ANIMALS IN THE WRITING OF BHARATI MUKHERJEE

Introduction

Animal imagery repeatedly appears in the work of the Indian-born American writer Bharati Mukherjee (1940–2017) from her first published US short story "Debate on a Rainy Afternoon" (1966) to her final novel *Miss New India* (2011) and last short story "The Going-Back Party" (2012). Although Mukherjee regarded herself as having "an oceanic love of animals" (quoted in Edwards 164), her literary portrayal of non-human creatures is rather more ambivalent than this claim implies: they are depicted in largely anthropocentric and zoomorphic ways, a rich, polysemic device to reflect human experience. Animal tropes suggest the freedom and entrapment experienced by the author's ethnic Indian characters, their feelings of both power and impotence, their expressions of cruelty and rage, and their sense of disorientation and depression, especially as new immigrants to the United States. Writing Indian animal imagery into American literature, Mukherjee's creaturely motifs also signify the power of dreams, the fall of the Mughal Empire in India, human communities as endangered species, and predator versus prey within a Darwinian logic of survival.

Mukherjee represents animals as part of everyday life, particularly in India. Nevertheless, they occupy an ambiguous symbolic position, at once trusted and feared. A shorthand for the vibrancy of India and the United States and a means of paralleling both countries, they expose a brutal world of danger, inequality and corruption. In an Indian context, of course, non-human creatures are prominent in Hindu cosmology where, as Mukherjee put it, they can "become gods and monsters or humans" (quoted in Vignisson 155); as Wendy Doniger notes, "anthropomorphism and zoomorphism are pervasive themes in Sanskrit texts" (n.p.). Writing in 2011, James Kim argues that "despite long noting the links between animalisation and racialisation, critical animal studies have yet to consider their relationship to Asian American studies" (136). Related to this wider critical gap, Mukherjee scholarship has yet to examine the importance of fauna within her œuvre. Tracing specific animal metaphors—from avian to marine mammalian and reptilian to canine—this essay addresses that lacuna by comparing Mukherjee's recurrent use of such tropes, while interrogating the cultural and gendered associations of animals in her fiction and essays.

Exploring gender, power and migration through birds and marine mammals

In "Debate on a Rainy Afternoon," Mukherjee repeatedly employs avian imagery, for instance, the "blithe and birdlike sensation" experienced by Miss Ghose, a spinsterly school teacher in Kolkata, who perceives that "the Ideal Woman was generally a gowned, bird-like Cambridge female" (261, 267). Bird metaphors in the story suggest a paradoxical blend of flight and imprisonment, strength and vulnerability with the teacher depicted as "blithe and aerial" (258) but also "trapped and fluttering" (260). Faced with a recalcitrant pupil, Miss Ghose commands "'You'll learn *The Skylark* [*sic*] by heart for Monday'" (258).[1] British intertextuality is a colonial force to oppose and reject: hence Shelley's poem is learned for punitive reasons.[2] The "nightingales" of English Romantic poetry are also satirised in Mukherjee's first novel, *The Tiger's Daughter* (1971; 68).

Recalling "Debate," avian imagery is again gendered as female in Mukherjee's novel, *Desirable Daughters* (2002), where Nalini—like Mukherjee, a Bengali American woman—"does not fly far from her nest" (204). And Tara, the novel's Bengali American protagonist—preparing to model a borrowed sari and jewellery at a New York gathering of wealthy South Asian Americans—feels like a "flightless bird,

unable to raise my arms" (206). Mukherjee clearly implies a connection between the limited agency of these Bengali American women and the immobility and fragility of certain types of bird. Her avian imagery naturalises that powerlessness, while recalling Sanskrit texts in which "women makes the noises of birds" (Doniger n.p.). By contrast, Mukherjee invokes a mightier and more predatory bird when Tara is later told by Kajol, a fellow Bengali Brahmin in America, that their subcaste is "'going the way of the condors . . . extinct in our native habitat. Marvellous plumage, though. Wonderful adaptability. A really good captive breeding program is our only hope'" (245). Kajol's use of condor imagery also suggests that migration has been inevitable for the survival of Tara's generation of ambitious middle-class Indians.

Desirable Daughters is a site of memory for the lost mid-20th-century Kolkata of Mukherjee's youth with her Bengali Brahmin community presented more generally as a species under threat. Hence Mukherjee later blurs avian and insect imagery when Tara regards her ancestral background as a "dusty identity . . . as fixed as any specimen in a lepidopterist's glass case" and "a perfectly preserved bug trapped in amber" (184). That such birds and insects are presented as rare can also be understood within a specifically American context. Mukherjee's frequent use of cultural translation suggests that she was often addressing a non-ethnic Indian readership. Thus Tara's sense of herself on display as a "flightless bird" (206) also connects to Mukherjee's presumed reader. In this sense, an elite, beautiful Bengali American woman becomes a modern-day example of what Lori Jirousek has termed "spectacle ethnography": that is, the putatively exotic, foreign subject paraded for the consumption of a 19th-century white American audience "observing the ethnic Other for diversion" (25).

Animal imagery signals human cruelty in Mukherjee's work, too. In her second novel, *Wife* (1975), the protagonist, Dimple Dasgupta, a young Bengali woman, spots "crows and pariah dogs" on her wedding day in Kolkata (compare Rao and Khushu-Lahiri 136): an inauspicious portent of her dysfunctional marriage to Amit Basu, a fellow Bengali. That marriage fails to survive migration to the United States and ends dramatically with Dimple murdering Amit. But long before this, her early married life in Kolkata is permeated by images of entrapment, particularly through animalistic tropes that foreshadow the novel's grisly dénouement. Small creatures such as mice, cockroaches, and goldfish, themselves trapped, perish at Dimple's hands, mirroring her blend of public helplessness, private cruelty, and repressed rage at her lot. Again Mukherjee depicts Indian women as captive, whether in the originary nation or the US, especially when they have made an arranged marriage; indeed, in *Desirable Daughters*, Tara literally dwells for many years within a gated community, her home paid for by the extreme wealth of her husband Bish Chatterjee, a man selected by her parents.

In *Wife*, when Dimple leaves India for New York, she regards Ina Mullick, another Indian American woman, and Leni Anspach, a white American, as "predators" (152). This zoological language cuts both ways since Ina likens Dimple to "'a porpoise! I can't tell if I'm boring you with my human stupidity—or if I'm talking to a fish'" (136). Such a moment recalls the deathly marine vision of a dream Dimple has earlier in the novel:

> something strange had been washed up on the beach. A whale, a *porpoise*, a shark, she heard people say. She fought her way through a crowd that suddenly disappeared. At her feet lay Ina Mullick, in Dimple's sari, a thin line of water spilling from her mouth (103; emphasis added).

Apparently harmless, porpoises themselves prey on smaller creatures, mirroring Dimple's form of vengeance and psychological survival by killing mice and other diminutive animals in Kolkata. Mukherjee's figurative choice of a porpoise may also signify Dimple's journey "across seven seas," a traditional South Asian image to refer to migration; and how fundamentally out-of-place she is within New York: a sea mammal struggling to survive on dry land.

These cetacean metaphors also reflect Dimple's underwater existence once in the US: that is, the lethargy brought on by her depression, an emotional and mental state not named explicitly but shared by Ina and other Indian immigrant wives with no clear sense of purpose. Dimple-as-porpoise—with the accompanying association of emotional disorientation—prefigures a similar image in Mukherjee's story, "The Management of Grief" (1988), where Kusum, a grief-stricken Indian Canadian woman, is compared to "a sea-creature whom the tides have stranded" (184).[3] Such a connection is interreferential vis-à-vis Mukherjee's wider body of work. She was also a highly intertextual author and her marine mammal imagery echoes its use by Vladimir Nabokov in his classic novel *Lolita* (1955).[4] Here he suggests an immigrant's non-normative position when seal metaphors are privately employed by the émigré narrator, Humbert Humbert, to dismiss Lolita's mother, Charlotte Haze, as an unfitting object of desire. Moving back to the Indian diasporic context, Amitav Ghosh's novel *The Hungry Tide* (2004) features a South Asian American protagonist, Piya, a cultural outsider to West Bengal where she travels to study river dolphins. That marine mammals have sometimes been read as humanoid—troubling boundaries between human and non-human, self and other—may also explain these Russian- and Indian-born writers' use of such creatures to explore liminality and difference of all kinds: ethnic, national, cultural, and sexual.

Critiquing India and America through reptilian metaphors

In Mukherjee's essay "Immigrant Writing: Give Us Your Maximalists!" (1988), she claims to use what she calls "chameleon-skinned" strategies to assume diverse narrative voices across different ethnic and gender lines (29). This image connects to the persistence of reptiles—iguanas, geckos, and snakes—in such fiction as "Loose Ends" (1988), a short story, and the 1989 novel *Jasmine*. Her figurative reptiles bring together India and America, a lifelong project in Mukherjee's writing, by depicting ecosystems and creatures in both countries and suggesting that a similarly tropical, brutal, Darwinian logic of survival obtains in each nation. Mukherjee was terrified of snakes, as revealed in an untitled 1993 essay on dreams in her creative process. Discussing serpentine imagery in her writing, she recalls that

> when I was about two, I pulled a snake by its tail. It was in its viper's nest, embedded in a hole in the floor of my grandfather's garden estate. As a result, when there's a crisis, what I dream of is an immense, enormous . . . snake. I'm terrified. As a result, snake sequences, snake hallucinations, snake nightmares or snake phobias turn up in many of my fictions ("Untitled" 163–164).

But rather than simply perpetuate associations of snakes with India (Rajamannar 146), Mukherjee makes them American. Thus Jeb, the white Vietnam veteran protagonist of "Loose Ends," admires the "reticulated python," wishing "to squeeze this state [Florida] dry and swallow it whole" (49). He likens the young and unnamed Gujarati American woman whom he sexually attacks to a much smaller reptile—a "gecko" (52)—while

her own father disparages her as "a bird" (53) within a local natural environment full of actual fauna. Again, a female character of Indian descent, figured partly in avian terms, has become entrapped, here by sexual violence. By exposing such brutish, unthinking patriarchy, Mukherjee critiques the "species thinking" that "associate[s] women with animals" (Ramos 41; and compare Adams). Similarly, in the unnamed central American country that forms the backdrop for her short story, "The Middleman" (1988), she portrays the misogynistic objectification of Maria, a beautiful local woman, in animalistic terms. Powerful men have subjected her to "beatings . . . humiliations. Loaning her out, dangling her on a leash like a cheetah" (19).[5] Paraded like a sleekly dangerous, but caged animal, Maria is figured as a female predator brought under masculine control. Anticipating Chase Pielak's argument about the use of animal metaphor in George Eliot's fiction, she is both "huntress and . . . prey-animal simultaneously" (113n11).

Returning to reptilian imagery specifically, it is used more positively in *Jasmine* when the eponymous Punjabi immigrant protagonist encounters Sam, a gecko owned by a white American acquaintance in New York. Jasmine regards this encounter through an intercultural lens, claiming "I had been reborn. Indian village girls do not hold large reptiles on their laps . . . The relationship of an Indian . . . to a reptile . . . is that of . . . fisherman to . . . fish" (*Jasmine* 163). She then recounts the cruel treatment of "house lizards" in her village, hung "by the neck from branches of the lichee trees. We'd watch them twitch and turn until the crows discovered them" (163); the sinister presence of predatory crows here recalls a similar image in *Wife*. Although *Jasmine* is implicitly critical of the United States as a site of danger and death, Mukherjee clearly pits the fate of helpless reptiles in India against the apparently more humane response to Sam in America. As a named, cosseted pet, he belongs to the white middle-class world of *Jasmine*'s Manhattan, a setting that is problematically held up as liberatory in contrast to the lethal violence that Jasmine fled in Punjab.

Other small animals are invoked in *Jasmine* to critique 1980s America, specifically the intimidation and powerlessness experienced by illegal immigrant women. Recalling Jeb in "Loose Ends," "Half-Face" is a white Vietnam veteran who attacks Jasmine sexually. He is figured as noctilionine: "the mangled side of his face came at me, like a bat in a night-black forest" (110). This bat simile is repeated in metaleptic fashion when Jasmine later experiences "bat-winged nightmares" (182), animal imagery once again belonging to a dream realm. Jasmine also likens illegal immigrants to "mice" (28); and in another image of predator and prey, she conceives of them as "bait-fish" (106). This presages her Indian fisherman-fish image, suggesting—through this connection between the US and India—that the ancestral homeland cannot be left behind so easily.

Depicting animals through ekphrasis

In her historical novel, *The Holder of the World* (1993), Mukherjee examines the world of 17th- and 18th-century America and India. Despite the shift in time, animals are equally prevalent and intertwined with human existence and self-expression. Indeed, she constructs a dialectical relationship where human animals are repeatedly defined in relation to other-than-human ones. The Puritan character Edward Easton dies from a bee sting in New England and, continuing this apian imagery, Gabriel Legge, a ruthless English adventurer in the New World and India, regards himself as "a nectar-gathering bee" (77). In Mukherjee's recreated Mughal India, buzzards frequently appear to signify human death, often in violent circumstances, while hyenas and jackals are further symbols of mortality. In this setting where human

life is no more significant than that of non-human animals and Mukherjee comes closest to a zoocentric vision, "humans are beasts, base-driven, venomous, unfeeling" (246). India, like the Florida of "Loose Ends," is another dense ecosystem, replete with elephants, "lizards and gaudy songbirds . . . reptiles . . . insects . . . jackdaws" (117, 121). Animals—again represented mainly in avian and reptilian terms—signify the sheer vividness of this imagined India.

In *Holder of the World*, Mukherjee's interest in animals takes a visual turn as she conveys the world of Mughal miniature painting through the use of ekphrasis, echoing an earlier work, the short story "Courtly Vision" (1985). In the first of the five paintings in her invented "Salem Bibi" miniature series, Beigh Masters, the novel's present-day, white American narrator, observes that "the [Mughal] artist cannot contain the wonders, fish and bird life bursts over the border" (16). In the largest of the paintings,

> on the cannon-breached rampart of a Hindu fort . . . leopards and tigers prowl the outer ring of high grass; the scene is rich in crow-and-buzzard, hyena-and-jackal . . . In a forest of blackened tree stumps just inside the fort's broken walls, hyenas lope off with severed human limbs; jackals chew through caparisoned carcasses of horses; a buzzard hops on a child's headless corpse . . . Broods of long-haired monkeys with black, judgemental faces ring the heaps of dead and dying (17–18).

In Beigh's description, non-human animals enjoy ascendancy over human ones, the *c* alliteration—"crow," "chew," "carcasses," "child's headless corpse"—freely exposing their dominance and the limits of human control. And the use of hyphenated phrases yokes different animals together, almost in partnership. In this scene, Mukherjee rejects human exceptionalism, drawing on a Hindu tradition of "the equal consciousness . . . of humans and animals" (Doniger n.p.). Her ekphrastic portrayal unblinkingly reveals a harsh world of animal instincts and animal survival in which all kinds of non-human others are simply a quotidian, unavoidable feature of Indian life. But this doubled vision—the Mughal painting refracted through Mukherjee's literary art—is also rich, colourful, and celebratory. Her representation of this scene of carnage may aestheticise horror and death, but it also pays tribute to the prowess of Mughal painters, artists who often depicted animals (Wilkinson 4–5). In a clear shift from the use of animal metaphors in *Jasmine* to represent 1980s India in purely violent, benighted and humanistic terms, Mukherjee's ekphrastic depiction of non-human creatures in *Holder of the World* suggests India's historic superiority in cultural terms, especially through the opulent animal imagery painted on palace walls. Here "lions prowled chartreuse forests, peacocks danced in amethyst rain, crocodiles bobbed in lapis lakes . . . Even the courtyard where palace servants slept was longer and wider than the houses of Salem aristocrats" (257).

Mukherjee's postcolonial critique reclaims Indian animals in order to counter the zoomorphic, speciesist language used by the early European settlers to dehumanise Indians, especially by means of simian imagery (compare Haraway 11): part of "a universally recognised and particularly efficient shorthand for othering individuals" (Rajamannar 4). As Anand Pandian observes, "the government of humans as animals has been a prominent feature in the management of Europe's colonies" (93; compare Kim 137, 139; and Walther 581). Hence "baboon" is frequently deployed in *Holder of the World* as an emasculating term of ridicule by white colonisers who dismiss Hinduism as "a religious faith that allowed . . . devotees to worship a godhead that chose to reveal itself as a scarlet-faced, yellow-furred, long-tailed monkey" (170). The

European imperialists seek to neutralise the threat posed by Pedda Timana, a successful local merchant, by disdainfully referring to him as a "leech . . . parasite . . . scorpion" (150). Such animal parallels are complex and contradictory, however. After all, a leech is not as deadly as a scorpion and was even used for medicinal purposes in early modern Europe. By contrast, the scorpion image conveys the power, stealth and potential danger of Timana. Such animal imagery exposes the ignorance, weakness and confusion of Mukherjee's European adventurers in India, however outwardly resilient and worldly they might seem. It also adumbrates the obsession with particular animals that characterised the British Raj: "the tigers, elephants, boars, furs, and feathers that sometimes all but obscure the human beneath and behind them, and that were so important a part of creating and maintaining the hierarchies that were the cornerstones of colonialism" (Rajamannar 1). That obsession appears in Mukherjee's later novel, *The Tree Bride* (2004), where Vertie Treadwell, a villainous British District Commissioner in colonial Bengal, is grotesquely fixated on his collection of tiger pelts. Conversely, in *Holder of the World*, Mukherjee's aesthetic use of animals repositions Indians at the centre of their own historical narrative.

The polysemic possibilities of dogs in Mukherjee's work

Also linked to Mukherjee's postcolonial politics is her emphasis on dogs, "rendered virtually absent in imperial texts," according to Shefali Rajamannar (2). By contrast, Mukherjee frequently deploys canine imagery to shifting, polysemic effect, although she does so "often . . . negatively" (Edwards 164). Invoked to suggest the cheapness of human life in the central America of "The Middleman," dogs are usually synonymous with South Asia in her fiction. Thus, in *Holder of the World* "pariah dogs" gather around the corpse of Cephus Prynne, the hated East India Company factor who derides Indians as being "like dogs. They know only one master" (157, 118). In the 20th-century context, the short story "Angela" features dogs in war-torn Bangladesh who feed directly upon corpses. In *Jasmine*, dogs suggest danger and, once again, India's survival-of-the-fittest dynamics. As a young girl, Jasmine has a frightening encounter with

> the soft waterlogged carcass of a small dog. The body was rotten, the eyes had been eaten. The moment I touched it, the body broke in two, as though the water had been its glue. A stench leaked out of the broken body, and then both pieces quickly sank. That stench stays with me . . . I know what I don't want to become (5).

Rendered in starkly corporeal, material terms, the rotting dog becomes a metonym for rural India, embodying an omnipresent sense of death, naturalising an apparently static system of preordained destiny from which Jasmine must escape, and revealing the early exposure of children to violence and decay. To underscore this point, Mukherjee inserts a further episode in which the young Jasmine kills a rabid dog. These ideas recur in Mukherjee's late work, too: in *Miss New India*, Subodh Mitra, a sexual predator in small-town India, is described as resembling "a long-snouted street dog" (103). In other words, she reserves the right to inflict negative zoomorphic language on unsavoury, morally suspect, contemporary Indian male characters.[6]

In *Desirable Daughters*, Rabi, Tara's American-born son, is attacked in Mumbai by his aunt Parvati's dogs, Raja and Rani, street curs-turned-house pets. They are described as "sleek and strong as wolves . . . beasts . . . hellhounds," their vicious behaviour likened to "a snake or a tiger fulfilling its own destiny" (68–69). Rabi later

angrily refers to Parvati as a "bitch" (90) in another example of tough canine language; and the attack reveals a South Asian American boy's vulnerability in India. Recalling notions of Indian entrapment, Parvati's dogs, adoptees from the horrors of street life, are also effectively imprisoned in the gilded cage of her luxury apartment block where "neighbours' monster dogs . . . throw themselves against the heavy, padlocked front doors of apartments" (67).

Canine imagery is often significant in Indian writing in English where animals are frequently an indispensable part of a writer's lexicon. The image of a dying dog is pivotal in Ghosh's novel *The Shadow Lines* (1988), while Uma in Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting* (1999) finds it reassuring to listen to the howling of dogs near a remote ashram. Human characters in these works respect, and draw comfort from, Indian dogs. By contrast, Mukherjee's India is full of canine terrors. In this sense, it anticipates the allegorical strategies of Aravind Adiga's satirical novel *The White Tiger* (2008), where a sophisticated use of animal imagery takes on Aesopic and Orwellian, as well as classically Indian, dimensions in an excoriating state-of-the-nation attack on Indian poverty and inequality. Although animal imagery drives *White Tiger* to a greater extent than in any of Mukherjee's writing, both writers occupy an essentially anthropocentric position (compare Walther 579). That is to say, the more biocentric perspective glimpsed in *Holder of the World* is fleeting and not repeated elsewhere in Mukherjee's work.

Her canine imagery is also shifting and contingent upon place: dogs take on a very different meaning in the US. They occupy an ambiguous position in any case, since they "can hunt and be hunted" (Pielak 113n11). In a 1999 essay "Imagining Homelands," Mukherjee figures her own identity as a new American by likening herself to an untrainable, immigrant "mutt," "mongrel" and "mongreliser" (78). At this moment, she celebrates her cultural hybridity and the US exceptionalism she believes has enabled this admixture. And connected to this positive resignification of such derogatory canine terms, her American dogs are essentially innocuous, for example, the "two big, drooling, goofy Lab mixes" owned by Beth, a San Francisco pre-school teacher in *Desirable Daughters* (87) or Mukherjee's own adored Papillon spaniel, Faustine (see Edwards 164), whom she took with her to every class when teaching students at the University of California, Berkeley (Hass n.p.). Despite the dangers of America, dogs are depicted as largely domesticated and harmless there, suggesting that in some key respect, the US is safer than India.

Canine imagery is also explicitly present in Mukherjee's adoption narratives, for instance, *Leave It to Me*, her 1997 novel of transcultural adoption. Here dogs are again identified with cultural hybridity as well as racially mixed Americans of South Asian descent: hence the employment of "mutt" in *Leave It to Me* (17, 47) and "Imagining Homelands" (78). This idea is historicised in *Holder of the World* where white colonisers regard mixed-race children as "little mongrel curs" (133). While such language appears pejorative in the manner of historically pathologising terms such as "half-breed" for people of mixed race, Mukherjee—the mother of two biracial sons—reclaims these words. In reappropriating them as part of her own creative vocabulary, she challenges master narratives of both India and the United States.

Conclusion

Drawing on a long literary tradition, Mukherjee relies upon animals as a rich allegorical and symbolic device in her work. Unlike such other contemporary writers as Ghosh or Karen Joy Fowler, however, her writing does not make an ecocritical intervention or advocate biocentrism: after all, Mukherjee's fiction and essays are

undeniably humanist. Yet her shifting use of zoological and zoomorphic imagery remains paradoxical. In terms of gendered associations, birds and marine mammals are most often connected with women—and used to interrogate notions of Indian entrapment, arranged marriage, and migration—while predatory creatures are connected to men, both brown and white. Dogs are particularly present in India and are often thematically associated with adoption and racial mixing. But whereas dogs are generally benign objects of affection in the US, they are untamed in India, revealing Mukherjee's lingering fear and rejection of her birth country. Canine imagery also exposes the vulnerability of Indian Americans visiting the ancestral nation. The artistic possibilities of animal representation are exalted in the historical setting of Mughal India where nonhuman creatures are used to attack the rise of European imperialism and question anthropocentrism. But in modern India, by contrast, animals are presented as feral, ruthless and even terrifying; and in a subversive sense, they threaten to disrupt the human hierarchies underpinning Indian society. Hence animal violence can erupt in the middle of a wealthy Mumbai apartment. This trend continues right into Mukherjee's last novel, *Miss New India*, where Bengaluru is figured in terms of vultures and "carrion" (239). In the United States, Mukherjee draws on animal language as an empowering means to celebrate cultural and racial hybridity. But that vision is less utopian than it seems since wild creatures, especially reptiles, are also associated with America, where they are employed to critique Anglo-American exceptionalism. Mukherjee's animals ultimately reveal the danger and unpredictability of both India and the United States and the slippery bid by human characters to lay claim to either place.

Notes

[1] Mukherjee is referring to Percy Bysshe Shelley's 1820 poem, "To a Skylark." The mistaken title is one of a couple of British-related solecisms in the story. The other is "Newenham" for Newnham College, Cambridge ("Debate" 267).

[2] Compare Mukherjee's use of Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach" (1867) in a later story, "The Imaginary Assassin" (1985), where the Sikh protagonist's grandfather is forced to memorise the poem as a punishment while serving time in a British colonial prison.

[3] Mukherjee initially viewed herself as "permanently stranded in North America" after leaving India in the early 1960s ("American Dreamer" 34).

[4] In a 1991 essay, Mukherjee calls attention to a reviewer's parallels between *Lolita* and the stories in her 1988 *Middleman* collection ("Four-Hundred-Year-Old Woman" 27). Such parallels are clearly empowering for Mukherjee in both literary and cultural terms.

[5] Cheetah imagery recurs in Mukherjee's short story "Happiness" (1997) and throughout her novel *Leave It to Me* (1997).

[6] This may be why—despite her critique of speciesist language to describe ethnic Indian women and her riposte to the European colonisers' denigrating use of zoomorphic language for Indian men in *Holder of the World*—Mukherjee deploys arachnid metaphors for P.K. Tuntunwala, an ambitious and predatory Marwari businessman in *Tiger's Daughter*, and depicts Amar, Shefali's conservative Bengali American husband in "The Going-Back Party," as having "simian arms" (n.p.).

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