



HUMAN-ANIMAL COEXISTENCE: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL READING OF SELECT CHILDREN'S MOVIES

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Abstract

A paradigm shift has affected all faculties of learning, giving rise to an array of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary disciplines. The biological and anthropological perspectives offered by the literary texts and its cinematic adaptation opens new doors to anthrozoological perception of the surrounding world. Man is considered to be a social animal and hence in all societies they are seen to coexist with animals in various structures from parasitism and avarice to kinship. This article attempts to explore the concept of anthrozoology in select children's movies with an eye to establishing the fact that even with all instance of technological advances, the bonding of mankind with nature and its associated creatures are indispensable. This realisation can prove instrumental to the well-being of the world paired with an urgent need to understand human-animal interactions as well as the overwhelming effect of humans on the natural resources needed for the survival of all animal species. The close reading of the movies belonging to the genre of children's films portray an exhaustive meaning to human-animal coexistence. These select movies has also been analysed to formulate a cross-cultural understanding of the concept examining how our relationships with animals are mediated by culture, to what extent belief systems induce current animal, human, and environmental social problems and the positive psychology engendered through this understanding of this subject. The prerequisite of biodiversity, ways of preservation and need for sustainability adds to the significance of this study.

Key words: Anthropological perspective, Anthrozoology, Children's movies, Human-animal coexistence, Cross-cultural

The history of humankind may be continuously seen as a dynamic dislodging from life in nature to life in urban networks. Man is an animal variety which advanced from the common habitat and, in this way, thinks that it is hard to live without

some contact with nature. The difference between animals and human beings have been extensively studied. Humans, from a *biological* perspective are treated as one species among many, but the fables and films generated for children often offer

an *anthropocentric* perspective, infusing animals with human-like characteristics. These distinctly different perspectives have severe impacts on children's reasoning about the natural world. Some of the research studies argue that children universally begin with an anthropocentric outlook and that acquiring a biological viewpoint necessitates a rudimentary conceptual change (Carey 269). It is in this context, children's books and other medias such as cartoons and films serve the purpose of the double-edged swords. The influence of films and other media may not only instinctively promote sustenance of human-centered reasoning in young children, but also may be instrumental in redirecting children's attention to a biological point of view.

This article engages the attention to the close interconnection between the humans and animal world, the extent and the importance of this situation as realised through literature written on such themes for children, its flourishing experience through the world of films and the relevance of the same in the twenty-first century scenario. The study brings in how the present situational analysis sometimes project a desperate need that effect the environments, and culture worldwide. At this juncture, the exploration of the films that depict this inevitable connection gets well established. There is an urgent need to understand human-animal interactions and relations as increasingly aware of our devastating impact on the natural resources needed for the survival of all animal species. Children's literature and films have been a fertile soil that reconnoitres such topics as climate change and biodiversity, the impact of animal domestication and industrial farming on local and global ecosystems, and the impact of human consumption of wild species for food, entertainment, medicine, and social status. An assessment of the human-animal interactions, its possibilities and the positive effects of human-animal relationships on either party based on their interactions has been done through the anthrozoological reading of two children's films- *The Jungle Book*, and *Dumbo*. All these films portray clear evidence of how humans and animals coexist beneficially and what is the real meaning of being an animal and their variations across cultures. Though

an array of films falls into this category of children's films, the two chosen for analysis are considered representational films in this mode.

The rationale of this study originates from the feeling that the human world is inexorably connected to nature, or more particularly to the world of flora and fauna. This idea is brought into the study by discovering the multiple dimensions instigated through the anthropological reading of children's literature but confined to select films as part of this study. The concept of anthrozoology need to be elucidated primarily before delving deep into the films which has this theme as its backdrop. Apart from probing into the ecocritical elements, ethnic and indigenous aspects, very little efforts tried in this regard accentuates the scope of this inquiry.

Anthrozoology, commonly known as human-non-human-animal studies, or HAS, is an interdisciplinary area that deals with interactions between humans and other animals. It is a subgroup of ethnobiology, a complex field of knowledge and action that interfaces with many scientific disciplines. While ethnobiology offers a wider perspective, the studies confining to anthrozoology as an academic discipline was spurred by reports that pertained to the health and psychological benefits of interacting with animals and which is seen overlapping with other disciplines. The official basis for it was the establishment of the academic journals *Anthrozoös* in 1987 and *Society & Animals* in 1993. Anthrozoological inquiry extends to the psychological and biological attitudes toward the use of animals, cross-cultural similarities and differences in human-animal relationships and the roles of animals in art, religion, mythology, sport, and literature. Anthrozoology bridges the gaps of various branches of learning such as humanities and the social, behavioural, and biomedical sciences.

The upcoming issues in the present scenario demands a close evaluation of and finding solutions to the issues raised in this context by providing a cross-cultural understanding of the concept of the animal by examining how our relationships with animals are mediated by culture, and thus how

belief systems contribute to current animal, human, and environmental social problems.

Animals play profoundly important roles in the lives of humans. All human interactions with animals and nature take place within a cultural context. The anthrozoological concept in the select films is established through the symbolic, economic, ecological, and social consequences of human/non-human animal interaction in a variety of cross-cultural contexts. Presently, the ubiquitous and developmental significance of nonhuman animals has been well established and it is nothing but an artificial distinction to consider children and their environments without the multitude of living beings that share them. Traditional disciplines, such as psychology and sociology, have still confined their arenas to anthropocentric roots without actively moving into the sphere of biocentric disciplines (Melson, 2001).

Pondering upon the realms of children's literature urges a "paradigm shift" or new Gestalt, which returns children (and all humans) to the environments in which they evolved, the buzzing, blooming natural world of other living things. Some of the crucial developments associated with this new world comprises of physiological development; cognitive development resulting from considering animals as significant social beings in terms of emotional closeness and support (McConnell et al. 1243) socio-emotional development and moral development.

Often animal representations are founded on human interests and cannot claimed to be true. Apart from our inability to represent accurately the animal experience, Baker (1993) also points to the extensive and paradoxical manner in which we use animals as symbols. This allows a more sinister interpretation of children's stories to take shape.

Plantiga and Smith (1999) confirm these findings that mirror neurons fire in the same areas of the observer's brain as if he were the performer (Haidt S137), solidifying that film experiences remain in continuity with real-world experiences. The possibilities of anthrozoological readings in children's literature is just superficially dealt with to emphasise the impacts of animals in human world,

but this study employs the potentials of children's films in establishing this perspective on its audience as well as its consequences. The films selected for study mainly focusses on perceptions such as emotional or relational bonds between humans and animals, the ways in which some animals fit into human societies, the variation in this coexistence between cultures, and change over times, the social construction of animals in human world and what it means to be animal, parallels between human-animal interactions and human-technology interactions, the place of animals in human-occupied spaces and the correlation of mind, self, and personhood in nonhuman animals.

Each of these films are looked up from these standpoints to establish the anthrozoological perspective imposed through these films, how and to what extent the coexistence has been realised and its influence on positive individual psychology. For this purpose, each of the selected films will be dealt with in detail to invade the prospects of already stated hypothesis.

The *first* film chosen for analysis is *The Jungle book*, a collection of stories by Rudyard Kipling, published in 1894. *The Second Jungle Book*, published in 1895, contains stories linked by poems. Much like the 1967 movie, this one has a loose relationship with the Kipling tales, originally published in 1894. It's no surprise, given Kipling's gravity that the 2016 movie sticks close to the first film in its boyish bounce and sunny vibe. Written by Justin Marks, it opens with Mowgli as a preteenager, racing alongside his protector, the panther Bagheera, who years earlier placed him in the care of a mother wolf, Raksha. Much of the story involves Shere Khan's plotting against Mowgli amid adventures with Baloo the bear, Kaa the snake and others.

Mowgli, an Indian boy who is raised by wolves and learns self-sufficiency and wisdom from the jungle animals explains how mind, self, and personhood in nonhuman animals is an imperative. The film describes the social life of the wolf pack and, more fancifully, the justice and natural order of life in the jungle. Among the animals whose tales are related in the work are Akela the

wolf; Baloo the brown bear; Shere Khan, the boastful Bengal tiger who is Mowgli's enemy; Tabaqui the jackal, Shere Khan's obsequious servant; Kaa the python; Bagheera the panther; and Rikki-tikki-tavi the mongoose. An array of animals is part of the film contradicting the human belief that a human child can be raised only among human beings and the fear imposed on animal world especially wild animals as human foes. The accommodability and approachability presented by the human-animal world offers a purely anthrozoological perspective.

The interventions of human beings into the jungle, commonly considered an animal world, can be traced to the ancestry of Mowgli, the orphan boy. The assumption that Mowgli may have been orphaned as a baby when Shere Khan killed his father leads to the intrusions of human beings into the animal world. Instead of depicting *The Jungle Book* as a story about an abandoned child who raises himself, thereby representing how some animals fit into human societies. The Indian wolves Akela and Raksha raise him as part of their pack, teaching him their values and survival skills, and the panther Bagheera acts as his tutor and mentor, trying to find a solution when Shere Khan's enmity makes Mowgli's presence in the wolf pack untenable. These scenes are indicative of cinematic elevation that leads to increase in altruism and prosocial behavior as revealed in several additional studies as well (Aquino 708; Cox 334; Landis et al. 83; Schnall 316). This opens the door that movies may increase desired positive behaviour. Indeed, the term cinematic elevation refers to the ability of movies to promote altruism, such that a viewer is inspired to perform acts to improve the welfare of others after watching a portrayal of virtue, goodness, and/or character strength (Niemic n.p).

The Jungle Book is a story about how Mowgli applies the lessons that Akela, Raksha and Bagheera have instilled in him once he's no longer living with the wolves and after he and Bagheera become separated on the way to the human settlement where Bagheera wants Mowgli to live. The movie is an argument that a well-raised child, helped by decent adults, can make his way in the world even in the absence of a hovering parental presence. This

highlights the human-animal bond and the place of animals in human-occupied spaces.

Mowgli, over the course of his journey, faces the sorts of physical and moral perils that would send plenty of contemporary parents into helicopter mode. He gets bad scratches and a raft of bee stings while helping Baloo steal honeycombs off a cliff. He is almost fatally distracted by the python Kaa, and his time with Baloo shades into a certain indolence. Mowgli is threatened by the orangutan King Louie and must confront the murderous Shere Khan in the movie's climax, saving himself with a combination of inventiveness and wolf-pack values. These challenges don't destroy him, though. Mowgli puts honey on his bee stings as a remedy and washes himself off when he gets dirty. He recognizes King Louie's request for fire as a dangerous bid for power that could transform the jungle where Mowgli grew up. While Mowgli absorbs many of Akela, Raksha and Bagheera's lessons, he also makes up his own mind about what's right, using the tools they disdain to gather honey, save a baby elephant who has fallen into a pit and ultimately lure Shere Khan to his death. When Mowgli does do something selfish and destructive, accidentally setting the forest on fire in his rush to confront Shere Khan, he's able to recognize the harm that he has caused and to gutter his stolen torch before it's too late to extinguish the blaze.

Shere Khan is a physically intimidating antagonist, and his attacks on Akela and Bagheera have more real menace than any of the scenes of citywide destruction that dominate action flicks aimed at teenagers and grown-ups. But those moments of anxiety are punctuated by the pure joy that is Mowgli running through the forest or acting on a flash of inspiration. but his pleasure in his freedom, his cleverness and his moral good sense are stronger than our fear.

Parallels between human-animal interactions and human-technology interactions are drawn in almost all modes of the film. The gaudy and glorious flora, the gathering clouds and the wind stirring them, all of which were created, with various degrees of believability, via computers. The child playing Mowgli — the human orphan turned wolf

child — is played by an actual kid, who frolics with computer-generated critters, a smart call, given that animals can be tricky to work with and that some of this menagerie's real-life equivalents are endangered. The lush and arid environments and padding paws were digitally created. The resulting look, pitched between photorealism and impressionism, hovers between the realistic and the uncanny. It turns out that the movie was shot in a Los Angeles warehouse, which paradoxically seems like an old-fashioned way to make worlds.

Shere Khan is still the baddie, but now he's lethally, instead of imperiously, cool, which seems unfair, given that Bengal tigers are endangered. The rest of the adult animals, meanwhile, largely register as noble, particularly the elephants that Bagheera and Mowgli bow down before. In the 1967 film, the elephants are amusingly buffoonish and march in a pachyderm parade as their leader invokes his time with the maharajah. The 2016 movie doesn't refer directly to our environmental catastrophes, including the decimation of the elephant population. Yet when Bagheera now instructs Mowgli to bow before the elephants, it feels as if the filmmakers were gesturing to the truth that this fantasy and its relation to the real world are now tragically different from what they were in Kipling's time.

And when Mowgli helps out the elephants, there's a suggestion that humans can play their part in their rescue, which is a comforting moral for the children who are this movie's main audience.

The integration of cultures in the animal and human world, together with its variations can also find its place in this film. Rudyard Kipling's version asserts that every creature abides by the Law of the Jungle, a decree that's been read as a proxy for British imperialist rule. But the filmized version both the 1967 and 2016 Mowglis, dictates that humans can exist with nature, as long as nature isn't too wild. There's an argument to be made against that kind of warm domination of nature. Yet it's also true that generations have grown up loving and respecting animals (as animals, not just human surrogates) because of the peaceable kingdom that has been created. Mowgli trades in his four-legged foe for

some two-legged villains—before the only wild worlds we have left are computer-generated. Rudyard Kipling's weighty colonialist baggage, both by giving Mowgli, an Indian child is provided an American voice, and as the villainous tiger, Shere Khan, who sounds just as a world-weary British royal to sound after centuries of plundering.

The farsighted vision imposed by anthrozoology of the animal to fit into the human spaces finds its application in various instances of *The Jungle Book* which centres on the life of a barefoot child who lives in a furry community right out of a pastoral idyll. The film features tangy vocal performances, hand-drawn animation and the ear-worming song "The Bare Necessities." But it also has queasy-making passages, none more so than the scene in which Louis Prima, as the orangutan King Louie, sings a Dixieland version of "I Wanna Be Like You" — "An ape like me/Can learn to be human, too".

The second film analysed as part of this study is the film *Dumbo* which again has ample anthrozoological moments to its credit. *Dumbo* tells the story of a tiny circus elephant whose enormous floppy ears enable him to fly. The story opens in 1919 at a down-and-out circus owned by Max Medici, a ringmaster who presides over the movie's busily milling, child-friendly freaks and geeks. By the time an earnest, tamped-down Colin Farrell enters as Holt, a big-tent trick rider turned disabled World War I veteran, the near two-hour running time feels a lot like a threat. Things pick up when baby Dumbo arrives in a makeshift birthing bed. Now a digital cutie with gigantic ears that hang off each side of his head like heavy leather curtains, the newest, littlest circus addition is conspicuously more animal than his childlike antecedent. He's an Indian elephant, so his trunk has one searching finger Like the original, this Dumbo doesn't speak and hence the focus is on his unnaturally large, expressive eyes.. Those eyes moisten a lot, including when Holt's drearily conceptualized and motherless -children comfort Dumbo after his protective mom is sent to elephant jail.

The beneficial impact of human-animal bond has been highlighted through the timely

interventions of the kids who help to teach Dumbo to fly, coaxing him with a feather he snuffles into his trunk: 'He sneezes, and the exhalation sends him up. When he finally achieves genuine lift off, soaring around the interior of the circus's one-ring tent, Burton does, too. It's ticklish fun to watch baby elephants of any kind, including an airborne one.' That's true even if Dumbo's flights prove increasingly bleak because he's at the mercy of some very bad people. Humans are secondary attractions in the 1941 movie and its animals are people proxies. Vandevere is a stereotypical Richie Rich screen villain with a shadowy lair; dark designs; a wolfish smile; and a silky, possibly fatal femme, Colette. The lack of timely knowledge or late realisations that dawn in human beings adversely affecting the anthrozoological prospects are well detailed. Holt is galloping through flames and Vandevere is threatening to kill Dumbo's mom. The animals are roaring, the workers are revolting, and Burton has merrily turned what could have been another remake into something genuinely different and surprising.

The image superimposed through Dumbo is nothing but how additional faculties are considered as a misfit by the human beings but only at a very later stage they tend to accept the positive outcomes it inculcates is highlighted throughout the film. Dumbo who is born with plaintive blue eyes and oversized ears is rejected and misunderstood for his unusual looks—except for Holt's sensitive kids, who rush to protect him. Milly and Joe figure out that when Dumbo sucks a feather into his trunk, it causes him to leap into the air and eventually fly.

These films clearly point to how humans can coexist with animals in a very sociable manner. The benefits of this bonding on the physical, psychological and social health and well-being of both human beings and animals has been well explored in these films. All these aspects will highlight how a positivity can be instigated by these relations and how the present ecological scenario demands a dare necessity of sustainable development. The indispensable need to maintain biodiversity is conveyed in a veiled manner in these

movies, as a constructive path to sustainability of both human beings and other creatures inhabiting the earth.

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