

Radhika Govindrajan, *Animal Intimacies: Interspecies Relatedness in India's Central Himalayas*

Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018. 256 pages. Cloth, \$85.00; paperback, \$27.50; eBook, \$10.00 to \$27.50. ISBN 9780226559841 (cloth); 9780226559988 (paperback); 9780226560045 (eBook)

Is there merit in writing a book on human-animal relatedness in a space in which these relations are so idealized that some animals can be viewed as more deserving of life than certain types of humans? The antagonist hovering over Radhika Govindrajan's *Animal Intimacies* is not anthropocentrists, but rather those who kill and police humans in the animal's name. This attention to the political landscape, where violence articulates itself as from a place of love, is what makes her book so timely and important. Her close attention to the social, historical, and physical landscape of her fieldsite, Kumaon, which is part of India's state of Uttarakhand in the central Himalayas, and her ability to narrate the liveliness of these landscapes is what makes this book beautiful.

In her book, Govindrajan poses a theory of relatedness that accepts "incommensurable differences" and "ineffable affinity" (4). She explores and leaves untangled the multiple and messy ways in which a non-human or human life unfolds and is lived in relation to others. Her focus is on the bodily, intimate, and individual relations between her human and non-human interlocutors. Importantly, these interactions are not innocent and they are rooted in multiple forms of hierarchy, power, and abuse. Attending to human-animal lived relations, she finds ways to tie together violent caste, class, racial, species, and gendered hierarchies. In this world, love and violence tangle up into an "ethical mess" (180) for those who labor with and alongside animals. It takes immense physical and affective work to maintain these relationships.

Each chapter is centered on one type of animal. Chapter 2 is centered on goats and Chapter 3 on cows. These are two animal species from whom Kumaon's villagers, particularly women, do backbreaking labor to care for. Their relations with both of these animals are challenged by animal rights activists/right-wing Hindus, whose view is that killing these animals (goats) or allowing them to be killed (cow) is morally and religiously wrong. These chapters draw on the tension between imagining animal as symbol and relating to animal as embodied being. In the latter case, the terrain of ethics is muddled with, amongst many other elements, love, duty, and labor. The spectacular violence that humans inflict on animals is entangled with the spectacular violence that the gods could and did inflict on humans, the discourse of Hindu animal

rights activists, and the love and labor that goes into the raising of the goat. Similarly, the Hindu nationalist idealization of the sacred cow is out of touch with the real embodied cow(s). In Kumaon, there are two breeds of cow, one with ritual and one with economic function. These two breeds fit differently into the religious ordering of animals. Ethical acts and mourning for these animals that follow their hyper-visible deaths (goats), or hidden and un-spoken of deaths (cows), keeps the animal with the one who had nurtured it beyond the limits of life (61). The entanglement of love and hierarchical violence are made present in and understood through these labored and embodied relations, and those who view the animal in the abstract fail to understand this ethical terrain.

The fourth chapter on monkeys and the fifth on pigs are both centered around two types of animals that have particularly antagonized the lives of villagers in Kumaon. Antagonism towards and disturbance of humans is mapped on other relations of exploitation. In the chapter on monkeys, exploitative relations between the hills and the plains is brought into relief when monkeys from the cities are brought into the hills. These urban monkeys are imagined as both a tool for urban plains-based Indians to grab land from villagers in the hills, and as agents possessing the qualities of city residents themselves. In Govindrajan's chapter on pigs, she introduces the concept of the "otherwild" to describe the unsteady nature of domestication. Pigs have been constituted with humans but ultimately are ascribed an innate sense of "wildness," which is something like an individuality or instinct (not a demeaning word) that exceeds their relations with humans (136). Caste hierarchy and colonial racialization bases itself on a settled nature of wildness and domesticity, but the concept of the otherwild articulates the instability of the settled assumptions that hierarchy and control are based on. Sides are not fixed, and individuals move between them, allowing moments of peace even in the midst of species antagonism.

It is difficult to group the sixth chapter on bears with the previous chapters. Few people have the chance to see a living bear, and their presence is seen only through traces or narratives. Govindrajan focuses in particular on narratives of women being kidnapped by bears who become their lovers. Past and real observations of bears' sexual habits inform these narratives. They are circulated by women living in an "insufficient present," which is characterized by marital and sexual discontent (and where bears are hidden), and are a means to express desire for an "unrealizable future" where female sexual pleasure can be made a priority (and where bears become present) (162). Remarkably, animal desire is what relates women and bears. Although Govindrajan writes earlier in the chapter about the patriarchal critique of women's desire, she only introduces the loaded term "animal desire" in its conclusion (170–171). I desired for more to be said of the historical linking of female sexuality and animal instinct.

Govindrajan writes against the working assumption of a radical and stable alterity so prominent in the "ontological turn" literature. A stable alterity transcends relations. Because, these transcendent ontologies cannot find a judge in the material, they can be undoubtable. It is not doubt of the other's humanity that allows those who kill humans in the cow's name to kill, but rather a transcendental certainty. Govindrajan's disavowal of the transcendental is politically and theoretically productive. If material relations can dislodge a stable ontology, then worlds must be made and remade. This is precisely what ethnographic theory should be: doing and undoing, then making and remaking our world with our interlocutors. For those who don't study South Asia,

gender, kinship, or animal studies, Govindrajan's theorization of relationality and her ethnography itself is an exemplar for how we conceptualize and do ethnography.

Anabelle Sutor
Brown University