

Slavery through the eyes of animals with reference to Anna Sewell's 'Black Beauty' and Arabella Argus's 'The Adventure of a Donkey'

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Abstract

Although slavery and the slave trade ended in the 19th century by the act of 1833, it stood as an irony throughout that era. This article exclusively focuses on the slavery and slave trade in the 19th century in comparison with autobiographies of animals. *Black Beauty* by Anna Sewell and *The Adventure of a Donkey* by Arabella Argus stood one step ahead of other works which talk about slavery. The primary essence of these novels is about the hardships faced by a horse named 'Black beauty' and a donkey 'Jemmy'. Anna Sewell and Arabella Argus unwittingly portrait the suffering of slaves through animals. Since it was written as an autobiography of animals, it showcases the in-depth feelings and sufferings they faced which can be equated with the feelings of slaves and working-class people. Anna and Arabella focus the spotlight on how horses are abused like tail bobbing, blinkers, double bits and also about how the donkeys are forced to do works beyond their capacity. This can be related to the rapid and unregulated industrialization which pulled the working-class people to slavery. This article proves the psychological impact of Anna Sewell and Arabella Argus towards the effect of slavery during the 19th century which is subconsciously reflected in their works. They not only talk about the life of animals (horses and donkeys) but also the working class and slaves of the Victorian era.

Introduction

Anna Sewell (1820-1878), was a British author of the well-known children's classic *Black Beauty*. It is the autobiography of a horse named Black Beauty and narrates the events from his birth to adulthood on a farm with a life full of adventures till his final retirement due to old age. Being a child of a successful juvenile author Mary Wright Sewell, Anna was home-schooled and learned about writing under the tutelage of her mother. An unfortunate accident made her life stuck in a wheelchair and she could not stand without support for the rest of her life. Her whole life depended on the carriage from where she got

an unconditional attachment and strong bond with her horse pony. Since she spent most of her time in the carriage, she was able to feel the treatment of humans towards the horse and decided to write a work on how the horses are treated. The main purpose of her work is to make the people understand how they are treating the horse. She said, "a special aim was to induce kindness, sympathy, and an understanding treatment of horses". One of her greatest inspirations was the "essay on animals" by Horace Bushnell where he argues that animals are created to follow the human will and to serve humans happily and it was incumbent on humans to treat them well. This novel was treated as one of the most important works in children's literature, but she proved that this novel is not only for children but to induce kindness and empathy toward horses in all humans. She worked with her mother in supporting the abolition of the slave trade which helped her enhance the thought and motivated her to talk about the slave trade in the form of an autobiography of a horse. We can find the gist of the slave trade in her work indirectly. Black Beauty, a handsome well-born, well-bred horse of the era before automobiles, narrates the story. He was separated from his mother at a very young age and was moved to London. He is then first sold to Squire Gordon where he met his first equine friend Ginger the horse. Ginger had a very cruel and abusive past. His childhood suffering had a great impact on her later days and he dies in mid of the story. His other friends are Merry legs, John Manly and James. They discuss mistreatment by humans and the neglect of masters. Black beauty had a great adventurous life where he was loved as well as neglected. The human possession over him was cruel but the way he managed and survived was astonishing. Days went by, and he was sold to one after the other till he met the last owner. He worked in a cab during the later part till his last strength and at last after his huge struggles with humans he finds a master in one sweet soul and his first caretaker Joe Green.

The Adventure of a Donkey, an animal welfare novel by Arabella Argus also stood as a voice for the animals. This British children's novel was written in 1815. Just like Arabella's other works, this work also lacked the attention of the readers. She stood away from the contemporary writers of her age. This novel is one good brilliant attempt of Arabella to open the eyes of society concerning the treatment of animals. Since this is a children's novel, she introduces children readers into the world of animal welfare and as a guide in the society where animals are treated worse. The life of Jemmy was like a rollercoaster where he received both love and hatred. Being a service animal, he was employed in various works. Lots of escapes from her stable and unhealthy state of mind and body led Jemmy to undergo the mysterious paths of life.

Arabella also enclosed the act of kindness and innocence of the children while treating animals and puts a spotlight on the cruelty and inhuman acts of humans.

The voice of animals to human society

“Those who deny freedom to others deserve it not for themselves” – Words of Abraham Lincoln resonates with today’s views on slavery. The 19th century is known for its abolishment of slavery by the act 1833. But the slavery and slave trade of the 19th century stands as an irony. It is well known that society will always create a great impact on the minds of people who lived in that era. One such impact was *Black Beauty*. Victorian age may be known for the abolition of slavery but no great steps were taken. Even though people talked about human slavery and fought for them, no one took an impressive initiative for animal slavery. Few expressed their view through their works, but that did not create a great impact until the novel *Black Beauty* was published and it was considered as a real piece of work. This work can be considered as a compact portrait of 19th century Britain which highlighted the effects and treatment of animals and indirectly indicates the state of human slavery. Black beauty was separated from his parents and he moves from the countryside to London as industrialization was at its peak and animals are more essential in everyday life for transportation and other works. Horses are like the substitution for human power where they are used to run the mills and other machinery which was performed by human slaves during the early stage of industrialization. An increase in population and widespread modernization and industrialization leads to the demand for a large number of horses and other service animals. For centuries horses have been the primary source of all sorts of power source from agriculture, mining, transportation and industrialization. The improvement of industrialization has decreased the effort and need for human power but the need for horses grew more and more especially in the Victorian era. The horses become the core source and Victorian society was completely dependent on them and failed to function without them. Even Black Beauty, who was born in the countryside was taken out to London due to the demand for service animals. Anna projects the act of abuse in the very first chapter where Black Beauty witnesses his own brother’s death due to human ignorance and greed for hunting. Ignorance is the main cause of abuse. Humans fail to understand the needs and emotions of those animals. Even though Black Beauty had a great master, his peace of mind was disturbed when he was handed over to other masters.

Black beauty showcases the various forms of abuse from the basic neglect to the cruelty made by the high society Victorians in the name of prestige. The greatest spotlight on animal cruelty was on the

usage of bearing rein. This was mainly used by the Royals, to showcase the pride and royalty. This was one of the cruellest acts on horses which were considered as the fashion of the Victorian era. Black Beauty revolves around various workers in various forms. He saw different experiences, kindness and compassionate treatment by people, but also selfish destructive cruel behaviour. Throughout the novel, Black Beauty was advised to behave well and to be a good boy by his mother and his master. Black beauty never disappointed them, even during his training period where he wore halters and then a bridle which is so uncomfortable for him and at last the driving harness and the crupper. He almost lost his patience but due to the emotional pressure and the dominance, he accepted it and got used to it. Even though these leather straps are considered as a usual one for horses, they will create mental distress to the horses. just because the horse should ride straight, they were given blinkers where they cannot see anything on their sides. We can take these acts as human selfishness where they use these innocent harmless animals and constrain their whole life in the piece of leather straps. In chapter three Anna and Black Beauty takes us to the seriousness and sensitivity of animal abuse. Ginger, Black Beauty's best friend gets introduced and the severity and cruelty she endures. She was treated badly and had poor upbringings in contrast to his good one and that has deeply affected her psyche that she couldn't perform well. But Anna portrays Black Beauty as a very stable and trustworthy horse even when he was treated badly. In a society where humans are treated like animals, this brave soul talked for the animals. Through her sincere love towards her pony, she demonstrated her love for animals during her later part and gave them a second chance to live their life. This work had created a great change in animal treatment and the abolition of the slave trade during the later 19th century.

Yet another creature jemmy took us through the life of donkeys who lived during the Victorian era. Just like black beauty and any other human slaves he was separated from his parents and experienced the cruel treatment of humans at a very young age. Being sold to the hands of a cruel caretaker, jemmy survived with the love of his master. once he gets to know that his loved one is no more, he ran away from the hands of the cruel caretaker. But poor jemmy was again reunited with his caretaker and this time due to human ignorance, he was used as an object for the bet and lost his home and moved to a stable. Here begins the human greed and rule over the innocent animals. He was then used to riding young women and children up and down the hill. And then to a sandman. He didn't get proper care and due to malnutrition, he fell sick. Jemmy was once broke his knees during his work. It is the responsibility of the

master to stay with his animal even during its hardest time. But he found him as a useless one and send him away. Humans even think of those living through the eyes of profit or loss.

Donkeys are being used as service animals for more than 5000years. Next to human slaves, donkeys are the most used living being to serve humans. Just like horses, industrialization used donkeys as an underrated employee to do all the physical works from carrying heavy loads to serving as entertainment for the public. Throughout their life, they end up serving mankind. Are these human masters treating them well? Are they fulfilling their needs? Or neglecting their feelings and pain. For centuries it is believed that the donkey had great willpower to do heavy works. But the human negligence had thrown the donkeys into an unjust state. Centuries ago, donkeys are real heroes and service animals who were used to carrying the soldiers who were wounded during world war I. And now it turned to be a poor men's vehicle. Even in some countries, donkeys are used as meat.

Like Anna, Arabella took a great step for those non-human animals to focus on their life as service animals. Anna was a voice for a horse where Arabella spoke for a donkey named Jemmy. Even though Arabella was an unfamiliar writer of the Victorian era, her efforts are primarily based on teaching children the correct value and humanity. As there are lots of other writers who talk and criticised humanity towards humans, this invisible and unrecognized lady of the Victorian era stood for the animals.

Human justice through animals

The concept of the slave trade begins during the early 15th century. since it gained a lot of profits, this slave trade was widely followed all over Europe. Africans were the primary target for slavery and the slave trade. Europeans bought the Africans as slaves in exchange for materialistic goods. The main source of this slave trade is due to poverty. Though Britain marched towards modernization, it increased the need for labour which eventually turns to slavery. Behind every industrialization there lies the blood and abuses of slaves. These slaves are taken from overseas where they have to travel for days and even months without proper food and care. During the slave trade, on their way to the new land, the captains ensure a profit by cutting off the ears of slaves as proof of purchase. This very incident was portrayed by Anna in her novel” Black Beauty” where the ears of the dogs are chopped in the name of fashion. Due to the brutal treatment, many committed suicides and starved themselves to death. At least at this stage of life humans had the liberty over choosing whether to live or quit. Consider these poor furry animals, neither they can live peacefully nor are they can express their emotions. Animals are considered to be

beasts, but the real beast is humans who failed to treat those four-legged creatures without care and compassion. These animals are neglected because human brains thought that they are the saviours of these animals by feeding them. The real saviours are these animals who lessen the hard work of humans and take the whole thing on their backs. It takes a few steps to share some amount of love with those speechless creatures who surrendered their whole life to humankind. From their birth to their death, it is humans being benefited by them.

Even Europeans became slaves for Europeans. 19th century Britain is known for its industrialisation and education which leads to remarkable progress in new inventions, physics and medical science. Even though these are considered a great success, this success is not celebrated by all. Anna and Arabella intended to tell us about developmental psychology about the impact of our early life on our later years and also about how cruelty and bad actions are echoing through people's lives. It is very evident that Victorian human slavery forced Anna and Arabella to present their works for mankind through the animals.

Conclusion

Beyond all the rational and nation discrimination, all the species of this world either its animals or humans should be treated equally with concerns. No matter whether it is animals or humans. Humanity stands there when we value the feelings of others regardless of their abilities or how many legs they have. The common sense of the human race should be reflected in the concerns we have towards others. Human slavery had been looked like a normal thing in human civilization for over 1000 yrs. The gradual development of education, morals and various acts took human slavery as an act of stupidity. It is now great to hear that society considers slavery as a moral abomination. Let's believe that our world is marching towards an antislavery place for humans and animals. No matter where they belong to.

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