

The Eco-Species Synergy: Exploring the Symbiosis of Ecocriticism and Speciesism for Sustainable Coexistence

Subhashree Rout

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Centurion University of Technology and Management, Bhubaneswar, Odisha.

Email: subhashreerout103@gmail.com, ORCID ID: 0000-0002-4678-3122

ABSTRACT

In the face of escalating global environmental crises, the concept of speciesism, rooted in the unequal treatment of different species, emerges as a pivotal force driving the deterioration of our planet. Various religious doctrines consistently underscore the interconnected web of existence, portraying Earth as a sacred entity deserving reverence and careful stewardship. However, this delicate balance is disrupted by the prevalence of speciesism, leading to a widespread ecocide—an intentional obliteration of ecosystems and biodiversity. By employing an ecocritical lens, this study analyses the detrimental impacts of speciesism and carnism on ecosystems, unveiling a stark contrast between the idealised ethical principles within religious teachings and the real-world practices contributing to environmental decay. By melding ecological insights with theological perspectives, the analysis draws inspiration from Carol J. Adams' *Sexual Politics of Meat* (1990) and Melanie Joy's *Why We Love Dogs, Eat Pigs, and wear Cows* (2009) offering a potent lens for critiquing societal attitudes towards non-human animals. The study advocates for a comprehensive analysis of the extensive repercussions and far-reaching consequences of speciesism, urging a peaceful reintegration of humanity into the intricate equilibrium of the natural environment. It challenges the harmful inclinations of speciesism that fuel ecocide, presenting a pathway towards a sustainable and interconnected future.

KEYWORDS

Ecocriticism; Speciesism; Carnism; Ecocide; Environmental Sustainability.

Introduction

The interdependence of ecological systems and the interaction of wide variety of species within them highlights the complex equilibrium that supports life on Earth. With the continuous escalation of environmental degradation and biodiversity loss, there is an increasingly evident imperative to reassess our connection with the natural world. The dawn of the 21st century heralded an era

of unprecedented environmental degradation, compelling academics and activists to examine the underlying ideologies sustaining such crises. Amidst these deliberations, the concept of speciesism arises as a substantial theoretical framework that aids in comprehending the relationship between humans and the natural environment. The core of this study revolves around the analysis of two interconnected notions:

speciesism and ecocriticism.

Ecocriticism, a branch of literary theory, scrutinizes representations of nature in literature and other cultural artifacts, while speciesism pertains to the privileging of certain species over others, often to the detriment of non-human entities. Originating from the prejudiced treatment of non-human species, speciesism not only gives rise to ethical quandaries but also worsens ecological disruptions, culminating in the current precarious condition of ecosystems. Religious traditions across the globe have long advocated for the sanctity of life and the interconnectedness of all living beings. However, the chasm between doctrinal teachings and human practices widens as speciesism infiltrates societal norms, paving the way for ecocide, which “is broadly understood to mean mass damage and destruction of ecosystems – severe harm to nature which is widespread or long-term” (*What Is Ecocide? - Stop Ecocide International*, n.d.).

The objectives of this research encompass a comprehensive exploration of ecocriticism, delving into its historical evolution and core principles. Additionally, the study aims to scrutinise the emergence and manifestations of speciesism across various human societies. Furthermore, it seeks to highlight the potential points of convergence and contention between ecocriticism and speciesism, offering insights into their nuanced interplay. This paper employs an ecocritical perspective to unravel the intricate dynamics between speciesism, religious ideologies, and environmental degradation, drawing insights from works like Carol J. Adams' *Sexual Politics of Meat* and also from Melanie Joy's *Why We Love Dogs, Eat Pigs, and Wear Cows*. Thus, the research endeavours to illuminate critical perspectives on environmental discourse and human-animal relationships, fostering deeper understanding and

dialogue in these vital realms.

A myriad of concepts has been studied and analysed in the field of ecocriticism, yet the fusion of ecology and speciesism remains ripe for exploration. Like Hopster in his study analysed that speciesism “highlight both philosophical and empirical research avenues that can help to move the speciesism debate forward, emphasizing that not all ethical intuitions about speciesism should be given equal weight” (Hopster, 2019). Researchers like, Marriot and Cassaday also analysed “the influence of individualising morality, speciesist tendencies and likeability on attitudes to animal use as measured by the Animal Purpose Questionnaire” (Marriott and Cassaday, 2022). McGuire and others have also observed that “there are key age-related differences in our moral view of an animal worth that point to socially constructed development over the lifespan” (McGuire et al., 2022). Thus, the present study focusses on a thorough analysis of ecocriticism, its roots, fundamental pillars and how it synergises with the emergence and expression of speciesism.

Harmony or Hierarchy: Decoding Ecocriticism in the Face of Speciesism

Ecocriticism, which has its roots in the environmental movements of the 1960s and 1970s, is an interdisciplinary field that includes studies of literature, philosophy, and culture. It aims to advance ecological consciousness and environmental sustainability by examining and criticising how nature is portrayed in literary and artistic works. It incorporates ideas from a number of theoretical traditions, such as postcolonial ecocriticism, ecofeminism, and deep ecology and enables a more thorough comprehension of how people interact with the environment and the variety of animals that call it home. Ecocriticism encourages us to explore

how literature portrays the natural world, and how these depictions reflect our attitudes, values, and behaviours towards the environment. Through the evocative portrayal of landscapes, symbolic narratives, and poignant ecological motifs, literature serves as a catalyst for promoting ecological awareness. Rooted in the environmental fervor of the mid-20th century, ecocriticism finds its genesis in the urgent calls of environmental movements. Iconic works like Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) exemplify this awakening, amplifying public consciousness regarding the perils of human impact on nature. While ecocriticism emphasizes the importance of understanding and appreciating the natural world, speciesism often perpetuates a hierarchical view where certain species are deemed more valuable than others. Navigating these differences is crucial in developing a balanced approach that acknowledges the complexities of human-nature interactions.

Speciesism, the ideology that one species is inherently superior to others, sustains systems of tyranny and exploitation. The idea of speciesism, as explained by ethicist Peter Singer, highlights the arbitrary favouritism of human interests above the interests of other sentient beings. The pervasive human-centric perspective influences different aspects of human society, ranging from industrial agriculture to biomedical research, resulting in ongoing injustices towards non-human animals. Adams' analysis of the connection between gender discrimination and the mistreatment of animals sheds light on the hidden systems of authority that justify the exploitation of both women and animals in male-dominated societies. Joy's concept of carnism provides a deeper understanding of the social and psychological factors that hide the

inherent violence of eating meat, thus perpetuating speciesist beliefs. From a particular perspective, people tend to view certain animals with care and safeguard them, while viewing others as mere objects for consumption. This reinforces a hierarchy where each individual's species is important.

The notion that humans are inherently superior to other creatures is known as speciesism which was first defined by Richard Ryder in the 1970's. Speciesism according to Peter Singer "is an attitude of bias against a being because of the species to which it belongs. Typically, humans show speciesism when they give less weight to the interest of nonhuman animals than they give to the similar interests of human beings." (*Lakhaney, Peter Singer: On Animal Rights and Human Rights*). Singer claimed that speciesism is prejudice based on a person's membership in a species, like sexism and racism, whereby speciesists unfairly favour the interests of those who belong to their own group over those of others. He highlights the fact that treatment of animals by humans, notably raising them in factory farms for slaughtering and constantly exposing them to research and product testing on them for extended period of time. It is the unreasonable negative evaluation or treatment of organisms who are not categorised as members of one or more specific species. Speciesism has its belief that human interests are always more vital than those of equivalent species. As far as humans are concerned, we tend to favour our own interests over those of other species which is known as species bias. We are predisposed to prioritise our own interests over those of other creatures, regardless of the conversion ratio. We believe it is worthwhile even if it means causing them pain and blindness with our shampoos to test the effectiveness of the product. Even if it means subjecting them to years of pain,

their lives will be offered up on the altar of our taste senses, so that we can enjoy a brief pleasure of taste.

Evolutionary biologists tell us that, “more than 99% of all species that have ever lived on Earth have become extinct” (Ayala). Some have vanished as a result of tragic occurrences, such as the material remains of asteroid that is thought to have led to the extinction of dinosaurs, but the majority merely have fallen victim to ageing cycle. There are only few evidences which show that most of the animals are doomed to extinction. However, most extinctions take place gradually, through time, rather than in the sudden decline that has started since the emergence of humans. We might be the next disastrous occurrence. The concept of eventual human extinction seems unthinkable, even in the face of abundant evidence of the fragility and transient nature of species lifespan. Animals are raised for food and exploited through experiments all around the world. They are killed in experiments, fishing and are exploited to meet human needs, putting the majority of animals at threat of extinction. Animals have been viewed by humans as commodities to be used and devoured rather than as sentimental beings. Humans claim to have affection for animals; however, they extensively raise them for food and employ them in medical research, which is extremely painful and can result in misery, damage, or death.

Analysis of Adams’ critique of the patriarchal meat-eating paradigm

Carol J. Adams' book *The Sexual Politics of Meat* provides a deep analysis of how discrimination based on species connects with gender politics, prompting thoughtful consideration of the moral aspects of human- animal connections. Adams analyses the widespread impact of patriarchal ideas on the consumption of meat and the objectification of animals from an intersectional feminist

perspective, where she states that “our culture mystifies “meat” with gastronomic language, so we do not conjure dead, butchered animals, but cuisine” (Adams 66). She argues that the exploitation of non-human animals’ mirrors and reinforces the subjugation of women, thereby perpetuating patriarchal ideologies. The core of her argument revolves around the notion of the “absent referent,” wherein the individuality and subjectivity of animals are erased, reducing them to mere commodities for human consumption. According to Adams “sexual violence and meat eating, which appear to be discrete forms of violence, find a point of intersection in the absent referent” (Adams 68). Similar to how racism and sexism legitimise the hierarchical control of specific groups over others, speciesism serves to justify the subordination of animals by humans. Adams argues that this hierarchical mentality forms the basis for multiple facets of society, shaping cultural customs, eating habits, and economic structures. She establishes a connection between the dehumanisation of women and the commercialization of animals in Western society, emphasising how language, images, and cultural perspectives sustain these repressive belief systems. According to her “gender inequality is built into the species inequality” and a “women’s status is inversely related to the importance of meat” (Adams 58). She critiques the use of sexualized imagery in meat advertising, which not only objectifies women but also reduces animals to mere products for consumption. The commodification of female animals' bodies for meat, milk and egg production and the objectification of women's bodies for their reproductive capabilities further reinforces this connection. Through advertisements, packaging, and culinary practices, meat is often associated with virility, dominance, and power-qualities traditionally associated with masculinity. The use of

“meat” instead of “animal flesh” and “beef” instead of “cow meat” exemplify how we create a distinction between the animal and the food item. Moreover, she emphasised on the fact that “women may feel like pieces of meat, and be treated like pieces of meat—emotionally butchered and physically battered animals” (Adams 72) to describe the absence of an animal referent by linking women to lifeless objects subsequent to the demise of an animal. Lockie et al. (2002), in their work, analysed that:

feminism has sought to render visible and contestable otherwise taken-for-granted practices such as rape within marriage, slogans such as ‘meat is murder’ are used by animal activists to challenge euphemisms—such as ‘beef’, ‘pork’ and ‘humane slaughter’—and the practices they legitimate (Lockie 2).

Women are typically portrayed as pieces of meat, whereas animals meant for food are commonly depicted as females. In every scenario, sexually explicit imagery is used to symbolically connect sex, abuse, and male dominance. The subjugation of animals is just as fundamental to Western patriarchy as the subjugation of women and other sexual minorities. In contrast, vegetarianism and compassion towards animals are often portrayed as feminine, weak, and inferior, thus reinforcing gender stereotypes and hierarchies. Adams challenges the societal norm of portraying humans as naturally omnivorous, presenting counterarguments without explicitly advocating for an essentialist perspective in support of feminist vegetarianism. By deconstructing societal norms and challenging entrenched power structures, Adams offers a compelling vision of a more just and compassionate future.

Exploration of Joy’s concept of carnism and the psychology of meat

consumption

Melanie Joy in her work, *Why We Love Dogs, Eat Pigs, and Wear Cows* contends that when eating meat is not a biological imperative, it becomes a matter of personal choice, rooted in individual beliefs. Central to Joy’s argument is the idea that without acknowledging how carnism influences our behaviour, our food choices remain unconscious and devoid of genuine freedom. She emphasises that true autonomy in dietary decisions can only emerge through awareness, as without consciousness, there can be no authentic freedom of choice. When we consider someone a vegetarian, it’s more than just acknowledging their dietary choices; it’s about recognising a profound philosophical stance and a distinct set of beliefs. For vegetarians, abstaining from meat is not merely a dietary preference but a reflection of their moral conviction against the killing of animals for human consumption. While “vegetarian” denotes a person abstaining from meat, there is no equivalent term for individuals who embrace meat consumption. Conventional labels like “meat eater to describe anyone who is not vegetarian” (Joy 29) fail to capture the depth of belief systems inherent in dietary choices. Unlike a mere descriptor of dietary preference, “vegetarianism is an expression of one’s ethical orientation” (Joy 28) encompasses a broader ethical framework, rooted in the conviction that consuming vegetables aligns with moral principles. Referring to them simply as “meat eaters” implies a detachment from the moral considerations that underscore dietary choices, neglecting the interconnectedness between actions and beliefs. Thus, there arises a necessity for a term that acknowledges the ethical dimensions inherent in meat consumption, one that recognises the intricate interplay between dietary habits and philosophical convictions.

Joy characterises carnism as a forceful ideology rooted in violence, its existence hinging on the physical act of slaughter. Carnism, a form of speciesism, establishes the social acceptance of consuming specific animals while disregarding moral consideration for others. The concept of carnism was coined by Melanie Joy, an American psychologist, which refers to “the belief system in which eating certain animals is considered ethical and appropriate” (Joy 30). Joy suggests that carnism operates subtly, often escaping our conscious awareness, leading many to perceive meat-eating as an unquestionable norm rather than a deliberate decision. The routine consumption of certain animals while excluding others typically goes unquestioned. She claims that “violence is necessary in order to slaughter enough animals for the meat industry” (Joy 33). Without this brutality, the entire system would collapse, as meat production inherently involves killing. The meat industry thrives on the level of violence necessary to sustain its operations.

The grim reality of carnism is shielded from the majority, who would recoil at the sight of the slaughter process. Even Joy, when presenting a documentary on meat production to her students, exercises caution, creating a secure psychological and emotional environment to prevent trauma. Throughout her teaching career, Joy has consistently witnessed the visceral reactions of her students—shudders and sadness—as they come face-to-face with the harsh truth of animal slaughter. This response, she believes, is rooted in the innate human compassion that recoils from causing suffering to fellow beings, be they human or animal. In the context of these seemingly paradoxical reactions, Joy highlights how people unknowingly allow practices that contradict their inherent nature. The invisible nature of violent

ideologies, such as carnism, not only manifests socially and psychologically but also physically. Despite the billions of animals slaughtered annually, a significant portion of meat consumers remain distanced from the actual processes, shielded from the harsh realities of production. Joy reminisces about a memorable day spent at a petting zoo conveniently set up outside a local market. The event attracted a sizable crowd, each individual eager to interact with the animals on display. From children to adults, there was a palpable desire for physical contact and connection with the adorable creatures. However, Joy couldn't help but observe the paradox unfolding before her eyes. The same people who eagerly petted cows, pigs, and chickens' moments earlier were now proceeding into the market to purchase their meat without a second thought. This juxtaposition highlighted a prevalent societal norm wherein individuals engage in affectionate interactions with animals they later consume without hesitation. In reflecting on this phenomenon, Joy conceptualised what she termed the “The Three Ns of Justification: eating meat is normal, natural and necessary” (Joy 96). According to this framework, the consumption of meat is deemed normal, natural, and necessary. These beliefs are deeply ingrained in our social consciousness, exerting a subconscious influence on our behaviours and choices. The Three Ns function as a form of tunnel vision, obscuring inconsistencies in our attitudes towards animals and rationalising our behaviours when confronted with ethical dilemmas. Joy argues that there exists a crucial distinction between what is deemed natural and what is morally justifiable, particularly concerning acts of violence such as consuming meat. Naturalisation, as Joy describes it, involves the integration of certain ideas into common beliefs, often suggesting a connection to natural laws or

divine ordinances, depending on whether the belief system is rooted in science or religion. In the context of meat consumption, animals are perceived to exist inherently for the purpose of human consumption, as evidenced by terms like “farm animals, broiler chickens, dairy cows, layer hens and veal calves” (Joy 108). Such language reinforces the notion that consuming meat is not only acceptable but also ordained by nature itself. However, Joy challenges this pretext of assumed biological superiority, which has historically been invoked to justify violence towards certain groups. She highlights the danger of using purported natural order as a justification for acts of violence, underscoring the need for critical examination and ethical scrutiny of ingrained societal norms and beliefs.

Inclusive Conservation: Redefining Sustainability with Eco-Speciesism

In both books, the authors skilfully weave together thought-provoking arguments that illuminate the intriguing intersection of feminism, speciesism, and ethical vegetarianism. They delve into the often-overlooked realms of vegetarianism and veganism, revealing them as powerful tools of resistance against the normalisation of exploitation and violence. Ensuring the welfare of non-human beings is crucial for preserving ecological equilibrium and averting species extinction. Conservation endeavours such as restoring habitats, implementing measures against poaching, and facilitating wildlife rehabilitation play pivotal roles in sustaining ecosystems. The adoption of animal welfare practices, such as reducing livestock density and embracing plant-based diets, serves to mitigate carbon emissions. Additionally, healthy animals are less prone to transmitting zoonotic diseases to humans, thereby diminishing the risk of pandemics.

By turning away from meat consumption, individuals not only

challenge prevailing norms but also pave the way for a more compassionate and just world. These authors underscore the vital importance of recognising the interconnectedness of various forms of oppression and advocating for intersectional approaches to activism and social justice. Promoting animal welfare cultivates a culture of empathy and compassion towards all living creatures. By equipping communities with knowledge regarding the interconnectedness of animal welfare and sustainability initiatives, we can raise awareness about the significance of ethically treating animals and drive policy reforms in support of sustainable practices.

Prioritising animal welfare is not only a moral obligation but also a foundational element in achieving sustainability. Recognising the intricate relationship between animal welfare, ecosystems, and human societies enables us to strive towards a more balanced and resilient future for all inhabitants of our planet. Through collaborative efforts in conservation, agriculture, consumer behaviour, and education, we can foster a sustainable world where animals coexist harmoniously with humans. The vision, articulated by Adams and Joy, paints a picture of a world guided by compassion, fairness, and ecological harmony. Together, through our collective efforts, we can shape a future where all beings—human and non-human alike—are honoured as sentient creatures deserving of dignity, liberty, and reverence. Through our collective efforts, we can forge a brighter future for generations to come, where humans and non-human animals alike are valued as sentient beings deserving of dignity, freedom, and respect.

Conclusion

The exploration of the symbiotic relationship between ecocriticism and speciesism within the realms of Carol J.

Adams' *Sexual Politics of Meat* and Melanie Joy's *Why We Love Dogs, Eat Pigs, and Wear Cows* unveils profound insights into our societal constructs, ethical frameworks, and environmental sustainability. Through the lens of ecocriticism, these seminal works analyse the intricate connections between human perception, cultural norms, and the exploitation of non-human animals.

Adams' meticulous analysis delves into the intersectionality of gender, sexuality, and speciesism, unravelling the oppressive structures that underpin our treatment of animals and the environment. By scrutinizing the symbolism embedded in meat consumption and the commodification of animal bodies, she exposes the inherent violence perpetuated by the patriarchal gaze. Through her work, Adams invites us to reconsider our dietary choices and challenge the dominant narratives that normalise the exploitation of sentient beings.

Similarly, Joy's exploration of carnism sheds light on the psychological mechanisms that enable the consumption of certain animals while fostering empathy and affection towards others. By

elucidating the cultural conditioning and cognitive dissonance that sustain speciesist ideologies, Joy compels readers to confront the inconsistencies in their beliefs and behaviours. Through her concept of "carnism," she encourages us to question societal norms and forge a more compassionate relationship with all living beings.

As we reflect on the insights gleaned from Adams' and Joy's seminal works, it becomes evident that the convergence of ecocriticism and speciesism offers a powerful framework for sustainable coexistence. By acknowledging the interconnectedness of human, animal, and environmental well-being, we can cultivate a more harmonious relationship with the natural world. Through conscientious consumption, advocacy, and activism, we have the capacity to challenge entrenched power structures and foster a culture of empathy, respect, and stewardship. In essence, the symbiosis of ecocriticism and speciesism serves as a catalyst for transformative change, beckoning us to reevaluate our ethical responsibilities and collective impact on the planet.

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Ms. Subhashree Rout stands as a beacon of scholarly excellence and academic prowess, with an unwavering passion for research and education. Notably, her research has been published in various esteemed papers that are Scopus-indexed, showcasing her commitment to scholarly excellence and the dissemination of knowledge. As an assistant professor in the Department of English at Centurion University of Technology and Management, Odisha, Ms. Subhashree Rout continues to inspire and impart wisdom, her breadth of knowledge and fervent commitment to research distinguishing her as a prominent voice in academia.