices” (2). She has often indicated in her writings that engagement in SF is a collaborative practice. Like playing the game of string figures [SF], each part of crafting worlds connects to the experience and thinking of another being. Haraway's metaphor of playing string figures illustrates how the collaborative storytelling practices of feminist SF takes place. Her depiction of the collaborative endeavour of playing string figures signalizes how she pictures multispecies storytelling as a collective work of 'worlding' practice. According to Haraway, ‘worldling’ practices tell "big-enough" stories that acknowledge our entanglements with non-humans (Haraway 52-87).

Trouble or problem inflicts fear. In *Staying with the Trouble* Haraway urges to go beyond all conflicts, setbacks, loss, etc. and emphasis the potential to stay in trouble. She also educate turning a problem or any worst case scenario into opportunity. Haraway describes *Symptosis* as making-with. Through symptosis, Haraway is able to explain how biological systems function in a collective, generative manner. She also introduces the concept of 'assemblage' to capture the multiplicity of relations and symbiotic arrangements within ecologies. The concept allows us to imagine the collectivity of biological, human and non-human, a togetherness that Haraway refers to as 'ecological assemblages.' Haraway's proposal for a multispecies becoming-with acknowledges assemblages and 'technological couplings' crossing paths with more-than-human worlds, "It is no longer news, that corporations, farms, clinics, labs, homes, sciences, technologies, and multispecies lives are entangled in multiscalar, multitemporal, multimaterial worlding" (Haraway 115).

Haraway envisages the concurrent role of nonhuman animals in engaging “jointly accomplished” facts with humans giving significant importance to animal agency. Haraway

more evidently addresses the histories that link nonhuman animals and inappropriate others (Haraway) such as women, ethnic minorities and the colonized, in relation to whom colonial primatology is poignantly defined as “simian orientalism” (Haraway 10). Her thoughts dwells on the exploitation of nonhuman animals for human ends, such as her reports on the “astro-chimps” or “Harry Harlow’s experiments”. Although such narratives ultimately shed light on the contested aims of human societies and their gender and ethnic biases more than their species.

The nonhuman animals are not generally contrived for the constitution of society. But these animals are said to possess semiotic agency, which makes them interfere epistemologically with the human realm. Thus, animals are not transparent mirrors or mute projection screens, but rather robust agents that “resist, enable, disrupt, engage, constrain, and display. They act and signify, and like all action and signification, theirs yield no unique, univocal, unconstructed 'facts' waiting to be collected” (310-311).

Haraway considers the notion of “significant other” (15), employing it for nonhumans. She believes that this traditional ‘other’ should be grant access to the social order, however the generic point of reference is through the symbolic activity of language that only humans are said to possess. As per posthuman post-Meadian sociology, animals act as social partners, not merely as surrogates of absent humans or projections of anthropomorphic intentions.

Issue of animal representativity arises due to the acknowledgment that animals are capable of semiosis and communication, though not in a linguistic way, frees nonhuman animals from their mechanistic representation.

Animals are full-fledged “actants” in multispecies collectives, a term that, at this point, Haraway prefers to “actors”, the latter still belonging to the language of liberal individualism (Uexkull 11). This preference reflects her rejection of individualistic language

and her belief that animals should not be reduced to passive objects but rather seen as active participants in the complex network of relationships. Haraway criticizes traditional approaches to studying animals, particularly in the field of primatology in the United States during the twentieth century. She argues that treating animals as silent objects prevents us from understanding the intricate connections and interactions between humans and other species. Haraway introduces the concept of "naturalsocial life" to describe the interconnected relationships between humans and non-human entities in the natural world. These relationships occur on multiple levels and are not solely reliant on linguistic communication. She also emphasizes the importance of articulation, which involves recognizing and creating connections between different entities. Articulation allows for the acknowledgment of differences among all participants and highlights the complexity of multispecies relationships:

Articulation, as the ability to both recognize and produce connections, is the antidote to ventriloquism: “The articulata are jointed animals; they are not smooth like the perfect spherical animals of Plato's origin fantasy in the *Timaeus*. The articulata are cobbled together”. (Haraway 324)

There is a need to rethink the holistic roles of various actors (human and nonhuman) within the development of refurbishing the environment , also to recognise the social and power dynamics at play within the relationships. Haraway alludes to the process of “Refiguring the actors” (297), this involves cognizing that not all “actors” are significantly human, thereby analysing the magnitude of non-human actors within the system.

For this, the social and power dynamics need to be unveiled within these human-nonhuman systems. This promotes a better understanding of the complex interactions between human and nonhuman entities and the influence vested upon by the power structures.

Haraway coins animal bodies as “material semiotic nodes” (297), foregrounding their dual nature as both physical entities and carriers of meaning within social and cultural contexts. This leads to an important step towards “natureculture” (298), achieving this requires recognizing and respecting the multitude of inhabitants and their contributions to shaping the world “has many houses with many inhabitants which/who can refigure the earth”(Haraway).

Haraway emphasizes the importance of respecting the presence and influence of other animals within these networks. This involves recognizing their agency and contributions, rather than simply imposing human-centric perspectives or priorities. Respect does not only mean giving another look beyond the speciesist gaze; it also means layering the onto-epistemological plane with a socio-political dimension: paying attention, meeting respectfully, regardless of species, is the basis for the constitution of the polis (Haraway 164).

To counter the ideology of evolution as a process of the separation of the human from and above other animals and nature, Haraway borrows the notion of *Symbiogenesis* stated in her works such as *The Promises of Monsters* and predominantly in *When Species Meet* . Symbiogenesis, was first theorized by the Russian botanist Konstantin biologist Lynn Margulis. A theory that believes, eukaryotes [organisms whose cells have a nucleus] evolved from a symbiosis with prokaryotes, unicellular organisms whose cells lack a nucleus, such as bacteria and archaea. Symbiogenesis challenges the predominant notion of evolution by emphasizing the collaborative and cooperative aspects of evolution. It underscores the interconnectedness and interdependence of evolution with different life forms. Certain interactions with organisms can contribute to exchange of genetic materials, ultimately leading to evolution. Haraway highlights how evolution is not a matter of hierarchical dominance but “the outcome of lateral transformations, assimilations,

digestions and ejections through which living beings materially” (Haraway 12). This concept emphasises the fluidity and complexity of evolutionary trajectories, highlighting how living beings continuously interact, exchange genetic material, and evolve together. Evolution, in this view, is not a linear progression dictated by a single genealogy but a complex network of relationships, transformations, and adaptations.

Both Haraway and ecofeminists embrace situated epistemologies and a politics of location; however, ecofeminists disclose the species biases of the utilitarian approach to animals (Singer), which allows them to adopt a dialogical theory of care, granting nonhuman animals what Haraway would later call “response-ability”. These interspecies ethics and politics rested on an intersectional approach. Haraway shares with ecofeminists critique of animal rights discourses while distancing herself from socialist feminism over time (Haraway), does not completely refuse a utilitarian approach to human relations with nonhuman animals. Because of this, she never embraces political veganism as most ecofeminists do (Adams and Gruen 11). Haraway believes ‘companion species’ as social agents, and her consideration of symbiogenetic processes reconceives social formations in a manner that paves the way to practicing an intersectional politics of alliances in a composite, multispecies body politic, which is closer to the claims of ecofeminism.

Haraway believes that the a society of “companion species” and decomposes as “compost”, finally burying under the ground, in the humus. This imagery of Haraway suggests that a society where humans and all other species interact each other, eventually decompose and return to earth. This ideology traditionally challenges the human-prioritised approach towards society and nature. If primatology (symbolizes a historical division between social and natural sciences) was exemplary of how the encounter between the social and the natural sciences created a gap between society and nature, molecular biology offers a non-disjunctive perspective to consider the link between the fields, and society and nature

accordingly. Compost, as the work of this unending meeting of beings that is sympoiesis (Haraway 287), is an in an example of a multispecies assembling that is open and respecting without being inclusive or exclusive which renders compost societies' worldling as flourishing as it is risky (Haraway 214). The process of composting exemplifies a multispecies assembly, where various organisms come together in an open and respectful manner, creating a flourishing but risky environment. This challenges notions of exclusivity and emphasizes the importance of coexistence and cooperation among different species.

Haraway looks at the dynamics that relate multiple lives in compost. Not all lives (including quasi-lives, such as viruses) are equivalent, but all lives are present in Terrapolis (Haraway 11), which means a hypothetical space where all lives, including viruses and other quasi-lives, are present. It represents an egalitarian environment where no life form is inherently superior or excluded. "An operator of *mise en égalité*", (Isabelle 995), also suggests of Terrapolis as means to create equality among all living forms. This also means that no designated representatives of the collective, stating what can be decided and what counts, exist in advance, which renders each decision as complicated as possible.

With "compost communities" Haraway produces the idea of interconnected that blur boundaries and engage in symbiotic relationships. Such communities challenge the notion of clear frontier and rigid identities. These societies also practice the concept of "corridor thinking" (Haraway 218) and build passages that allow symbionts to travel and flourish in movement - migratory species, like the monarch butterflies for the Camilles of The Camille Stories (Haraway) . Such interactive passages within the compost communities impart flourishing of diverse species and promote mobility.

Compost societies has healing and restorative powers and strives to emerge organically within inherited ruins, cultivating hospitable spaces of for renewal and balancing inequalities. Haraway in the chapter "The Camille Stories", emphasizes that instead of

perpetuating colonial logics or hierarchies, the compost communities prioritise equitable relationship for the deeper flourishing of environment:

Compost communities can also be healing and restorative in the case, for instance, of forced displacements or genocides: not built from scratch, not imposed from above (according to a colonizing logic), they take place among inherited ruins, in which they cultivate hospitable refugia as “a basic obligation and source of mutual renewal” for rebalancing inequalities and losses. (147)

Haraway conceptualises the concept of kinship within compost societies. The compost societies depend on a life that does not depend on genetic or reproductive ties, that is it challenges the conventional understanding of kinship as solely tied to reproduction. Ergo, Kinship has been redefined as *oddkin* moving away from the natalist perspective (of kinship and reproduction). Instead she calls for “breaking the necessity of the tie between kinship and reproduction” (216). This helps to emphasize the need to recognise intersectional complexities. She highlights the multispecies perspective by considering diverse experiences of human and nonhuman within the compost communities.

“Kin-making is making persons, not necessarily as individuals or as humans” (92), which, for Haraway, requires “pro-ongoingness in our mortality, not pro-Life” (Haraway and Wolfe 236). The slogan “Make Kin Not Babies” (Haraway 102), considers it is a community responsibility and prompts to imagine kin as a commitment instead.

The “situated” utilitarian perspective of Haraway does not differentiate between murderable or disposable species, but deems that everyone has a responsibility not to let or force them to die or killed.

In 2016, a workshop titled "Anthropologists Are Talking About the Anthropocene" brought together researchers from diverse disciplines, including Haraway and Tsing, to examine and debate the term Anthropocene and its challenges. During the workshop,

Haraway coined the term “Plantationocene” to describe industrialization led by the domestication of plant species, replacing the earlier term Capitalocene period (Haraway).

Multispecies compost societies as per Haraway can be cultivated among amid the dilapidated ecologies of the current era.

Chapter 2

Multispecies and Compost societies

Multispecies, plants, and animals are on the edge of extinction in today's global society. Nature, or nonhuman animals, have been essentially killed as a result of monoculture expansion, which underpins civilization, environmental damage, and climate change. The critical measures of conserving the environment and its vital actors frequently exacerbate a continual cycle of pillage. There is a complex interaction between humans and non-human materials, emphasizing the often-overlooked vitality that coexists with these agents. There is a need to reconsider the connectivity of all living things in our common ecosystem.

Ecofeminism is a subset of feminism that emphasises the importance of listening to nature's many voices and the consequences of disregarding the perspectives of underprivileged groups, including women. It looks on the relationship between women and nature. Strengthening the foundations of feminist theory, ecofeminism promotes gender equality, a worldview that values natural processes, connection, intuition, and cooperation, and a reevaluation of non-patriarchal or non-linear systems. In contrast to these ideas, ecofeminism highlights a commitment to environmental preservation and recognises the long-standing bonds that have been created between women and the natural world.

The existing attitudes to the environment and non-human creatures are condemned as manifestations of a cruel capitalist system that frequently appropriates the utilisation of planetary resources. It is necessary to accommodate living organisms in the web of life. Donna J. Haraway critiques anthropocentrism, emphasises nonhuman systems' self-organizing capacities, and investigates the discordant relationships between those processes and cultural practices, reconsidering ethical sources.

She represents a broader ecological and relational vision that looks beyond the human-machine dichotomy to the web of human and nonhuman species that comprise the fabric of life on Earth.

The 2022 Indian documentary film *The Elephant Whisperers* directed by Kartiki Gonsalves tells the story of a couple and an orphaned young elephant named Raghu who was placed under their care. The film focuses on the unbreakable friendship between an abandoned elephant and its two caretakers. It aims to increase the understanding of the relationship between humans and animals while also advocating elephant conservation.

It became the first Indian film to receive the Academy Award for the Best Documentary Short Film at the 95th Academy Awards. It was produced by Sikhya Entertainment. The film got premiered at DOC NYC Film Festival, a renowned event for documentaries in the US, on November 9 2022. It was released worldwide on Netflix on December 8th, 2022.

The documentary portrays an inspiring tale of an indigenous couple, Bellie and Bomman, who care for an orphaned baby elephant named Raghu in Mudumalai National Park, in Tamil Nadu. Despite several hardships, the couple goes to tremendous extent to nurse the damaged infant back to its health and assure its survival. As the story progresses, the couple develops a strong bond with the elephant, portraying the relationship of animal-human cooperation. Furthermore, the film highlights the forest reserve's natural grandeur while also delving into the lifestyle and culture of the indigenous tribal community, which has lived in harmony with nature for generations. The film not only depicts the emotional relationship between an animal and humans, but it also highlights Indian traditional environmental conservation techniques.

Environmental humanities is becoming a popular interdisciplinary area, increasingly displacing prior schools including ecocriticism, environmental critique, and green cultural

studies. Environmental humanities bring together scholars collaborating across disciplines to address and solve the environmental disaster known as the Anthropocene, a geologically "accurate" phrase for the current age.

In 2016, a workshop titled "Anthropologists Are Talking About the Anthropocene" brought together researchers from diverse disciplines, including Haraway and Tsing, to examine and debate the term Anthropocene and its challenges. During the workshop, Haraway coined the term "Plantationocene" to describe industrialization led by the domestication of plant species, replacing the earlier term Capitalocene period (Haraway).

The forest department found Raghu in a dire state, he had been attacked by stray dogs and had maggots in open wounds. The forestry workers tried, unsuccessfully, to reunite Raghu with his family. No one thought Raghu would survive, but they gave him to Bellie and Bomman to try. "Capitolocene" for broader exploration of analysing the ways of understanding the capitalist era that dominates the non-human animals for material gains. It critiques the notion of Anthropocene which attributes environmental change due to human invasion. "Capitolocene" highlights the agency of capitalism and its associated systems of exploitation, extraction and inequality that thrives in extinction and social injustice. Raghu was brought in a dilapidated condition who is worn off by the capitalist society. Prolonged drought has caused Raghu's herd to search for water, that led Raghu lost into the wilderness of the jungle. "Due to prolonged drought his herd had wandered into the village in search of food and water" (*The Elephant Whisperers* 36:34). The adverse effects of capitalist society have led to several toxic conditions to the environment such as flood, drought and other natural calamities. This has not only caused trouble to animals but humans as well. It is often difficult for animals to cope with such a situation and often seek help from humans. These animals thus cross into the human settlement areas, which the humans deem as animal encroachment to human settlements. *The Elephant Whisperers* essentially portrays a situation

wherein only interdependence with nonhuman and human entities can significantly provide a change to better living conditions. “When I arrived, the baby elephant was in lot of pain” (*The Elephant Whisperers* 36:52).

The film revolves around Theppakkadu Elephant Camp in Mudumalai Tiger Reserve in Tamil Nadu. Theppakkadu Elephant Camp is one of the oldest elephant camps in Asia and was established around 140 years ago. “ This place is the largest contiguous wild space for the Asian elephants” (37:20). It is quite strange and fascinating elephant camp, as it does not only seem for elephant but it is inhabited by other living organisms of the Mudumalai Tiger Reserve. Monkeys, Peacocks, Pigs, etc. roam around this niche that is for its name sake meant for the elephants. This significantly shows how there is no clear demarcation in this place and each species essentially maintains equity.

The couple Bellie and Bomman belong to the Kattunayakan Tribal Community of South India. Kattunayakar or Jennu Kurumbas, an indigenous community, is a designated scheduled tribe in the Indian states of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala, and Andhra Pradesh. The word *Kattunayakar* means “the king of the jungle” in Tamil and Kannada. The Kattunayakar are one of the earliest known inhabitants of the Western Ghats, who are engaged in the collection and gathering of forest produce, mainly wild honey and wax. Kattunayakars believe in Hinduism and speak a language which is a mixture of all Dravidian languages. The main deity of the tribe is Lord Shiva and Nayakkar under the name of *Bhairava*. They also worship animals, birds, trees, rock hillocks, and snakes, along with the other Hindu deities. The film opens up with the couple introducing their community and how coexistence with nature has brought significant betterment to the lives of animals and the human community. It opens up with Bellie and Bomman involved in the religious rituals and praying. Bellie walks barefoot through the lush forests of the Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary, a national park in the state of Tamil Nadu, hot on the heels of a baby

elephant. The act of walking barefoot is a mark of respect shown to nature. The Kattunayakan Community significantly live in harmony with nature and thrives to protect nature at all costs. “ We don’t take anything more than necessary” (*The Elephant Whisperers* 29:22). Haraway emphasizes the importance of respecting the presence and influence of other animals within these networks. This involves recognizing their agency and contributions, rather than simply imposing human-centric perspectives or priorities. Respect does not only mean giving another look beyond the speciesist gaze; it also means layering the onto-epistemological plane with a socio-political dimension: paying attention, meeting respectfully, regardless of species, is the basis for the constitution of the polis (Haraway 164).

The scenes of Raghu, Bellie and Bomman keeping themselves warm around the firewood during cold nights remarkably presents the idea of egalitarianism. The village men and women washing clothes, bathing along with the different nonhuman animals [elephants and pigs here] counter the ideology of evolution as a process of the separation of the human from and above other animals and nature. Haraway borrows the notion of *Symbiogenesis* stated in her works such as *The Promises of Monsters* and predominantly in *When Species Meet*. Symbiogenesis challenges the predominant notion of evolution by emphasizing the collaborative and cooperative aspects of evolution. It underscores the interconnectedness and interdependence of evolution with different life forms. Certain interactions with organisms can contribute to exchange of genetic materials, ultimately leading to evolution. Haraway highlights how evolution is not a matter of hierarchical dominance but “the outcome of lateral transformations, assimilations, digestions and ejections through which living beings materially” (Haraway 12). This concept emphasises the fluidity and complexity of evolutionary trajectories, highlighting how living beings continuously interact, exchange genetic material, and evolve together. Evolution, in this view, is not a linear progression dictated by a single genealogy but a complex network of relationships, transformations, and

adaptations. The reference to “ I want to do my best for him, I consider him a godsend” (*The Elephant Whisperers* 28:37). This conspicuously signifies how the director Kartiki Gonsalves has created an utopian society, a place that she necessarily thinks to be vital in any society.

Gonsalves has carved an angle where humans respect the space of nonhuman animals. It is quite irrational and fantastical to consider nonhuman animals as well as human beings to coexist in the same way. However the film beautifully portrays how each species must be given its own space and security. Bomman and Bellie often sends Raghu to the jungle, “There is only so much we can teach them” (32:38). The couple is contended with Raghu’s friendship with Krishnan, another fellow elephant of “Theppakkadu Elephant Camp”. This bonding helps Raghu to gradually learn things that an elephant does for basic survival and necessities. “ There are things that they can only learn from one of their own kind” (32:38). The reason for leaving them in jungle is to create independence and betterment of life.

The nonhuman animals are not generally contrived for the constitution of society. But these animals are said to possess semiotic agency, which makes them interfere epistemologically with the human realm. Thus, animals are not transparent mirrors or mute projection screens, but rather robust agents that “resist, enable, disrupt, engage, constrain, and display. They act and signify, and like all action and signification, theirs yield no unique, univocal, unconstructed 'facts' waiting to be collected” (Haraway 310-311).

“Everything about him is like a human, except that he cannot talk” (*The Elephant Whisperers* 28:12). Here both Raghu and Ammu [another four months old baby elephant who lives along with Bellie, Bomman and Raghu] are treated as equals or as “multispecies”, they are full-fledged vital actants capable of vitality. There is rejection of individualistic language and her belief that animals should not be reduced to passive objects but rather seen as active participants in the complex network of relationships. The film *The Elephant Whisperers* deviates the linguistic limitations of nonhuman animals and bestows the species

with agency and freedom to create a just society.

Kartiki Gonsalves considers the notion of “significant other” (Haraway 15), employing it for nonhumans. She believes that this traditional ‘other’ should be granted access to the social order, however the generic point of reference is through the symbolic activity of language that only humans are said to possess. Animals are seen as social partners, not merely as surrogates of absent humans or projections of anthropomorphic intentions.

Raghu was handed over by the Forest Department dilapidated due to anthropomorphic concerns as per Haraway. Bellie despite of not being a professional caretaker was bestowed with the responsibility of Raghu. “I wasn’t officially an elephant caretaker” (*The Elephant Whisperers* 36: 06). Her connection with Raghu is that of a mother-child bond, “When I first met the baby, he was tugging at my clothes like a child and felt his love” (35:54). The entitlement of a nonhuman animal to “baby” dismantles the generic notion of anthropocentrism.

Haraway introduces the concept of “naturalsocial life” to describe the interconnected relationships between humans and non-human entities in the natural world. These relationships occur on multiple levels and are not solely reliant on linguistic communication. She also emphasizes the importance of articulation, which involves recognizing and creating connections between different entities. Articulation allows for the acknowledgment of differences among all participants and highlights the complexity of multispecies relationships. Once Bomman chides Raghu for losing his bell tied around his neck, at first it seems like the authoritative human entity controlling a mute species. However Bomman rationalises his concern “they wear a bell so we can hear them if they get lost in the forest (33:17). Bomman cannot imagine Raghu being abandoned and going back to his malnourished state.

There is a need to rethink the holistic roles of various actors (human and nonhuman)

within the development of refurbishing the environment , also to recognise the social and power dynamics at play within the relationships. Haraway alludes to the process of “Refiguring the actors” (Haraway 297), this involves cognizing that not all “actors” are significantly human, thereby analysing the magnitude of non-human actors within the system. For this, the social and power dynamics need to be unveiled within these human-nonhuman systems. This promotes a better understanding of the complex interactions between human and nonhuman entities and the influence vested upon by the power structures.

In a soft voice, she says, "I have experienced many losses in my life. My ex-husband was killed by a tiger. This left me feeling scared of the forests. I get scared when I see a tiger" (*The Elephant Whisperers* 30:38). Kartiki Gonsalves not only creates an all good utopian society but signifies the fears of the real world. Most wild animals are tamed and tortured to keep humanity safe and sound. Picturing Bellie’s fear of wild animals and her traumatic experience of loosing her ex-husband to a wild animal portray any common man’s fear about wild animals. In Bellie’s sadness comes baby Raghu comforting and becomes her solace.

Haraway believes that the a society of “companion species” and de-composes as “compost”, finally burying under the ground, in the humus. This imagery of Haraway suggests that a society where humans and all other species interact each other, eventually decompose and return to earth. This ideology traditionally challenges the human-prioritised approach towards society and nature. Bellie says, "I am a tribal woman, and our people come from the heart of the forest" (30:33). She is part of the Kattunayakan community, a tribal group that, for generations, has devoted itself to caring for elephants. "For us Kattunayakans, the well-being of the forest is all that matters," she says (30:25).

Compost, as the work of this unending meeting of beings that is symposium (Haraway 287), is an example of a multispecies assembling that is open and respecting without being

inclusive or exclusive which renders compost societies' worldling as flourishing as it is risky (Haraway 214). The process of composting exemplifies a multispecies assembly, where various organisms come together in an open and respectful manner, creating a flourishing in a risky environment. This challenges notions of exclusivity and emphasizes the importance of coexistence and cooperation among different species.

Theppakadu Elephant camp is a landscape that is the one of the largest undisturbed spaces for the Asian elephant. Here, the Kattunayakan and forest rangers work together to care for abandoned elephants. The locale Theppakadu essentially becomes an area of "compost society". This setting makes people understand how beautiful beings elephants are and to recognize and respect their intelligence. That understanding would help protect their habitat, which the Asian elephant is losing at a rapid pace. Wildlife encroachment, climate change and India's hunger for development are major reasons for Capitalist society which Haraway terms as "Capitalocence".

This society looks at the dynamics that relate multiple lives in compost. Not all lives (including quasi-lives, such as viruses) are equivalent, but all lives are present in Terrapolis (Haraway 11), which means a hypothetical space where all lives, including viruses and other quasi-lives, are present. It represents an egalitarian environment where no life form is inherently superior or excluded. In *The Elephant Whisperers*, Bomman and Bellie care for Raghu and one other abandoned calf sunny and bright Ammu. Just like human teenagers, elephants during their adolescence go through a phase of stubbornness and they don't listen to others. Gonsalves in an interview says "If they are allowed to continue that behaviour, it doesn't end well in the long run". The forest authority takes Raghu away from Bomman and Bellie and puts him under another caretaker who had more experience handling adolescent elephants. It creates an intense separation anxiety to Bomman and Bellie, who miss Raghu desperately. And just like the human

counterparts, the animals [Raghu] show great emotion. In one scene, baby elephant Ammu wipes away Bellie's tears when she is heartbroken over Raghu moving away. In another scene, Ammu reaches out and curls her arm around Bomman's who is about to fetch her some milk in the early hours of the dawn, drawing him closer.

The elephants are a part of the tribe's larger community, too. Raghu even plays football with neighbourhood kids. The major takeaway is to eliminate the concept of 'othering' animals . *The Elephant Whisperers* helps people understand more about elephants and their human caretakers, how they love and understand each other, how they have learnt to adapt and co-exist.

The Elephant Whisperers is a Point of View Shot (POV Shot) narrative documentary film, of which the story is told through the eyes of the central protagonists Bellie and Bomman . It is the angle through which the story is told. A point of view in film making can be first, second or third person point of view. According to Joseph V. Mascelli in his *The Five C's of Cinematography* :

Point-of-view, or simply p.o.v., camera angles record the scene from a particular player's viewpoint. The point-of-view is an objective angle, but since it falls between the objective and subjective angle, it should be placed in a separate category and given special consideration. A point-of-view shot is as close as an objective shot can approach a subjective shot and still remain objective. The camera is positioned at the side of a subjective player whose viewpoint is being depicted so that the audience is given the impression they are standing cheek-to-cheek with the off-screen player. The viewer does not see the event through the player's eyes, as in a subjective shot in which the camera trades places with the screen player. He sees the event from the player's viewpoint, as if standing alongside him. Thus, the camera angle remains objective, since it is an unseen observer not involved in the action.

The documentary film *The Elephant Whisperers* has been narrated from a First Person Point of View. It unfolds the story from the thoughts of central characters POV. The audience comprehends the story through experiences and thoughts of the central character. Kartiki Gonsalves has directed it through the “Objective Point of View” in filmmaking. This technique is one among the widely used in filmmaking and unfolds the narrative through this perspective. There are two types of Objective Point of View in filmmaking ; limited and omniscient. The former is used to tell the story and perspective through the eyes of an observer. This can be an over the shoulder shot or mid shot of characters having a conversation or dialogue. The latter depicts the inner feelings or thoughts of the characters. This is one of most popular form of technique as it develops an emotional bond between the audience and characters. Furthermore, the use of special production or visual effects such as soundtrack, lighting, graphics, etc. amplifies the visual narrative experience.

Wildlife filmmaking is one of the most challenging aspects as it is quite laborious to film around with wild and unpredictable animals, birds as well as the indigenous communities.

Kartiki Gonsalves opines that gaining trust from Kattunayakan community as well as several other times to shoot under dire conditions was challenging. She made conscious decision to film the entire documentary in natural lighting. Another mindful decision is not to inflict physical harm on animals with artificial lights. As per Gonsalves:

I had to do to be ethical about the fact that we were really working with animals and you can't shine bright lights onto animals. And I also wanted to really bring out the rural atmosphere that Bomman, Bellie, and the elephants lived in and they use candlelight. So that's something that I wanted to put in the forefront. I didn't want to go in there with an outsider's perspective that, ‘Oh, we should have more lights so that

I can get my beautiful shots,' because I think there's a certain beauty in showing everything that they do have. And I think representing that in the right way is also something that needs to be done ("The Making of 'The Elephant Whisperers' & the Power of Story to Change Minds").

Ergo, the documentary film effectively produces a sustainable filming ethics and thereby through the process of story telling technique provide a unique perspective that unities communities and species.

Bird's eye-view shots which is often taken above the scenes establish the relationship with landscape and other species or actors. Over the Shoulder Shots that often places the camera to the back of the subject during conversations, thus providing inclusivity to all the actors of the film ("All About Camera Angles").

Interestingly the directorial prowess gives due importance of the species presented in the documentary. Eventhough the docufilm revolves around Raghu, Ammu, Bellie and Bomman, other species such as monkeys, calves, pigs, etc complete screen focus give rise to inclusivity. The scenes shifts in a jiffy to all other aspects of the environment and its vital actants.

Giving significant importance to nature and its species including the people from the tribal community projects the idea of inclusive environment. It has taken a significant amount of energy and hardwork to capture the real incidents happening in a forest reserve. The camera techniques have thereby helped the audience living the urban areas to deeply ponder about the interconnected life of human and nonhuman animals. It is often to difficult to follow ethics when producing a wildlife documentary. Many wildlife documentary films use other snippets from various other documentaries, thus losing its exclusivity. However the docufilm of Kartiki Gonsalves has done marvellously by not losing the authenticity of the film.

Ergo, the documentary film *The Elephant Whisperers* has significantly played a

crucial role in creating an awareness based on the theme of coexistence in multispecies. The camera angles and the entire production of the film are on the same pace as that of the theme that it extols.

Chapter 3

Staying with Trouble: A Care Perspective in the Flourishing of Mudumalai Tiger Reserve

Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene is a work by that explores ways of thinking about and responding to the interconnected ecological, political and social challenges of times. She introduces the concept of “Capitolocene” for broader exploration of analysing the ways of understanding the capitalist era that dominates the non- human animals for material gains. It critiques the notion of Anthropocene which attributes environmental change due to human invasion. Capitolocene highlights the agency of capitalism and its associated systems of exploitation, extraction and inequality that thrives in extinction and social injustice. The documentary film *The Elephant Whisperers* is an outspoken response to monoculturalism's detrimental impact on the environment.

Haraway deems the current society to be human- centered. She argues for embracing a more inclusive, multispecies perspective that acknowledges the entangled relationships between humans and nonhumans, and emphasizes the importance of "making kin" with other beings to navigate a more sustainable future.

Kartiki Gonsalves' *The Elephant Whisperers* demonstrate the devastation wrought by monoculture on the soil and ecosystem but also convey an alarming message, implying that the forest reserve is vulnerable in the Anthropocene. As an Academy award-winning wildlife filmmaker, Gonsalves employs the narrative technique of “in medias res” in the film to foreshadow the looming effects of climate change and highlight the challenges that the villagers and wild animals face. According to Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, the term “in medias res” refers to “starting a story or account straight into the main part without any introduction.” The opening scene of *The Elephant Whisperers* begins with Raghu, a four month-year-old baby elephant in pain. “His tail had been bitten off by stray dogs and his open

wounds were infested with maggots” (*The Elephant Whisperers* 36:49) and a bushfire in a neighbouring area that may not be the central part of the story. However, this scene indicates that Gonsalves starts the film in the midst of their struggles. This creates a sense of urgency and alertness, implying that the environment is always at risk in the Anthropocene, despite of the expert capturing of the picturesque and lush atmosphere of the forest reserve.

Immediately Gonsalves reveals the real reason behind Raghu’s dilapidated state. “ Due to prolonged drought his herd had wandered into a village in search of food and water” (36:34). The film indirectly portrays how “Capitalocene” era has led to a deplorable state for the wild animals to plunge into human settlements in search of basic necessities.

Tsing sees the Anthropocene as defined by the loss of "refugia, places of refuge," while Haraway proposes fostering new epochs that can "replenish refuge" in every way conceivable with one another. Collaborating to "reconstitute refuges," which can partially and robustly recover and recompose biological, cultural, political, and technical aspects (Haraway 101). In other words, Haraway defines refuges as areas where landscapes and waterscapes can be "significantly reconstituted." We are currently at a moment where "the limits of homeostatic adaptation" have been reached, and it is becoming increasingly important to participate in care practice by "repopulating and refilling broken places" (Haraway and Tsing). The degradation of the environment and the subjugation of women are inextricably linked, and both require a place of refuge for healing and repair. Refuge acts as a form of resistance against oppressive systems, notably those maintained by monoculturalism, patriarchy, and capitalism. In *The Elephant Whisperers* the Theppakkadu Elephant Camp stands as a place of refuge. The term ‘camp’ is used to describe those places in which biological and political life, private and public, cannot be distinguished from each other. This exceptional spatial arrangement , for example a detention centre for asylum seekers, a ‘black’ rendition site, or a Nazi death camp continues to function outside the normal judicial

order.

In the Nazi camps authorised the state to takes any person into custody even if they had not broken any law, and hence this necessarily becomes a state of siege (Agamben 12).

However Gonsalves Theppakkadu Elephant Camp becomes second to none as it deviates the standard signification of camp. Elephants are held in high regard in Indian culture. However, in temple elephants face widespread maltreatment, which animal welfare groups are bringing to the public's notice. Elephants in Kerala, India, spend their lives tethered, living in tiny areas and performing at festivals. According to Bomman the Theppakadu Elephant Camp is a place of refuge that reconstituted Raghu from his painful condition. “Orphaned, abandoned and displaced wild elephants are brought here, and we take care of them” (*The Elephant Whisperers* 34:29). The Theppakadu Elephant Camp essentially becomes a space of reconstitution and resistance to tackle any worse conditions caused by the “Capitalocene”.

Bellie and Bomman serve as highly responsible citizens in fostering respectful and responsible society that closely watches the capitalist ruins. Considering the dire repurcussions, the couple significantly stands as a shield against the environmental injustice. Capitalizing “THE VERDANT GREENS ARE GONE” (21:18) and “REPLACED BY THE SCORCHING HEAT OF SUMMER” (21:15), portrays how callous human actions have contributed to the extermination of the natural habitat. The drought-struck area has led many elephant herds and animals go astray and plunge into human settlements. The couple understands the situation of wild animals especially elephants. Caring Raghu becomes the couple’s helping hand towards caring nature, but “ we are not able to save all of them” (05:23).

Haraway increasingly problematizes the use of technologies of domination and the domination of animals as, questioning the instrumental relations between humans and nonhumans and extending the consideration of social agency to “companion species” or non-

human animals. "It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with.... It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories" (Haraway 12).

Bomman and Bellie gives due consideration to both nonhuman animals Raghu and Ammu. A mediocre elephant mahout take care of the basic needs of an elephant, probably taming leading to torture. However, Bellie and Bomman deviates from the conventional mahout type. Gonsalves has significantly depicted the lives of two mahouts Bellie and Bomman who consider both Raghu and Ammu as "companion species". Eventhough both Raghu and Ammu live in a man-made shack, it never becomes a suffocating cell or prison for the nonhuman animals. Infact, Bomman has made himself a shack next door to keep an eye on both elephants. The intriguing design of the shack, such as a small window through which Raghu could move his head to reach Bomman next door. This essentially gives agency to the nonhuman animals who are demarcated due to their linguistic limitation. Haraway through her concept of "companion species" has made people ponder rather uniquely to consider nonhuman animals in holistic development for the universe.

Ecofeminists promote "Thinking with the soil" as living, an interconnected system that needs care and attention. The "composting" metaphor includes two critical factors: transformation and connectivity. In an interview with ecofeminist Catriona Sandilands, feminist scholar Marianna Szczygielska argues that "composting" has been used as a powerful material metaphor for "surviving on a damaged planet" and "living in capitalist ruins" by authors such as Haraway and Tsing (Cielemęcka and Szczygielska 14).

Matters of Care, book by de la Bellacasa, encourages readers to consider "not just about compost, as compost, or like compost, but rather with compost" (Bellacasa la 14). Finally, composting can be viewed as a biopolitical practice that may challenge Zygmunt Bauman's "gardening state," which governs and disciplines both plants and humans. We are

currently living in a biopolitical epoch in which life is subjugated to money .

Critics like Sandilands sees composting as a sequence of meetings with multispecies players rather than just a metaphor for political action (14). Haraway agrees on composting, preferring it to posthumanism and emphasising humus over humanities (Haraway 32).

In *The Elephant Whisperers* projects the contradicting question of who is a real elephant lover? Do an elephant lover associate themselves with connectivity and interdependence. However the idea of an “Aana Premi”, translated into Malayalam as an elephant lover significantly deviate from Gonsalves role models, Bellie and Bomman.

Elephants are regarded as a cultural emblem in India. Elephants were utilised in warfare. The more elephants they possessed, the more powerful they became. In India, elephants are also venerated as the incarnation of Lord Ganesha, a Hindu god with an elephant head. Because of this veneration, elephants have traditionally been regarded holy. A cruel dichotomy exists among the revered and worshipped elephants. On one side, they are enslaved and denied of their fundamental needs. When they first enter the temple, they immediately decorate it with garlands and bells, and even the shackles are decked. Then the deity's idol will be placed on the elephant's back. In addition, there are three or four men seated on the elephant. Around 300 to 400 kilogrammes of load are installed. Then they are made to circle around the temples three or four times with the music, trumpets, and drum sounds, which are extremely upsetting because elephants have sensitive hearing. Instead of dwelling happily in the wilderness, they are enslaved. This is an appalling reality and thus becomes a striking contrast.

Indians praise and pay respect to elephants who are considered as incarnation of Lord Ganesha, a Hindu God. Ergo, they have been projected as deity of Ganesha during religious festivities. Gonsalves has portrayed how the “Kattunayakan Tribal Community” has respected the limits of a living creature during religious festivities. Bomman says, “We pray

to Lord Ganesha. Seeing an elephant, to us, is equivalent to seeing God” (*The Elephant Whisperers* 21:57). People of the “Kattunayakan” community serve elephants as the same way as they consider Gods. “Kattunayakan” means “King of Forest”, might connote to an authoritative attitude, however they believe themselves in protecting a generation of human and nonhuman species.

“On a special ceremony day, elephant calves are taken to seek their blessings from Lord Ganesha” (22:29). Indian traditions never go without any adornments and festoons. During the temple festivities Raghu, Ammu and other elephants are taken to the temple with only a flower garland as an only festoon bejeweled. This can be seen as a stark contrast to the attitude of people, especially in the Southern part of India who hangs garlands and other festoon of around 300-400 kilograms. “The elephant Thechikottukavu Ramachendran stands ten and a half feet tall and could easily be India's largest captive elephant. Because of his stature, he has historically inaugurated the year's major festival in Kerala, India” (“Episode 17: The dark reality behind India’s festival elephants”).

“The number of captive elephants is declining. There were an estimated 1,000 captive elephants in Kerala in 2010, but there are now less than 500. However, the reduction is painful. The increased demand is forcing current elephants to become overly agitated as they are booked in more and more festivals. And whether legal or not, elephants usually die before their natural lifespan “ (Episode 17: The dark reality behind India’s festival elephants).

In 2003, the practice of purchasing elephants was prohibited in India. Today, owning an elephant requires a document proving that it was captured before then. The law isn't foolproof. People continue to capture and trade elephants illegally.

Elephants go through a lot of "schooling" and rigorous training , a lot of hitting, essentially taming them to obey like a child. So it learns that they must obey a human being. If you do not obey, you will be penalised. So this is how they can stroll beside humans on a

highly crowded street, nothing but a captured wild elephant.

“THE VERDANT GREENS ARE GONE, REPLACED BY THE SCORCHING HEAT OF THE SUMMER” (*The Elephant Whisperers* 21:18). “WILD ELEPHANTS ROAM IN SEARCH OF FOOD AND WATER” (21:01). Not only nonhuman animals but also humans suffer from these excruciating environmental crisis. It then shifts to the carcass of a dead elephant all alone to be decomposed as compost. The carcass of the elephant becomes highly symbolic of the dark reality of “Capitalocene”. There are no lush greens but a dried and arid forest. This becomes a point of deviation as per Haraway’s theory of “Staying with Trouble”, she suggests to “make kin not babies”, meaning one has to make create a close knit community that helps in the flourishing the environment.

Bellie and Bomman advocates the principle of “Staying with Trouble”. Despite of the detrimental effects of the environment and caring for Raghu and Ammu as always been a responsible and humongous task for both. However they stood with all the troubles and emerged as successful caretakers that probably the world has seen. Their ideological stance has taken their recognition to a worldwide stage.

Both Raghu and Ammu has significantly played a role in bringing Bellie and Bomman’s relationship to grow leading to their marriage. Gonsalves has beautifully pictured how the “Kattunayakan” community becomes an example of a “compost society” as per Haraway. They had a close knit wedding with the Kattunayakan rituals, dance, music, etc. Bellie and Bomman considered Raghu and Ammu as their own children. They cannot imagine their wedding day without the presence of their Raghu and Ammu. Since the couple see God through Raghu and Ammu, they honoured both during the wedding ceremony. The presence of Raghu and Ammu has given a life for Bellie and Bomman. They together led a life of joy, peace and harmony.

But things took a drastic turn in the lives of Bellie, Bomman and Ammu when

Raghu was taken back by the forest authority to be trained under adolescent elephant caretaker since Raghu has reached his puberty. The separation was unbearable for the couple. Bomman went days crying and desperate. According to Bellie, the moment Raghu was taken away Ammu ran frantically to see Raghu. Ammu went for days without proper eating.

According to Haraway, “the practices around Speculative Fabulation are activated with the urgency and importance of different modes of thinking, imagining, and acting that is urgent in the Anthropocene” (Haraway 7). A goal behind thinking through the intersections provided by the practices of Feminist Speculative Fabulation, is to question and explore possibilities for a collective flourishing in the future. Haraway envisions the ideas of care, nurturing and interdependence that resonate with feminist perspectives.

With “compost communities” Haraway produces the idea of interconnected that blur boundaries and engage in symbiotic relationships. Such communities challenge the notion of clear frontier and rigid identities. These societies also practice the concept of “corridor thinking” (218) and build passages that allow symbionts to travel and flourish in movement migratory species, like the monarch butterflies for the Camilles of *The Camille Stories* (Haraway). Such interactive passages within the compost communities impart flourishing of diverse species and promote mobility. Compost societies has healing and restorative powers and strives to emerge organically within inherited ruins, cultivating hospitable spaces of for renewal and balancing inequalities.

The concept of story telling is presented in the scene were Bellie tells a bedtime story to her granddaughter Sanjana:

“Today I will tell you a story of three blind men. They came across an elephant in a jungle. One of them touched the trunk and said it felt like a serpent. Another touched the ear and said, “It’s a sieve”. The third touched the tail and said, “It’s a broom”....many people believe that elephants are dangerous and they raid crops. But only people who live close to

elephants will know how they are.” (*The Elephant Whisperers*, 11:29). “When you give them love, they give back to you in the same way. Just like Ammu and Raghu” (11:21).

This bedtime story becomes an allegory that shatters the conventional belief system of elephants posing threat to the humankind. Bellie and Bomman wishes for a generation that would continue their healthy ideological legacy. The compost societies depend on a life that does not depend on genetic or reproductive ties, that is it challenges the conventional understanding of kinship as solely tied to reproduction. Ergo, Kinship has been redefined as *oddkin* moving away from the natalist perspective (of kinship and reproduction). Instead she calls for “breaking the necessity of the tie between kinship and reproduction” (Haraway 216). This helps to emphasize the need to recognize intersectional complexities. She highlights the multispecies perspective by considering diverse experiences of human and nonhuman within the compost communities.

“I’m not scared of forest anymore. But now I have found my way through it, I have found my voice” (06:38). Essentially inhabiting coexistence and interdependence has significantly helped Bellie to overcome her fear towards wild animals and wilderness.

As Raghu emerges from ruins to riches similarly Bellie finds agency through her strength. “Now everyone knows me, as the mother of elephants, makes me proud” (06:03).

Ending scene shows the dry and arid land/ forest back to its lush green scenario. The “situated” utilitarian perspective of Haraway does not differentiate between murderable or disposable species, but deems that everyone has a responsibility not to let or force them to die or killed.

Multispecies compost societies as per Haraway can be cultivated among amid the dilapidated ecologies of the current era.

Haraway highlights how evolution is not a matter of hierarchical dominance but “the outcome of lateral transformations, assimilations, digestions and ejections through which

living beings materially” (Haraway 12). This concept emphasises the fluidity and complexity of evolutionary trajectories, highlighting how living beings continuously interact, exchange genetic material, and evolve together. Evolution, in this view, is not a linear progression dictated by a single genealogy but a complex network of relationships, transformations, and adaptations.

The concept allows us to imagine the collectivity of biological, human and non-human, a togetherness that Haraway refers to as 'ecological assemblages.' Haraway's proposal for a multispecies becoming-with acknowledges assemblages and 'technological couplings' crossing paths with more-than-human worlds.

Bellie and Bomman necessarily becomes the spokesperson for advocating significant changes towards environmental destruction. “It is the actions of us humans that is causing elephants to enter village these. Our mistakes are very harmful both for us and for elephants” (*The Elephant Whisperers* 05:40).

The ending scenes of the documentary becomes thought-provoking as the audience witness the future generation, the children of the village engaging and thriving along with the elephants. “ These children are our future” (04:09).

The documentary film *The Elephant Whisperers* chronicles the journey of establishing and rejuvenating the Theppakkadu Elephant Camp and the entire Madumalai Tiger Reserve of Tamil Nadu. The documentary film illustrates the transformation of the injured and dilapidated baby elephant into a resuscitate being of the earth.

In *The Companion Species Manifesto*, Haraway questions the prevalent view of "pets" or "animals" as just items or commodities owned by humans. Instead, she contends that humans' relationships with animals, particularly dogs, are much more sophisticated and reciprocal.

Haraway invented the phrase *companion species* to emphasize the fact that people and

animals, particularly dogs, have co-evolved and coexisted in close partnerships for thousands of years. The term "companion" implies a close bond, mutual dependence, and shared history between humans and these creatures.

Haraway's concept of companion species is based on the assumption that humans and dogs, in addition to other animals have a similar history of labour, cohabitation, and evolution. She contends that these connections are more than just domination or exploitation; they include reciprocal links, mutualism, and a shared history of becoming together.

In adherence to the concept of "companion species", Bellie and Bomman challenges the distinctions between humans and animals, nature and culture, and wild and domestic. They advocate for a rethinking of how humans see and treat animals. This contributes to more ethical and respectful relationships based on care and responsibility.

The Kattunayakan community raises significant ethical concerns about the cruel mundane treatment of animals. Kartiki Gonsalves emphasises the importance of responsible management, care, and understanding the history and lives of the animals.

The Capitalocence societal culture and its the constant search of profit results in a sharp money-minded mentality. This also happens at the expense of ethical and sustainable methods, particularly in the production of food and consumables that are essential for human survival. In the case of poultry farming, the demand for increased yields and more profits has led to the widespread usage of numerous harmful chemicals. These compounds are injected into the bodies of chickens to speed up their growth and produce more meat. Hens are given hormone injections to increase egg production in order to maximize income.

However, the repercussions of these actions go far beyond the poultry farm. The overwhelming use of drugs and hormones jeopardizes the animal welfare and human health alike. Consuming meat and eggs from these animals treated with additives exposes us to numerous kinds of potentially harmful elements into our meals, with far-reaching and

adverse health consequences. Apart from this there are serious environmental and ethical concerns as well. Factory processed meat and egg in such facilities adds to environmental deterioration by polluting waterways and overusing other resources. The confinement and exploitation of animals in these factories raises ethical concerns regarding living creatures and the commodification of their lives for the sake of profit.

Furthermore, the drive for higher yields and lower production costs frequently marginalizes small-scale farmers who prioritise more sustainable and ecologically sound farming practices. These farmers, who desire to rear animals in a more natural and ethical settings, are unable to compete with the mass-produced items flooding the market.

Elephants are often revered to the status of God and deemed as an Indian cultural symbol. However the term ‘Elephant lover’ or ‘Aana Premi’ is quite contradicting in its nature, because of the myriad contextual meanings. In the Western scenario, an elephant lover is a person who enjoys gazing elephants in their own wild habitat. Whereas in Indian context, an elephant lover is a person who enjoys its enslavement. The elephant lover celebrates the elephant being captured and dolled up in Indian festivities with bursting crackers and the crescendo of drums creates an unpleasant atmosphere for the elephants.

The terrible reality of elephant abuse might be hard for people who consider themselves as true elephant lovers. Elephants, respected for their intelligence, social relationships, and gentle demeanour, are subjected to frequent human abuse and greed. This exploitation manifests itself in myriad ways, ranging from the horrific tactics of the elephant trade to the hidden cruelty that lurks behind elephant camps and attractions.

One of the most devastating components of the elephant trade is the illegal poaching and trading of these creatures for their ivory tusks. Despite international bans and conservation efforts, elephants are still being hunted for their tusks, which are highly valued in international markets. This trade kills many elephants and affects entire herds and

ecosystems.

Elephant camps, which are marketed as sanctuaries or tourist attractions, frequently conceal a darker truth beneath their veneer of protection and care. Young elephants are forcibly torn from their mothers, caged, and subjected to physical and psychological torture in order to make them submit to human demands.

Elephant lovers who are sincerely concerned about the welfare of these animals frequently find themselves in a tough situation. The tragic truth of the elephant trade and the hidden cruelties in tourist attractions might make them feel helpless and overwhelmed. However, many dedicated individuals and organisations work tirelessly to raise awareness, rescue abused elephants, and lobby for tighter animal welfare standards and enforcement. Elephant enthusiasts, must educate themselves and others on the realities of these magnificent creatures face. By supporting ethical sanctuaries and responsible tourist practices, one must ensure that elephants receive the respect, dignity, and care they need.

Ergo, the documentary film *The Elephant Whisperers* stands out as a prime example that advocates for ethical approaches towards nurturing nature and ensuring the well-being of elephants. Bellie and Bomman emerge as exemplary figures within the realm of elephant lovers, contrasting sharply with those who merely maintain a facade of affection while subjecting these magnificent creatures to mistreatment. Unlike the superficial elephant enthusiasts who parade them in heavily adorned splendor for temple rituals, Bellie and Bomman embody genuine love and care for the elephants.

Conclusion

The documentary film *The Elephant Whisperers* has essentially put a massive impact worldwide making it an Oscar- winning documentary film of 2023. One can significantly understand the pertinence of such films that is not just fictional but true to its colours. The director Karthiki Gonsalves has marvellously pictured a space, probably unknown in today's world of poaching and killing for material needs.

Furthermore, the film highlights the park's natural splendour while also delving into the lifestyle and culture of the indigenous tribal tribe, which has lived in harmony with nature for generations. The film not only depicts the emotional relationship between an animal and humans, but it also highlights Indian environmental conservation traditions, making it a wonderful testament to nature's strength and human compassion.

This documentary film stands analogous to the realities all animals and nature. The objective of this project attempts to study the above mentioned documentary film on the basis of theories that explore the role of non human animals in the process of evolution and constitution of societies and thereby advocates a response-able multispecies politics.

It is hightime that literary criticism and theory should advocate for issues that pose threat to the environment as well as the humanity. Haraway has become a strong figure for stepping out and “thinking with the soil”.

In today's rapidly evolving literary landscape, the dynamism of literary theory calls for a shift towards addressing pressing environmental concerns with a lens that not only delves into the problems but also offers viable solutions and raises public awareness. Natural calamities, the escalating impacts of climate change, and the depletion of biodiversity are stark reminders of the hostilities inflicted upon the environment, largely driven by capitalist greed. Certain species, ecosystems, and elements are often discarded as inconsequential in the pursuit of profit and progress. Yet, these overlooked components hold profound importance,

their absence reverberating through the intricate tapestry of life on Earth. It is imperative that literary theory, as a reflective tool of societal values and norms, illuminates these critical issues, urging us to confront the consequences of our actions and the urgent need for responsible stewardship of our planet.

Documentaries like *The Elephant Whisperers* have enormous impact because they serve as emotional mirrors to the reality of our natural world. Kartiki Gonsalves' directing prowess has not only caught a narrative, but also revealed a refuge of hope in a landscape marred by poaching and exploitation. The video serves as a tribute to nature's enduring endurance, set against the backdrop of a civilization coping with its own contempt for the environment.

By delving into the lives of the park's indigenous tribal clan, the film sheds light on a way of life that is inextricably linked to the rhythms of nature. It provides an insight into a society that has developed a harmonious relationship with the land, coexisting with the flora and fauna that surrounds them. This portrayal is a compelling reminder of the wisdom contained in traditional ecological practices, calling for a return to a more sustainable way of living.

Furthermore, *The Elephant Whisperers* represents more than just the link between humans and animals; it also serves as a conduit for Indian environmental conservation practices. The film's vision transports spectators to a world where appreciation for nature is more than a sentiment, but a way of life. The stories weaved within its frames reflect the voices of individuals who have long recognised the delicate balance that keeps our world alive.

The urgency of the environmental crisis necessitates a proactive and involved response from all sectors of society, including literature and criticism. *The Elephant Whisperers* is a moving reminder of the power of narrative to spark change, promote

empathy, and encourage a stronger connection to the natural world.

The impact of *The Elephant Whisperers* is not merely its cinematic genius, but also its deep invitation to reconsider our relationship with the natural world. The humankind must learn to embark on a path of meditation, action, and rejuvenation, inspired by the wisdom of elephants and the enduring spirit of indigenous tribes.

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