



Becoming and Unbecoming: Re-examining Human-Animal Relationship in *Dog Boy* and *The Whale Caller*

Dr. Subodh Mahato

School Education and Literacy, Govt. of Jharkhand

Abstract:

In the two novels *Dog Boy* and *The Whale Caller*, animals are shown no longer sufferer rather they are idealized or desired by the human world for redemption. The barrier between human and animal does not exist as frailty of human beings have forced themselves towards 'becoming' animals which is to turn into animality in order to find a world which is full of pure intensities. 'Becoming animal' never focuses nonhuman animals in alienation but present them in different forms of organic and non-organic life. According to Deleuze and Guattari, 'becoming' is not imitation because imitation denotes a shift from one identity to another. It may be from higher identity to lower identity or the vice versa. It is a way to regain consciousness which was lost in darkness of anthropocentrism and this leads simultaneously to unbecoming of human beings from their arid conditions. Being remote is the key for such redemption but not at the cost of leaving anyone. Being in concord with the nature in the process is another aspect which this paper has tried to explore and also the position of animals in the nature has been examined. This paper has tried to look after these issues critically.

Keywords: Becoming, Human, Animal, Animality, Anthropocentrism, Nature.

Introduction

What beast was't, then,
That made you break this enterprise to me?
When you durst do it, then you were a man; (Shakespeare, 2008, p. 64)

Lady Macbeth's use of beast-metaphor in narrating the mental state of her husband, Macbeth,

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in Shakespearean tragedy, *Macbeth* (1623), never seems to be a superfluous one to the readers because their uses are common in the daily language of mankind. The main point is whether this comparison to beast is only metaphorical or it captures the imagination of human mind in real life also. This paper has tried to delve into the faculty of human mind whether any 'beast' resides inside the human mind or not. The titles of the select texts, *The Whale Caller* (2005) and *Dog Boy* (2009) have been the indicators that protagonists from both texts are nothing but hermaphrodite in nature. And they are in perfect harmony in the company of each other. The motive behind this is to wipe out of the anthropocentric attitude and to believe in a more inclusive idea of the world. The idea of 'communion' has been recurrently used across myths and religions. In Christianity, 'communion' is a rite in which breads and wine are shared among devotees in the memory of Jesus Christ. In general, it means sharing of thoughts and feelings. One of the main subjects of Human-Animal Studies is the necessity of the empathy between species and co-existence of them in harmony.

Human nature is believed to be divided into two parts- rational part and animal part. Plato has called this animal part as 'beast within' in *Republic, Part IX*. Plato, like most of the philosophers, has written on 'beast within' on a negative note. The beast epitomizes lawlessness. It is associated with all the grotesqueness of human mind. It is inferior, uncivilized and unreasonable therefore, meaningless. But philosophers like Mary Midgley have defended this. According to her, presence of evil in human nature is not due to any external force. It is the lack of goodness that gives birth to evil in one's nature. The tradition to relate evilness of human beings to a beast is a case of human prejudice. In both novels, animals are shown no longer sufferer rather they are idealized or desired by the human world for redemption. The redemption through nonhuman animals, which is first visualized and portrayed by Ted Hughes. Ted Hughes is easily the pioneer litterateur of Animal Studies. His name must not be missed from the list of animality-advocates. Towards 1950s and 1960s, he made ripples in the English literature by dedicating his poetic oeuvre to animal spirit and animal power. His poetry chiefly focuses on animal's natural life which is supposed to be instinctive, by exploring the elemental core of animal world and human world. Seeing the human worlds exhausted and in debilitating condition, he seeks in the nature of the nonhuman spring of energy which could recharge the devitalized human world. The barrier between human and animal never exists as frailty of human beings have forced themselves towards 'becoming' animals which is to turn into animality in order to find a world which is full of pure intensities. Animality, here, is suggestive of the tuning of animal senses in human mind.

Becoming Animal, Becoming Human:

I move from 'the ends of man', that is the confines of man, to 'the crossing the borders' between man and animal. Passing across borders or to ends of man I come or surrender to the animal, to the animal in itself, to the animal in me.... (Derrida, 2008, p. 3)

In the above-mentioned lines, Derrida is unequivocally critical about man and man's take on animals. Before moving into the critical explanations of human-animal relationship, if we look carefully at the terms, 'human' and 'animal', we may understand that it is a social categorization, done exclusively by mankind. This categorization becomes easier as man and animal are two different species. The prejudiced minds of human beings refuse to accept them in the same order they are in because they think that reasoning is the sole factor to classify into the categories of 'human' and 'animal'. Zakes Mda, in *The Whale Caller* (2005), fills his unprejudiced human protagonist with some elements that are thought to be animalistic. The protagonist has no other name but Whale Caller. The name properly suggests his preoccupation with the whales, particularly with a female Southern whale named Sharisha. He spends throughout the day and night in the shore with his restless heart for the female whale. He generally avoids human- faces. His eyes always remain stuck at the middle of the sea with his

Ahab-like monomania. However, this obsession or the preoccupation with the nonhuman creature is merely out of love, not hate. The author describes his obsession by saying that the human protagonist was not a 'whale crier' (Mda 13) but a whale caller. By the phrase, 'whale crier', the author suggests to the tourists who come to watch the whale. As the protagonist also does a job of playing horn in church, he starts playing horn in order to communicate with his favourite whale and he does it successfully. As a lover feels sometimes, he also feels jealousy when he finds Sharisha surrounded by male whales.

The Whale Caller is suddenly seized by a fit of jealousy. He yells at the males, calling them names and shooing them away from his Sharisha....The Whale Caller feels betrayed. (Mda, 2005, p. 47)

In the novel, the protagonist is portrayed as a socially alienated figure but his empathy for nonhuman beings makes him more integrated with the nature. The portrayal of both human and nonhuman characters along with the others never makes us feel that Zakes Mda is doing here superfluously. He never tries to make it more sentimental and sensational by adding extra effects. His creatures, both human and nonhuman, are not anthropomorphized ones but they belong to the real world. As one can see that the female whale's response to the Whale Caller is natural. Because, it is scientifically proven that cetacean creatures like dolphin and whale are responsive to any kind of music. They can easily reciprocate to song or music just like Sharisha does in the context of the novel. It makes the protagonist very jubilant. References of human obsession, dance, music, musical instruments etc. make it more poignant in reflecting the harmony between both the species. The author has used certain sexual imageries like orgasm of the human persona in order to show the extreme obsession but he has never said that same thing happens with the nonhuman beings. This obsession posits the presence of animal-self of human being. It seems quite unnatural to the people like Saluni, another human protagonist of the novel, but it is quite normal. Human beings don't believe in the emotional lives of animals, be it domestic or wild. They think that animals are creatures of only flesh and blood. This reciprocation of feelings between two species is one of the main objectives of this research. The word, 'reciprocation', has long been associated with human being. Animals are denied of this word. Continuous obsession and recurrent activities of Whale Caller for the nonhuman species are suggestive of the perverseness of his human nature. Whenever, he sees Sharisha, he dances in frenzied way. His animality flows like a river.

'Becoming animal' never focuses nonhuman animals in alienation but present them in different forms of organic and non-organic life. According to Deleuze and Guattari, 'becoming' is not imitation because imitation denotes a shift from one identity to another. It may be from higher identity to lower identity or the vice versa. On the other, it suggests about the deconstructing of identity itself. Thus, it rejects the hierarchical structure of human and nonhuman beings. They also elaborate that it is not an evolution but an involvement or entanglement between human and nonhuman species. In *The Whale Caller*, we find that the eponymous character continues to stay and keep a watch on the whales or upon a particular whale named Sharisha. Deeper sexual activities are not possible between a human and a gigantic whale. But for the attachment between a human and a nonhuman, another woman becomes jealous and lovelorn in the novel. As the whale appears once in a year nevertheless, Whale Caller never forgets the whale rather grows impulsive and restless in spite of the love of a fellow human being. Third, when Sharisha, the female whale with whom the protagonist is deeply infatuated, has been surrounded by the other male whales in the ocean, he feels disgusted, jealous and sometimes he imagines as if a lovemaking has occurred between him and the whale. On the other hand, killing of whales by the local people or the tourists makes him aghast and it is like cannibalism to him. Fourth, the response from the whale—When Whale Caller clads himself in a tuxedo-dress and blow his horn in frenzied manner, the whale also responds by splashing the water by its long tail. Even many times the whale appears after

hearing the shrill sound of the kelp-horn and also makes sound like that. Finally, we can see the reverse of Cartesian opinion throughout the novel. That animals are devoid of emotion is proved wrong here. Towards the end of the novel, the whale strands itself when there is a happy-times spent between Whale Caller and Saluni, the human counterpart of the whale. The novel confirms that Whale Caller's love for the whale has been a spiritual and affectionate one. Sometimes, though the human protagonist is found obsessed with the she-whale, it is only an attempt to bridge the Cartesian gulf between human emotion and animal emotion. That the nonhuman animals are mere soulless machine as said by Rene Descartes, is rejected here. The novel portrays that the minds of human protagonists have been filled by the emotion and the nonhuman animals are also capable of response. Jacques Derrida has mentioned very clearly about 'response' of nonhuman animals. He has said that the nature of response has been traditionally denied to animals despite their obvious capacity to return the human gaze.

Ferality and Entanglement:

Some powerful spirit instruct the kites and ravens
To be thy nurses! Wolves and bears, they say,
Casting their savageness aside, have done
Like offices of pity. (Shakespeare, 1968, p. 190)

William Shakespeare has mentioned long ago about the feral child in the play, *The Winter's Tale*. In her novel, *Dog Boy*, Eva Hornung has taken up the issue of feral for understanding the animality in human nature. The word, 'feral', literally means any animal or human which escapes the human civilization in order to live in wildness. The novel is a story about Romochka, a six-year old boy who leaves his home in order to escape the tortures that he faced. He gets much needed warmth and love from a family of stray dogs. The stray dogs roam just outside the human apartments and the alleys which suggest human territory. The human boy who never went outside without the permission of his biological mother, takes shelters with the pack of dogs under open sky in a chilly cold night. The association of dog with human beings is thought to be one of the oldest human-animal associations. In the text also, the other dogs along with the mother dog, Mamochka, know well about the arrival of a human boy in their territory and they never show any protest against him. They easily become known and friendly to each other. It does not take too many days for him to adjust with the dog-family. He survives the first with the warmth of the camaraderie of the puppies and the milk of the mother dog.

He warmed up and his spirits lifted. Then it was on: the rolling fighting tumble as one puppy after another piled on top on him, he laughing and gasping and trying to throw one off, bite another, pin down another and clamp his knees over a fourth. He soon learned not to expose his belly or neck. He poked holes in his woolen hat for his earholes and then pulled it down over his face and neck for some protection. But he was always sore, and Mamochka would lick his wounds every time she settled down to take care of them all. (Hornung, 2010, p. 31)

Outside the human territory, Romochka yearns for home, family and mother. And all these he gets here with them. With the similarity in naming of Romochka and Mamochka, the mother dog, the author has given the hint the natural affinity between them. The mother dog teaches Romochka a thing or two by biting. He is gradually becoming like them. When his raw skin gets infected, he has taken off all his torn-out clothes for the dog-mother to lick away the pus and scabs near his armpits and on his inner-thighs. Amidst all these, he does not forget his past life as human and with human. One day, when he goes outside with the other dogs, he remembers the place because he has past memory with the place.

The author has maintained the boundary between two different species. Though they

feel an obscure yet palpable happiness in the presence of each other, they are all aware about their own nature. That 'becoming animal' is not entire becoming of animal is again established when we see that Romochka, even after spending more than one year with them, has not forgotten to listen music. If he could listen music anywhere while roaming with other dogs, he immediately stops to listen that music. Though music is loved by almost all creatures but music here, belongs to culture of which nonhuman beings are generally not associated with. However, the outsider people now avoid this human child because he is never left alone by his beast-friends. He gradually becomes known as dog boy. As the boy lives with the family of dogs sometimes in the outskirts of the city, sometimes on the roads and alleys, people now can identify him as an unnatural boy who stays with dogs. Actually, the period Eva Hornung has chosen for this novel is a time around 2000s when the administration of Russia was on high alert about this type of children who had left their home. One of them was Ivan Mishukov upon whose life the novel is based. Towards the end of the novel, Romochka has been caught by the local police and he is kept on a shelter-home. Mamochka tries to avert his capture as much as she can but it was simply impossible for her to fight with human. After few months spending at shelter, Romochka gets back to his normal human life. George Orwell talks about the deep-rooted vices and follies of mankind through his animal spokespersons in his satirical novella, *Animal Farm* (1945). Though it is regarded mostly as political satire, the observations made by the author about human beings are apt. This is not new to say that self-centeredness and vices are predominant in their nature. But things have changed in the present literary scenario where the human characters are seeking liberation from their own vicious labyrinth. Their souls become so tired to remain with their incorrigible friends that they seek the blissful company of nonhuman beings. In *Dog Boy*, the main character, Romochka, is a boy who, after leaving human territory, grows up with a pack of dogs in wilderness. The story is quite similar to that of Mowgli in Kipling's 'Mowgli's Brothers' where Mowgli is raised by wolves in the jungle or forest. Eva Hornung has often highlighted a particular word, 'territory' in the novel, *Dog Boy*:

He was both afraid and exhilarated, charged with the surge of power and weakness one feels when stepping over a boundary and into another's territory. (Hornung, 2010, p. 115)

The boundary of which the writer is talking about is the boundary or barrier between human animals and nonhuman animals. This barrier is established long ago by human beings in order to announce the uniqueness among other species. However, they have not contained themselves within their own territory. They have invaded other's territory and have spoiled it. Karl Marx (1818-1883) rightfully remarked in *The German Ideology* (1932) that nature which preceded human history no longer exists anywhere (except perhaps on a few Australian coral islands of recent origin). Though, in the text, *Dog Boy*, the territory symbolizes a place where only animal resides and which is unknown to human beings. The contrasting set of words in the aforementioned lines, 'afraid and exhilarated' is quite significant. The human character, who is determined to leave their own territory now, is feeling afraid or hesitant to enter into the territory of others because he has never tried to know his animal companions before. At the same time, he is feeling exhilarating because he is now going to liberate himself from his own tyrannical species and is going to be feral.

Giorgio Agamben, in his book, *The Open: Man and Animal* (2002) quotes Kojève by saying that the disappearance of Man at the end of history is not a cosmic catastrophe rather the natural World remains what it has been from all eternity. And it is not a biological catastrophe either: Man remains alive as animal in harmony with Nature. Outside the human territory, Romochka yearns for home, family and mother. And all these he gets here with them. With the similarity in naming of Romochka and Mamochka, the mother dog, the author has given the hint the natural affinity between them. The mother dog teaches Romochka a thing or

two by biting. He is gradually becoming like them. When his raw skin gets infected, he has taken off all his torn-out clothes for the dog-mother to lick away the pus and scabs near his armpits and on his inner-thighs. Amidst all these, he does not forget his past life as human and with human.

Becoming Animal and Becoming Integrated:

Towards the end the novel, Professor Lurie in J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999) accepted that he loved to live "Like a dog" (Coetzee 205). As the novel, *Disgrace*, goes, it is seen that Professor Lurie and his daughter, Lucy, both are getting obsessed gradually with the dogs' lives and they relate their traumatic life-experiences with those of animals. Initially, Prof. Lurie and his daughter, Lucy, were not so convinced about their lives around dogs before they both found love and warm solace in them. This unison is much significant for them after facing humiliations in their respective lives. Quite similarly, in *Dog Boy*, Romochka, the young protagonist, finds joy and security in the presence of the dog-family after leaving the horrifying experiences behind. It is found that both the sentient nonhuman beings and their human counterpart quiver with excitement:

They stayed stuck together for long stretches, exhausted, focused only on each other, with day passing into dusk. Even Romochka could smell them now and he tingled with a heady excitement. He felt the pressure of an obscure happiness. (Hornung, 2010, p. 55).

Along with gaiety, some mischievous adventures have also been carried out by the team. In these adventures, Romochka leads as he is better acquainted to the human world. When he faces difficulties, the other dogs of the team act as rescuers. A deep sense of bonding is always there between the lives of two species. In *The Whale Caller*, when we meet the protagonist who lives in a Wendy house in the coastal town, Hermanus, his whole adult life has been determined by his desire to communicate with the whales. He has eschewed all kind of earthly material possessions, even the daily food, and becomes a fisherman who uses to travel up the west coast from his home by playing the kelp-horn. We all know that he has a special kind of relationship with the whale, Sharisha. She is his beloved. He describes the callosities on her face which resembles the Three Sisters (three landmark hills in the Karoo province of South Africa). He recognizes her acrobatics and becomes delighted to see the whiteness of her baleen, which is evidence that she is not infested with lice. One can assume how much obsessed Whale Caller's mind turns into. The minute description about the female whale with brimming passion is not just a mere fantasy for a particular nonhuman animal but by his mind, he becomes an 'animal'. We generally use the term 'wilderness' for signifying nature which is uncontaminated by civilization. It is also seen as a place for the reinvigoration of mentally fatigued and polluted human society. In this sense, wilderness is sacred. Though the term is generally used in eco-critical and ecological discussion but we can say in the novel, *The Whale Caller*, that the protagonist's mind has entered to the 'wilderness' of animal-mind. Becoming-animal is not just doing behaviour of a four-legged creature of horns or any other sea-mammals but it reflects the 'purity' of someone's mind which is not polluted by anthropocentrism but soaked with genuine feelings for animals. Zakes Mda represents a reciprocal relationship between a human and the whale. It is not just mythical but real. The Whale Caller does not only become animal but the whale also becomes integrated with her human lover. His aim is to converse with whales in subjective-ways rather than mere objective ways like the tourists who come only to watch whales in sea. He wants to grow up a mutual bond with them in a way that he and they both become one and their identities are beyond the human-animal border. Hence, they validate that 'Animal was the basis, the hidden foundations; but human---that was the building, the amazing sculptured artifact of personality'. (Hornung, 2010, p. 194)

Conclusion:

In *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, said that the essential alliance between two different beings is important. It is not an evolution but an entanglement that happens in the process of 'becoming animal'. In the texts that are taken for establish this argument; there are plenty of examples where there is no total transformation or metamorphosis happening to the protagonists. They show one thing that whenever human beings come in close contact with the nonhuman animals, the human beings go through positive transformation. The effect of this transformation is something different. They become capable to retrieve the lost vitality of life. And with this vitality, they not only can feel and understand the essence of being whole, being integrated with the other living beings in the world. They even regain the consciousness which became messy in the narrow, darker passage of self-centric world. The narrative fully posits that "the story with animals is the better story" (Martel, 2003, p. 317). In this way, it is a matter of unbecoming of the alienated, unethical and anthropocentric selves of human beings from the crudity to a revitalized and invigorated ones by 'becoming animals'.

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Bio-note

Dr. Subodh Mahato has been awarded Ph.D degree from the Department of English, Banaras Hindu University in 2024. His primary research is on Human-Animal Relationship in literature. Apart from that, he also has keen interest in the areas like Animal Studies, Postcolonial Literature, Ecocriticism, Translation Studies etc.

Email Id: subodhz.mahato@gmail.com

Orchid ID: 0000-0001-6247-3231

