



## **The Human that Therefore I am: Transculturation of an Ecological Debate in *Green Humour for a Greying Planet***

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**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.59045/nalans.2023.21>

### **APA Citation:**

Khatai, S. & Ladsaria, S.K. (2023). The human that therefore I am: Transculturation of an ecological debate in *Green Humour for a Greying Planet*. *Journal of Narrative and Language Studies*, 11(21), 144-163.

### **Abstract**

The present research aims at showcasing the transculturation of animals that have adapted human culture in delineating the cause of the environment through Rohan Chakravarty's *Green Humour for a Greying Planet* (2021). The book is a compilation of comic strips that have previously appeared on various other platforms over the last decade, ranging from subjects of human-animal relationships to ecological unbalance and the impact of COVID-19 through the voices of animal characters. It primarily deals with threats to the habitat of animals (non-humans) and environmental degradation because of untoward human activities. The Anthropocene, the current geological epoch, is an offshoot of excessive human exercise on planet Earth, resulting in the deterioration of its natural resources and affecting the lives of other species. It has resulted in humans perceiving non-humans as 'other' to themselves, thereby diluting the concepts of 'symbiosis' and 'co-being'. This paper attempts to view humans in relation to non-humans toward an agenda of establishing ecological balance. Derrida's analysis of the ontology of animals in *The Animal that therefore I am* (2008) focuses on the influence of animals on human lives and vision. Taking this analysis as a parameter, this paper endeavors to decode the animal sentiment as displayed in the comic strips in Chakravarty's book. This paper uses Franz Kafka's transcultural ape, Red Peter's creation of an ape-human culture, as a model to decode the neoculturation of human-animal interaction in Chakravarty's animals. By referring to the studies of anthropomorphism and anthrozoology, this study attempts to analyze the ecological debate of a world model where humans and animals play interchangeable roles. Subsequently, the paper scrutinizes the 'language-game' that the animal characters indulge in to homogenize species differences.

**Keywords:** Anthropocene, transculturation, animal sentiment, anthropomorphism, anthrozoology.

### **Introduction**

The Anthropocene<sup>1</sup> includes the predispositions of human beings as a complement to the ‘transformation of the Darwinian image of man in the twentieth century’.<sup>2</sup> The early Hominin species became extinct after the Pliocene epoch, roughly around 0.3 million years ago<sup>3</sup>, leading to the evolution of human beings. Due to tectonic activities and volcanic eruptions, the larger mammals that inhabited the contemporary earth suffered altered topography and habitat loss. They could not accommodate themselves in Darwin’s sphere of the ‘survival of the fittest’, resulting in the rapid expansion of the human species by the end of the Pleistocene epoch. The current Holocene epoch has seen the zenith of excessive human intervention that has negatively impacted nature and other natural beings. Thus, the Holocene is now reconfigured as the Anthropocene.

Traditionally, humans have always been in the subject position and studied the environment in relation to them, thereby proclaiming their superiority quotient on the existential ladder. The ongoing practices of moving animals to the periphery in their relationship to nature have made them undergo cultural transformations where they want to denote themselves in human terms. Since this might promote the loss of existing cultural elements in animals, as in Red Peter, the ape in Kafka’s “A Report to an Academy”<sup>4</sup>, this transformation suggests transculturation. René Descartes’ ‘I think therefore I am’ (1637) is an existential assurance for all thinking beings. While the body-mind dualists believe that the mind can exist non-physically<sup>5</sup>, Descartes’ philosophy emphasizes the crucial role of the mind in the existence of the body, thereby denoting the inseparability of the body and the mind. Jacques Derrida, in *The Animal that therefore I am* (2008), talks of human existence in relation to the existence of animals. Both Descartes and Derrida conceptualized the human in the subject position. Chakravarty’s animal characters, as products of transculturation, talk about man-made changes in human terms and propose the relevance of biodiversity by putting humans in the object position. Hence, this paper scrutinizes the supposed role reversal of man-animal relations necessary for sustainable practices. With the tools of anthropomorphism and anthrozoology, this paper studies the transculturation of animal characters in *Green Humour for a Greying Planet* to reconfigure the foundation of the ecological crisis. Additionally, it also accommodates the representation of animal perspectives after transculturation to comment on the anthropogenic activities in the Anthropocene. With the objective of animal inclusivity in the Anthropocene, we propose the concept of ‘the human that therefore I am’ to negotiate an interculturality between humans and animals.

The purpose of this paper is to look at the human-animal relationship from a transcultural perspective in view of expanding the idea of ‘the animal that therefore I am’. It encompasses the implications of transculturation for the study of anthropomorphism and biodiversity conservation. The underlying assumption of the Anthropocene is that animals are not thinking beings, whereas humans have unique cognitive abilities. However, the transculturation of animals suggests that animals can speak for themselves—an idea that dovetails with animal cognition and critical animal studies. The assumption is based on the idea of ‘adaptation’ in the given habitat, which will guide the interspecies relationship, obliterating the historical dichotomies based on human instinct, language, and stewardship. The graphic novel is one of the most communicative mediums with its multimodality and comprehensiveness in discussing current issues concerning industrialization, urbanization, globalization, and pseudo-human intervention for the protection of the environment. The Indian graphic novel often employs “both Indian and non-Indian visual cultural utterances to add extra layers of meaning to the narrative” (Sarma, 2018). This inclusivity of global perspective in the Indian graphic novel proposes the medium’s requirement to be studied

irrespective of the “local, national and global cultural spaces” (Sarma, 2018). Thus, this paper aims to utilize the inclusive and diverse outreach of the Indian graphic novel to propose an ecological debate from the animal perspective.

Rohan Chakravarty’s *Green Humour for a Greying Planet* (2021) is an anthology that compiles animal comic strips published on various platforms from 2012 to 2020. It makes a fervent appeal in a sarcastic overtone to reduce the stewardship attitude in the name of development and establish a social bond that is mutually effective, long-lasting, and survives temporary separations. Chakravarty writes in his introduction:

I have grown to realize that animals on conservation work in three ways: they deliver the message of conservation without making it preachy, eliminate jargon and make the information being presented easy to retain and respond to, and instil a curiosity and respect for the natural world in the mind of the reader (2021, p. 12).

This perspective is smeared throughout the book with hints of irony and conveys a clear message for a sustained co-existence of humans and non-humans. The book comprises chapters in terminology associated with the Linnaean taxonomy of animals<sup>6</sup>, with anthropomorphized animal characters as spokespersons to represent their unique contribution to the ecosystem. With the constant threat to their habitat and existence, the referred animals have either adapted to human culture or are on the verge of adapting. Consequently, the voiceless non-humans have gained a human-like voice, exhibiting the traits of deculturation and acculturation, respectively. Simultaneously, these animals also bear the hallmarks of wildlife conservation and sustainability governance. A section on the coronavirus pandemic and its positive and negative impact on the planet is crucial to understanding the wildlife trade hazards and subsequent environmental damage in general. Though the strips serve as critiques of artificial destruction, some of them discuss humans with great reverence. The animal characters regard wildlife conservationists, field biologists, herpetologists, ornithologists, etc., as saviors of their respective species. By unsubscribing to the Cartesian notion of ‘lack of speech’ in them, here, the animals go beyond their animality to accommodate themselves in Derrida’s concept of ‘the autobiographical animal’.

*Zooontologies: The Question of the Animal* (Wolfe, 2003) is an analysis of some fundamental questions about the ethical and political discourse pertaining to the repression of animal subjectivity. In an original essay in this volume, “And say the animal responded?”, Derrida questions the Lacanian analysis of the symbolic order, leaving humans as the only subjects who are “prey to language” (Wolfe, 2003, p. 120). Wittgenstein’s ‘language-game’ describes the difference between human and animal language as the difference in the “kind of actions that each form of life can realize through its own language” (1968). Juanita Sundberg discusses animal conservation in protected areas like the Maya Biosphere Reserve in relation to the transculturation of the local people (Sundberg, 2006). Her research paves the way for considering transculturation beyond the human population to include animal studies. Silvia Spitta defines transculturation as “the complex processes of adjustment and recreation—cultural, literary, linguistic and personal- that allow for new, vital and viable configurations to arise out of the clash of cultures” (Spitta, 1995, p. 2). It is a three-phased process of “acculturation, deculturation, and neoculturation” (Teo, 2014). The ‘species-specific’ feature of Wittgenstein’s ‘language game’ undergoes a cultural change in the animals in *Green Humour for a Greying Planet* as the animals adapt to the language of the human species. Anthropomorphism is generally believed to be “the characterization of

nonhuman behavior or inanimate objects in human terms" (Horowitz & Bekoff, 2007). Similarly, anthrozoology is an interdisciplinary approach to studying the interactions between humans and animals that "embodies a sustained interest in understanding and analyzing how humans relate to making sense of other species" (Birke and Hockenhull 2012). Since the relationship between humans and animals affects the social and cultural spaces (DeMello, 2012) of both species, anthropomorphism and anthrozoology are crucial to understanding the connection between Derrida's animal question and Chakravarty's animal transculturation.

### **'The Autobiographical Animal': Anthropomorphism in *Green Humour for a Greying Planet***

Derrida believes that 'the autobiographical animal' is a sentiment crucial to the existence and authority of humans. In his words, 'the autobiographical animal' is an individual who "chooses to indulge in or can't resist indulging in autobiographical confidences" (Derrida, 2008, p. 49). Humans, the only species that confers this definition, deny animals the right to define themselves against or independently from humans. Anthropomorphism is a tendency to assign "those characteristics we attribute to a subject that the subject does not have" (Asquith, 1984). Chakravarty wanted to be a biographer of animals, with his belief that someday wildlife would be at his doorstep," demanding a percentage of royalties" (Jeshi, 2021). *Green Humour for a Greying Planet* displays anthropomorphic characters possessing human-like features such as "the logos, history, laughing, mourning, burial, the gift, etc." (Derrida, 2008, p. 5). Since they can reveal and record their experiences and interactions within their own species and with humans, the boundary set by humans for 'the autobiographical animal' is blurred.

In a comic strip of five panels, a yellow and black striped tiger is placed in five different poses at different spots in a national park. In the first three panels, the signboards "NH-7", "NH-35", and "NH-11" are placed in rectangular widgets as the tiger moves through the park. In the first two panels, the tiger faces backward with pointed ears, while in the second two panels, it is facing forward with big and worrying eyes to show his security concerns in his habitat. In the fourth panel, the tiger is peeping from a bush to avoid the gaze of the moving automobiles on the road, with another signboard of "NH-93" over his head. In the fifth panel, he goes to a higher altitude in the park and sees all the moving vehicles on the roads from there and comments, "More highways through the national park than stripes on my body!" (Chakravarty, 2021, p. 18). Unlike real animals, the tiger here can think and comment on his immediate surroundings, undermining the Cartesian idea of humans as the only thinking beings. Here, Tiger, as a non-human animal, suggests the power to reason, vents the mirrored aggression, and resists human intrusion relentlessly in their own habitat.

While physical properties such as "size, weight, motion, shape or colour and their manifestation in space and time" (Northoff, 2014, p. 128) are common to both humans and animals, mental properties such as "consciousness [... perceptual and emotional experience], intentionality [... beliefs and desires ...]" (Wilberding, 2021, p. 322) are specific to humans. Thus, the dualistic divide between humans and non-human animals follows a simple Cartesian formula. The animal is a part of the "res extensa" (corporeal substance), whereas the human is a part of the "res cogitans" (mental substance). The post-animality projected by the tiger in the selected strips offers us the space of reverse res-cogitans and proposes a continuity of thought between thinking man and thinking animal.

In a later strip of six interrelated borderless panels, “Social networking the Tiger Way, the same tiger is looking for a mate through social media, a medium exclusively used by humans. It begins with an image of feces with the accompanying text, “neighbouring female sent you a friend request” (Chakravarty, 2021, p. 64). In the next panel, the tiger sniffs the feces to ‘accept the request’. By doing so, the male tiger finds out about the breeding cycle of the female tiger. The subsequent two panels show the rivalry between two male tigers when a female tiger in heat is near them. Only the social media slang ‘poke’ and ‘poke back’ is used here. The fifth panel shows that the female has urinated on a tree, with the accompanying text, “female on heat posted on your wall” (64). In the last panel, the male tiger is drawn tight-teethed with excitement in his eyes. To show his readiness for copulation, a heart symbol is drawn over his face, and the text reads, “Piss here to like post” (64). The whole strip’s language resembles notifications on social media platforms. The association of social media slang with the breeding scenario of the tigers is an instance of anthropomorphism. Thus, the anthropomorphic tiger extends the boundaries of the language of the cat family to comply with contemporary human language, thereby establishing the neoculturation of social media language used by tigers.

Derrida, in *The animal that therefore I am*, relates the recognition of nudity and the subsequent shame with the creation of humanity. In Derrida, the human is “the autobiographical animal,” who records its perceptions of nudity by inferring to the naked cat in front of it. The “single, incomparable and original experience of impropriety” (Derrida, 2008, p. 4) of nudity is irrelevant to Derrida’s cat. However, Chakravarty’s anthropomorphic animals can comment on the nakedness with a spirit of critical rationalism. With nudity as a parameter, we propose Table 1 to show the difference between real and anthropomorphic animals.

**Table 1**

Parameter 1	Derrida's Animal	Chakravarty's animal
Nudity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Human is naked.</li> <li>• Animal is unaware of its nakedness.</li> <li>• Animal gazes at the naked human and turns away after a while.</li> <li>• Human feels ashamed of their nudity.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Animals are naked.</li> <li>• Animals are aware of their nakedness and feel proud of it.</li> <li>• Humans are semi-naked, but animals gaze at them and end up commenting on anthropogenic activities.</li> </ul>

The nudity of humans is discussed in a strip of eight drawings with a duck and a tortoise talking about humans’ excessive use of plastic. The duck holds a plastic straw in its leg and asks the tortoise about its use. The tortoise gives a sarcastic monologue distributed in the textboxes in all the subsequent panels. He defines the straw as a “hollow, plastic sucking device invented by man... (for) sucking drinks from a bottle or a glass... sucking the life out of the planet” (Chakravarty, 2021, p. 31). At the same time, they see a semi-naked man on a lounge chair sucking some liquid from a plastic cup. They gaze at his nakedness and label

him a “parasite that sucks using a device” (p. 31). Anthropomorphism allows them to recognize the difference between their nudity and that of the man. Similarly, the Indian Pitta, with its nine-colored body, comments on the birder’s dress as “a drab wardrobe!” (p. 107) and suggests consulting its stylist. The bird is proud of its colorful naked body. Thus, it calls for going beyond “the impropriety of a certain animal nude before the other animal [...] (or) the animalséance” (Derrida, 2008, p. 4). In the comic strip “The Big, Fat Indian Wedding’s Bigger, Fatter Carbon Footprint,” two naked crows list the eco-unfriendly practices of Indian weddings. They mention the “purchase of exorbitant apparel and jewelry, never to be worn again” (Chakravarty, 2021, p. 25) as a reason for the increasing carbon footprint. In a way, they promote nakedness rather than spending on clothes that impact the Earth. The animal’s comment on the expenses related to clothing and garments by the human material kinship is unremitting and exploitative. While anthropocentric discourses regard nudity as a prime feature to distinguish between humans and animals, Chakravarty uses this feature to show a connection and continuation between both species.

Derrida explains that ‘response’ and ‘reaction’ are key distinguishing features of humans and animals, respectively. According to him, activities like purring, barking, or hissing are animals’ reactions to a specific stimulus. Though ‘response’ is a crucial human feature, he discusses response in animals “as not whether the animal speaks, but whether one can know what respond means” (Derrida, 2008, p. 8). Chakravarty’s anthropomorphic animals display this animal response. We propose Table 2 to show the difference between the reaction of Derrida’s animals and the response of Chakravarty’s animals.

**Table 2**

Parameter 2	Derrida's Animal	Chakravarty's Animal
Reaction/ Response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The animal might respond to the name.</li> <li>• The animal only reacts.</li> <li>• The animal might purr or growl, but if somebody asks the difference between these, the animal might not reply.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The animals respond to the names.</li> <li>• The animals not only react to human intervention in biodiversity but also respond to humans' illogical reasoning to keep pets.</li> <li>• The animals make the owner differentiate between domestic animals and wild animals.</li> </ul>

The animal response is discussed in a comic strip where a man is perched on a sofa with his little daughter and instructs the pet parrot, Mitthu, to speak. The parrot immediately responds by declaring himself an alexandrine parakeet, which is “one of the largest wild parrots found in India” (Chakravarty, 2021, p. 51). He also talks about the illegal pet trade and its repercussions. A tight-lipped owner cannot respond further when the parakeet asks, “I’m done speaking. Now you speak [...] speak, buddy, the kid is watching” (p. 51). In another

strip of nine borderless panels, a slow lorris talks about the difference between pets and wildlife. In the first three panels, he holds the drawings of a dog, cat, and rabbit, respectively, each with the text “this is a pet” (p. 47). In the subsequent three panels, he talks about himself as a wild animal, his habitat, and the results of the exotic pet trade. However, in the next panels, he is captured from his dwelling place and sold as an exotic pet. In the last panel, a scantily clad woman, probably the buyer of the slow lorris, is clicking a selfie with him. The helpless lorris says, “You guys are slow, aren’t you?” (ibid). In another strip, the Pigmy Marmoset of Peru, the world’s smallest monkey, is captured and sold as ‘the finger monkey’ to exotic pet owners. In the last panel of this strip, the monkey clinging to the finger of the owner shows its middle finger to represent disgust with this pet trade. Though victims of the pet trade, these animals know well when and how to react. The domestication of animals reflects the human-animal bond. However, mostly the bond is tested from the human perspective (Hosey and Melfi, 2014). Because of the lack of emotional ownership, the ethical stance of the aforesaid animals shows an undesirable bond between humans and pets. The idea of making “animals more human” is to expose the precariousness of human dominance by distancing them from their natural habitat, thereby positing relative adaptability and resilience under the garb of the human-animal bond.

Derrida believes that by naming the nonhuman as ‘the animal’, humans claim subjectivity over the animals. In the accounts of the human autobiographies, there is an “unprecedented proportion of subjection of animals” (Derrida, 2008, p. 25) with subsequent violence against animals to benefit humans. Matthew Callarco explains that Derrida’s work aims at undercutting the humanist hierarchies that oppose the analogies of industrial farming and biological experimentation as scandalous simply because they compare human and nonhuman life (Callarco, 2008, p. 110). Derrida distinguished between the real suffering of animals because of human subjectivity and the projected suffering of animals because of human pretenses of activism. We propose Table 3 to compare the role of real and anthropomorphic animals in reducing their suffering.

**Table 3**

Parameter 3	Derrida's Animal	Chakravarty's Animal
Suffering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The animal suffers in silence.</li> <li>• The suffering of the animals is listed in the statistical reports but without any emotional involvement.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The animal suffers but makes its entire kingdom aware of it.</li> <li>• The animal devises plan to make its sufferers suffer, more like a revenge strategy.</li> </ul>

One comic strip by Chakravarty discusses the rising stress levels of a Gangetic dolphin due to noise pollution from vessel traffic. It says, “Noise from vessels in the Ganga hampers our echolocation and stresses us out. This could pose a grave threat to our already endangered species” (Chakravarty, 2021, p. 60). In the subsequent panels, we see it making rallying cries to keep the Ganga noise-free. In the second-to-last panel, three ships are drawn with the accompanying text, “whrrrrrrrr”, the sound effects of the propellers. The dolphin tries

making a louder sound than the vessels, to which a nearby tortoise responds, “Try Twitter, WhatsApp, or primetime debate” (p. 60). This ironic suggestion refers to the pseudo-activism of humans. Another strip narrates a conversation between a bat and a pangolin. Both are reading from books that trace the relation between ‘the spread of new pathogens’ and ‘the present-day coronavirus pandemic’ with ‘destruction of natural reserves’ and ‘private farming of wildlife’ respectively (p. 223). They conclude that the current governance models need to be changed. As a resort for immediate global realization, the pangolin asks the bat, “Do you have an introspective panic-inducing virus in your inventory that we could transmit next?” (*ibid*). It might be a ridiculous solution. Still, it signifies that the animals can devise strategies for the well-being of the planet that would, in turn, reduce their suffering.

Like Derrida, Chakravarty does not follow a dichotomy between the superiority of the human or animal species. While “using empathetic anthropomorphism as a conservation tool is to promote care and protection of individuals of a species” (Root-Bernstein et al., 2013), hardhearted anthropomorphism, like Chakravarty’s, might promote the justification of conservation. Chakravarty’s animals display traits of anthropomorphism in sync with transculturation, thereby situating themselves in Derrida’s ‘the autobiographical animal’ and ‘*ecce animot*’.<sup>7</sup>

### **Existence beyond speciesism: Anthrozoology in *Green Humour for a Greying Planet***

Anthrozoology, “studies of the association between individual humans and individual nonhuman animals” (Mills & Marchant-Forde, 2010, p.28), is crucial to understand the role animals have played in human history and the subsequent social construction of the meaning of animals in cultural discourses. York and Mancus describe the legacy of the human-animal relationship as a result of the “mutually conditioning effect of species-specific characteristics and the social organization of production” (York & Mancus, 2013, p. 86). *Green Humour for a Greying Planet* depicts animals in three places and spaces: as wildlife in their habitat, as captives in zoos, and as pets in human households. The relationship between humans and animals can be broadly categorized into three sections; human-animal interactions (HAIs), human-animal relationships (HARs), and human-animal bonds (HABs) (Hosey and Melfi, 2009, p. 5). In the three spaces of animal inhabitation in the book, one finds all these three kinds of human-animal relationships, thus suggesting a discourse on existence beyond speciesism.<sup>8</sup>

In a strip, the author shows distinct similarities between the Apatani Glory moth and the Apatani people of Arunachal. In the sequence of six panels, he lists both species as attractive, lovers of designer wear, wonderful users of natural resources, possessors of great dance moves, and lovers of nectar. By choosing to draw the similarities between an invertebrate and a primate, Chakravarty lays the groundwork for discussing the intertwinement of seemingly different species. Similarly, in another strip, he discusses the features of ubiquitous presence, vigilance, camouflage, navigation, and contribution to the health of forests as being common to both leopards and forest guards. While environmentalists often point out the disastrous impacts of human species on the forest ecosystem (Ledig, 1992), they often forget the role of forest officials in preserving the same. In both strips, one finds

no prejudice against one species and the ensuing recognition of the continuation of species-specific features.

Siddiq and Habib describe anthrozoology as the study of “the role of animals in cultural identity, power, and cultural changes” (Siddiq & Habib, 2016). Chakravarty discusses animal rights and conservation in relation to global powers. In a borderless strip of four panels, one finds the president giving a speech: “Apex predators are keystone species and the backbones of every ecosystem! Together, we must ensure their protection all around the world!” (Chakravarty, 2021, p. 197). In comic strips on sustainability practices by powerful nations, he discusses the pseudo-importance given to apex predators. The thought is welcomed by the audience, which includes an apex predator, a wolf. The second and third panels show their shock at the wolf’s presence. Once the leader shoots the wolf, the audience is again in unison with their leader. This strip shows the hypocrisy of humans. Though they want to discuss the other aspects of human-animal relations to reconsider cultural identities, they are not yet ready to accept animals as a part of this relationship.

In another strip, one finds the pangolin narrating the links between traditional Chinese medicine and the coronavirus pandemic. The pangolin also laments the government’s decision to prescribe the same medicine as a cure for the coronavirus disease. To vent its disgust at the Chinese government, it sneezes at the president. The last two panels show the sound effects of the pangolin’s sneezing, to which the president reacts by scarily running away. It shows the consciousness of humans toward animals as a reflection of their cultural identities in powerful societies. In epistemic regimes of power relations, humans are always in the authoritative position. When they see powerful species other than humans, they consider it a threat and take immediate measures to reinstate their authority.

Another area of anthrozoology that Siddiq and Habib focused on was “interspecies telepathic communication” (Siddiq & Habib, 2016), where the animals respond to the silent commands of humans. A similar reference to animals knowing humans’ thoughts is displayed in *Green Humour for a Greying Planet*. In the eight borderless panels, the artist draws eight characteristics that are common to both dolphins and marine biologists. He declares both as “creatures of extreme intelligence” who are “elusive” yet “extremely photogenic” (Chakravarty, 2021, p. 185). The other common characteristics include whistling, smiling, being photogenic, flipping, burning body blubber, and communicating underwater. It is common knowledge that marine biologists have a keen eye for life underwater. However, by depicting their similarities, Chakravarty suggests that the underwater species also value the humans who care for them. Thus, as an offshoot of the extreme attachment of both species, they can communicate with each other.

Herzog and Arluke consider anthrozoology in connection with “animal cruelty and cruelty directed towards humans” (Nell, 2006). Based on findings from psychology, neurobiology, and paleoanthropology, they categorize cruelty into four areas: “voices of perpetrators and their audience, gender and animal cruelty, animal cruelty as play, and the relationship between animal cruelty and human violence” (Nell, 2006). The animals of Chakravarty also talk about human cruelty when they shed light on conservation issues. The text has a comic strip of an Asian palm civet, captivated in a cage, narrating its use in producing a luxury coffee, kopi luwak. The civet asks for justification for brutalizing “an innocent cuddly creature” for a beverage and questions the farming techniques for entertainment purposes. Similarly, in another strip, a rhinoceros narrates about poaching for horns to make

aphrodisiacs. It displays a picture of a human fingernail and a human hair alongside a rhino horn and declares all of them to have the same keratin substance. It comments on the irony of humans' need for aphrodisiacs "Your species really doesn't need, going by the rate at which you guys reproduce"; (Chakravarty, 2021, p. 40) and requests to stop poaching with folded limbs. However, in the subsequent panels, the rhino has been poached, and the horn has been cut off, leading to its death. The horns of the rhinoceros have been extensively smuggled into foreign markets at a very high price. This business generates greater profits for the men involved in it, but at the expense of the lives of these animals. Arluke claims that active cruelty results from intent to harm, and passive cruelty results from a lack of intent to harm (Vaca-Guzman & Arluke, 2005). In the first strip of caging the Asian palm civet, the cruelty is passive because there is no sign of intended harm. In the second strip, however, poaching is an instance of active cruelty.

According to Herzog and Arluke, cruelty is "a recreational extension of hunting" (Nell, 2006). The seeming indifference of the hunters and illegal wildlife trade owners reflects the inherent sadistic amusement of torturing the animals (Kellert & Wilson, 1993). In *Green Humour for a Greying Planet*, a strip of three borderless panels shows a monk's hypocrisy in caring for the animals. The panel shows a tiger bound by a belt as a pet by the monk and two officers in shock after seeing the skin of tiger cubs on a table. The monk tries to defend himself by saying, "It gets very hot around here, you see, so we put them in the cold storage" (Chakravarty, 2021, p. 195). In the final panel, it is revealed that he is the monk of the tiger temple of Thailand, which was accused of illegally possessing wildlife<sup>9</sup>. Keeping the tigers in a sanctuary-like habitat in the tiger temple was intended to generate emotional support and economic benefits. However, tiger conservation activism soon turned into the maleficent possession of animal products.

Chakravarty appeals to people to stop hunting by listing its hazards through his animal characters. In one strip, a hunter with his gun is ready to shoot the bats hanging from a tree. The bats stop him and hand him an agreement letter in which the contributions of bats as 'long-range pollinators' and 'seed disposers' are mentioned. Another strip of six borderless panels shows the rendezvous of a wildlife enthusiast. The first panel depicts him with goggles and shorts, holding a dolphin. The caption reads, "#dolphinselfie #lookatmeladies" (Chakravarty, 2021, p. 54). In the second panel, he is holding a snake and posing as a daredevil with the caption "#snakeselfie #fearless #totalstud" (p. 54). In the third panel, he holds an octopus with the caption "#octopusselfie #seadude #nofear" (ibid). In all these panels, the creatures are depicted with gritting teeth that represent their awkwardness and hatred toward this behavior. In the subsequent panel, he takes a selfie in the forest with a bear in the background, and the caption reads, "#bearselfie #imbeargrylls #YOLO" (p. 54). But the bear comes closer and hits the man with his claw. In the last panel, the bear holds the unconscious man and takes a selfie with the caption, "#wildanimalsarentselfieprops #leaveusalone #YOLOindeed" (p. 54). Arluke claims that childhood animal cruelty often takes the form of "dirty play" (Arluke, 2002). The behavior of the wildlife enthusiast hints at his obsession with using animals as a sport.

Chakravarty's strips also focus on trophy hunting, a type of sport in which big game, such as elephants and rhinos, are hunted by skilled hunters, and the animal's corpse is treated as a trophy. In one of the strips, an elephant asks the ranger to shoot the trophy hunter for poaching him, but the ranger responds that the trophy hunter pays the government for conservation. The elephant wants to know the ways of conservation and asks him, "By taking

another animal out of an already plummeting population? [...]. By importing his ‘trophy’ back to his country, further fuelling the demand for ivory?” (Chakravarty, 2021, p. 43) This connotes the irony of trophy hunting as a way of conservation. There is also a hint of racism in the strip as the elephant asks, “Is he called a trophy hunter, and not a poacher, simply because of his skin colour and privilege?” (ibid). The ranger is drawn as black, while the trophy hunter is drawn as a white man. Both speciesism and racism, in their bigotry of placing one category on a superior ladder to the other, need to be avoided for a lively dialogue between humans and animals.

Micheal Hauskeller, in his seminal article “Do animals have a bad life” (Hauskeller, 2018, pp. 50–61), argues for the justice and fairness of uplifting the “quasi-status” of the animals so that they are privileged to enjoy the intellectual, social, and cultural goods as enjoyed by human beings. The notion of speciesism glorifies the supposed superiority of humans to other species for the sake of humanism.<sup>10</sup> Humans, enriched with the ideology of stewardship, often make ecological debates by assuming the central position and placing other animals in the periphery. Chakravarty uses the scope of anthrozoology to study the unseen aspects of human-animal relationships by suggesting a symbiotic relationship rather than a central-periphery one, thereby suggesting the eradication of speciesism and the accommodation of multispecies companionship.

### **The case for transculturation: an animal perspective in *Green Humour for a Greying Planet***

Transculturation is a process through which new formations are created as a result of cross-cultural contact (Oritz, 1995), subsequently making the subaltern groups select and invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant or metropolitan culture (Mary Louise Pratt, 1991). Animal culture is ‘the existence of socially transmitted behavioral variation between groups or subgroups of the same species in non-humans, reminiscent of human culture’ (Laland and Galef, 2009). Transculturation, originally a sociological concept restricted to human culture, is now associated with human-induced behavioral and cultural changes in animals. With the correlation between human influence on particular species and disturbances created in those species, we propose Table 4 to show the similarity of transculturation between the scientific discourse on animals and the comic strips of Chakravarty.

**Table 4**

Name of the species	Human activity	Cultural change in the scientific discourse of animal studies	Human activity	Cultural changes in <i>Green Humour for a Greying Planet</i>
Orang-utans	Palm oil monoculture	Using oil palm trees for nesting and feeding on mature fruits (Ancrenaz et al. 2014)	Palm oil monoculture	Lighting the monoculture farm with palm oil and firelight
Gibbons	Smoke because of forest fire	Decrease in call pattern (Cheyne, 2010)	Loss of large trees because of deforestation	Canopy gymnastics and self-hammock
Macaques	Co-habitation with humans at a temple	Innovation of exchange between humans and macaques (Btotcorne et al. 2017)	Increasing stress levels	Psychotherapy

A strip shows six orang-utans near a palm oil monoculture farm. The panel depicts deforestation and a stream of oil directed toward the farm. Two of them are sitting on a branch of a leafless tree; two are drawn and looking towards the farm, and three are near the stream. One of them is holding a firelight, while the other is pouring palm oil from a can, intending to burn the farm. The orang-utans perched on the branch commented, “Looks like we’ve discovered at least one good use of palm oil” (Chakravarty, 2021, p. 41). While revenge, like lighting and burning a farm, is not a factor in animal culture, human-induced activities have resulted in this transculturation. While animal studies scholars focused on the adaptation of the orang-utans to the monoculture, Chakravarty depicts an ironic change in their behavior. Similarly, after listing the uses of the Hoolock gibbon’s long arms, he depicts the effects of deforestation in the second and third panels. Gibbons, believed to be the dwellers of rainforests, use the higher branches of deciduous trees to form the canopy. However, the panel depicts a single branch with fewer leaves, suggesting a canopy shift from higher to lower branches. In a strip of two panels, the behavioral changes of macaques are drawn. In the first panel, a stressed macaque goes to a doctor for psychotherapy. In the second panel, the doctor scratches the underarms of the patient, and the sound effects read “groom groom” (Chakravarty, 2021, p. 70). This hints at the rising stress levels among macaques that can eventually affect their breeding patterns.

In a strip titled “Similarities between the Langur Mom and My Mother, he lists different characteristics of the langur, such as climbing, multitasking, commuting, grooming, etc., and shows similar activities of the mother. While evolutionary biology already has evidence of the connection between them, the point of consideration here is the transculturation suggested by features such as ‘lovely eyelashes’ and ‘nice, long tails’. The first panel depicts the faces of the langur and the mother, focusing on the eyes. Though

animals do not pertain to the human standards of beauty, here one finds the langur with a smiling face and rounding up its eyes, thereby making his eyelashes noticeable. In the sixth panel, the mother's dupatta is drawn analogous to the tail of the langur. While Huaidans clinging to their mothers' tails is a common sight, the comparison with the human mother's dupatta might suggest another behavioral change. There is a possibility that the langur might use its tail for ornamentation like the human mother, and the Huaidans might use it as a sliding panel like the human babies. In so doing, the langur is positioned at the same level of cultural identity as that of the human mother. Similarly, in another strip divided into two parts, he shows people's thoughts on feeding monkeys in the first part and the repercussions of doing so in the second part. While people think that they are "paying religious obeisance" (Chakravarty, 2021, p. 59) by feeding the monkeys, in reality, they are making them stressed by changing their food patterns. Some monkeys are offered food from moving vehicles on roads as an act of kindness, but ultimately this makes them prone to road accidents" (p. 59). While people think that they are conserving wildlife, they are actually changing the stress levels of the monkeys. In the third panel of the second part, two monkeys are drawn with rebellious faces and guns in their hands. They are pointing the gun toward a man in the car and demanding the car keys. The speech bubble near the monkey reads, "I wasn't born a criminal. Society made me one" (p. 59). The monkey's barbaric actions represent a change in his cultural ideology that is induced by changed food patterns. Since brutality is not a cultural trait of humans or monkeys, this trait is an instance of neoculturation in the monkeys.

Certain requirements of Red Peter, the ape in Kafka's "A Report to an Academy" compelled him to discard his animal self and adapt to the culture of the human world. These requirements can be used as parameters to study transculturation in certain animal characters in *Green Humour for a Greying Planet*.

- **Desire of Freedom:** In one of the strips, like Red Peter, a black bear is captured in a cage for its bile. The bear wants to get out of the cage and is in a vengeful mood when the keeper arrives to take its bile. The keeper asks in a joyful mood, "Baa, Baa, Black Bear, have you any bile?" (Chakravarty, 2021, p. 42). An angry bear responds in an equally rhythmic way, "Yes, but not for you, you imbecile! It doesn't cure COVID; it doesn't cure s%#t! Let me out of this cramped cage, you \*\*\*\*ing dimwit!" (ibid.) In the final panel, the head and forelimbs of the bear are out of the cage, signaling that it might soon come out to get its freedom. The poetic response of the bear is a symbol of transculturation.
- **Giving up stubbornness:** Like Red Peter, lions in the wild are stubborn animals who refuse to be kept in a cage or zoo. They do not like to be petted or cuddled, as it hinders their dominance. Additionally, they are increasingly fearful of the growing human population with the removal of males of pride through hunting (Packer, 2019). In one of the strips, a lion with its stuck-out tongue is holding a wooden selfie prop, while another lion is clicking a picture of the lion with a man with a gun. A signboard reads 'instant trophy pictures,' while three other men are waiting to click pictures. Another lion is telling a lioness, "it's a free service we've started to bring down trophy hunting" (Chakravarty, 2021, p. 43). Here, lions have undergone the transcultural process of giving up their stubbornness to stop themselves from being trophy-hunted.

- **Accepting the hatred:** In its initial days in the cage, Red Peter faced severe hatred from people. But gradually, he accepted the hatred and eventually overcame it by becoming like them. In one of the strips of Chakravarty, a tiger is in the middle of a residential area. Two lines of people are drawn in the panel. The people in the top line are trying to swoop him away with firelights and sticks, and the people in the bottom line are busy clicking selfies and reporting the event. Two forest officials are ready with a cage and a tranquilizer gun to take it back to the forest. The tiger, worried by the disturbances, asks the officials, “Hey! Can you please tranquilize the crowd first?” (Chakravarty, 2021, p. 61). Here the tiger shows transculturation by accepting the hatred and awe of people.
- **Occasional outbursts:** Red Peter wants the fingers of the journalist to be shot who misrepresented him. In the second fragment, when an admirer visits him, he confesses, “sometimes I’m overcome with such an aversion to human beings that I can barely refrain from retching” (Kafka et al., 1995). This kind of occasional outburst is seen in the comic strip of the Indian Bustard. The bird outbursts at the inconsiderate nature of media people and the government, which has posed a threat to the whole species. It feels like the fear of embarrassment over a possible misspelling of its name prevented it from being the national bird. Since it is a national bird contender, it deserves to be conserved. The causes of its death, such as “habitat loss, collision with overhead transmission lines & windmills” (Chakravarty, 2021, p. 48), need to be altered otherwise it might become “the first bird to go extinct in independent India” (p. 48). The transculturation occurs in the outburst and the subsequent monologue on conservation.
- **Learning and unlearning:** Red Peter had to learn to drink schnapps, talk, and unlearn his wildness to be a part of the human world. In the comic strip about Gobo Bear, he learns the art of reporting. The strip shows an anchor from ‘nature TV’ asking about the experience of the gobi bear, the world’s only desert bear. It responds by listing its worries about extinction due to the scarcity of its vegetation due to climate change, competition with livestock, and poaching. It declares the urgency of the matter and says, “We need a voice” (Chakravarty, 2021, p. 53). In the final panel, it snatches the microphone from the reporter, saying, “I should be hosting this show” (ibid). Ironically, the gobo bear has already gained a voice, and now it wants to be heard. In another strip, a tiger is learning brachiation from a langur. The five panels depict the tiger’s journey from unlearning its wild walk to learning to hang and move through branches to survive the traffic on the roads in the national park. Here the tiger undergoes transculturation in acquiring the culture of the langurs.

Every time an animal character shows a new cultural trait peculiar to humans, it presents a misrepresentation of the animal consciousness of the traditional canons. In so doing, they go beyond the radical division of cultural supremacy among humans to present a refined cultural vigor among animals. Table 5 is an overview of the transculturation of some other animals in justifying their rights to be humans.

Table 5

Species	Cultural change	Acculturation	Deculturation	Neoculturation
Shark	Stalking the plastic waste from the sea			✓
Polar bear	Tanning of the body			✓
Penguin	Living in greenery			✓
Owl	Resigning as the bahana of Goddess Lakshmi with fear from poaching		✓	
Slender lorris	Adapting to twigs in the scarcity of deciduous forest		✓	
Tiger	Suing the internet for selling animal products	✓		
Asiatic wild buffalo	Lack of indigenous mate		✓	
Wombats	Opening animal shelter	✓		
Kingfisher	Fishing tutorial	✓		
Fireflies	No courtship		✓	

Transculturation helps the animals accommodate their arguments in the rallying cries of environmentalism. The transcultural animals of Chakravarty are not only different from the animals of anthropocentric discourses but also represent a ‘deferment’ (postponement) (Derrida, 1998, n.p.) of animality. By gaining voices like humans, the animals are able to declare their humanity in the ongoing practices of humanism. Thus, by being more human than the humans in the Anthropocene, the animals declare, “The human that therefore I am”. Since transculturation has helped them look beyond the man-animal divide, they refer to their existence from both human and animal perspectives. Hence, by pointing to humans,

each animal in Chakravarty says, I am human because you are human; you are human therefore I am human.

## Conclusion

Graphic novels employ visual metaphors and relatable character-driven narratives to address difficult and debatable areas, such as issues related to environmentalism, in a way that is appealing and accessible to a wider audience. *Green Humour for a Greying Planet* illustrates the biological and adaptable practices of animals in a lucid and entertaining way, carrying a message for environmental conservation. The technique of compiling comic strips instead of a full-length graphic novel helps Chakravarty touch upon the various aspects of the ecological debate rather than simply building on the human-animal relationship. In his innovative communication of theoretical and practical knowledge, he gives his readers the opportunity to take numerous lessons rather than a single, undisputed core lesson. By using animals from all over the world as his characters, Chakravarty's anthology situates the Indian graphic novel on the global platform for studies in contemporary ecological politics and animal rights issues in the Global South.

Ecological debate is often considered an altruistic form of human activism that posits the significance of the interrelationship between humans and animals. The inclusion of all other species except humans in the umbrella of animals is neither symbiotic nor moralistic but is often associated with conservation and sustainability. The present research is a challenge to such notions. It shows that the category of animals is itself a conglomeration of different species that exhibit traits essential to enjoying the same status as humans in the world. Concerning the study of *Green Humour for a Greying Planet*, the age-old perceptions of the differences between animal and human culture are obliterated by transculturation and anthropomorphism. While transculturation allowed the animals to adapt to human culture through the subsequent manifestation of a relatively new culture with traces of the previous cultures, anthropomorphism helped them to record and preserve their thoughts and observations, similar to human autobiographies. This research also challenges the bias in studying anthrozoology in relation to humans. It paves the way for conservation practices for the sake of animals who have become more human than humans in declaring their new motto, 'the human that therefore I am'.

## Notes

1. The 'Anthropocene' is a term coined by American biologist Eugene Stoermer and popularized by Dutch chemist Paul Crutzen to propose a new epoch that is entirely anthropogenic.
2. Robert J. Richards, in his book *Darwin and the Emergence of Evolutionary Theories of Mind and Behaviour*, claims that Darwin never proposed natural selection as a mindful and intentional process and the inherently special place of humans in evolution. He posits that Darwin's nobler view of human altruism and morality was transformed into the authoritative man in charge of the other species by powerful disciplinary and social forces of the 20th century.
3. Ewen Callaway claims in his article, "Oldest Homo Sapiens fossil claim rewrites our Species' History" that Homo sapiens evolved way earlier in Morocco than in East Africa, which dates back roughly 0.3 million years ago.

4. Benítez-Becerra and José José Darío, in the essay “Transculturation and Migration in the Story “Report for an Academy” of Franz Kafka”, elucidate the migration and subsequent transculturation of Red Peter by borrowing ideas from Ángel Rama, Antonio Cornejo Polar y Néstor García Canclini.
5. W. D. Hart, in an essay in *A Companion to the Philosophy of Mind*, defines “dualism” as a non-physical mind or a separable body and mind.
6. Carl Linnaeus, in his *Systema Naturae*, set up the biological classification of plants, animals, and minerals known as Linnaean Taxonomy. In his taxonomy of animals, there are seven types of animals: mammals, birds, amphibians, fishes, insects, and vermin. In Chakravarty’s book, there are chapter names that are dedicated to this specific nomenclature, such as ‘Mammals’, ‘Birds’, ‘Reptiles, Amphibians, and Invertebrates’, etc.
7. According to Derrida, *Ecce animot* is “neither a species nor a gender nor an individual” (Derrida, 2008, p. 41). He coins the word ‘animot’ to include the wide variety of animals that are generally excluded from the term ‘animals’. In their endeavor to go beyond their animality, Chakravarty’s animal characters identify themselves under the umbrella of ‘animot’.
8. Singer defines “speciesism” as a prejudice or bias in favor of the interests of members of one’s species and against those of members of other species.
9. Teeranai Charuvastra, in the report “Temple refuses to release tigers, again”, informs of the allegations against the tiger temple by activists, the seizure of more than 100 tigers, and the politics of the abbot in retaining the right not to release the tiger.
10. Humanism is a philosophical notion that focuses on the dignity, promotion, and development of human individuals in relation to the world. Beginning with ancient Greek philosophy, Humanism gained momentum during the Renaissance period with Da Vinci’s renowned drawing of *The Vitruvian Man*. The drawing is a symbol to establish the human figure as the pinnacle of proportion among all the other species of the contemporary Earth.

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