

Bestiary Beacon: An analyzing Allegorical Uses of Animals in Contemporary Hindi Poetry

Anindya Gangopadhyay

Presidency University, Kolkata, West Bengal

Abstract

Usage of bestiary in modern literature is very common stylization to depict a harsh critical discourse very easily without hurting anyone directly. It becomes the finest way ever possible of comparing the specific characteristics with dual meaning using simply a mask of that particular symbol. Horse, tiger, crow, buffalo, cow, snake, wolf rather specific terms are commonly used symbols for smart equivocation in world literature. Bestiary as symbolic stylization is used in world literature for appropriate expressions of unsaid words even at difficult situation behind the mask and it stimulates our numb feelings alarming us just like a beacon. The articles discuss allegorical uses of bestiary in contemporary Hindi poetry and try to show how the issues raised in the poems are deeply related to our immediate social problems.

[**Keywords:** Bestiary, Allegory, Sacchidanand Hiranand Vatsyayan Agneya, Kedarnath Singh, Sarbeswardayal Saksena, Kunwar Narayan, Srikant Verma]

The great Hindu epic *The Ramayana* translated and in some places re-written by the poet Krittibas in Bengali tells us the story of victory over Dasanan Ravana's Lanka where monkeys as army of Rama fought for their king. Monkeys played a vital role in the entire *Ramayana* and became an important cause in the revolution as bestiary for human civilization. It is seen many times that world's renowned writers used resolute symbolic application of bestiaries in various literary creations. Such parlance remains always indicative to point out deformities of society and it becomes also provocative to think about the abnormal behavior of various human faces in society. But the question arises: why do writers eventually depend on application of bestiaries to tell the ultimate truth of society even at the digital age? This debate can generate certain constructive logic that writers may feel more comfortable to speak out the truth, the indecent activities and maladies by using allegory of bestiaries. It can also be a point that being a human being, inner sense of writers never allows portraying camouflaged human faces directly in their writings. It may be one kind of humbleness, may be escapism. But it's a fact that since long literary world smartly uses allegory and symbolizes bestiaries indicating different meanings in many ways at different situations. In medieval Europe, there were few stories and illustrations which depicted real and mythical animals or plants to illustrate a moral. Usually it is based on Christian moral. The stories were initially derived from the Greek physiologies. It is thought that the concept of bestiary in world literature had been generated from a collection of 48 such stories, written in Alexandria around the 2nd century.

Several times in Hindi poetry experimentation on bestiary becomes the ultimate implementation of protesting ill-treatment and other socio-economical maladies. Sometimes it expresses social values, morality and existence too. Sacchidanand Hiranand Vatsyayan Agneya had written two poems using allegoric expressions “Saapn” (The Snake) and “Sonmachhli” (The Golden Fish), which contain profound meaning within very limited words. The first poem indicates characteristics of venomous snake which actually points out vindictive, jealous and harmful people of our society. The poetry “Saapn” contains 7 lines in which first and last two are really remarkably striking. Agneya wrote –

“Snake!
 You have not been civilized
 living in city....
 Asking a question (Will you answer?)
 Then how you have learnt to bite
 from where you have got poison? ”ⁱ

The poetic acumen imparts that people of a city cannot be taken as civilized and more consequently uncivilized people may be present in rural and also in urban community. This is the simplest difference between good and bad. In the last sentence, word ‘poison’ represents immorality and evilness. From the collection of poems “Aari o karuna prabhamoy” the poem “Sonmachhli” is the shortest one which consists only 6 lines but it contains wide inner meaning of remaining alive, the propensity for life. In March, 1955 French poet Allen Ridel wrote a poem “Golden Fish at an Angle” for magazine ‘Encounter’ in France. Agneya was influenced by the deep thought of aforesaid poem and wrote “Sonmachhli”. He wrote:

“We look beauty,
 behind the glass
 fish are breathing fast
 thirst for beauty also thirst for beauty (and behind the glass)
 is propensity for life.”ⁱⁱ

These sensational words create such an impression in mind that we are living in definite circle of glass. We all are like golden fish moving fast heather and theater inside the glass sometimes with cause and sometimes without; we are rushing for something which we do not know in this materialistic world. Some have thirsty look, watching our beauty from outside of glass only for daily amusement, for each and every minute, every moment, but their look cannot ameliorate our living, cannot help to sustain our existence. The Golden fish here is an appropriate application of bestiary which can easily touch our heart, motivate us to smash our conventional limitations of thoughts for stepping out.

Another contemporary modern poet in Hindi literature is Kedarnath Singh (1934-) who has shown excellent application of bestiary. The poetic world of Kedarnath is such in which the poet can easily blend colour, luminosity, beauty, essence, and image. The most interesting part is that he has portrayed the soul of village and the spirit of city at a time

in many of his poems surprisingly. Sometimes in form of crow, sometimes birds, bull and tiger, his bestiaries as allegorical expression have made its room in core of many hearts distinctly. The poet does not only illustrate reality in his poem but also has tried to indicate hidden perturbation under reality and in this circumstance bestiaries play allegorical role to unleash the actual. The poem “The Tiger” (Baagh) written by Kedarnath Singh in the year 1984 reveals perturbed reality. Eminent Argentinean Poet Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986), famous for ‘Ultraismo’ – a kind poetic approach in Latin American literature had written a poem ‘El Otro Tigre’ (Another Tiger) where he represented ‘Tiger’ as ‘un sistema de palabras’ which means a system of human expression. In this context it can be mentioned that British poet, painter, engraver, and mystic William Blake had also written poem “The Tyger” which belongs to *Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience*. In the poem, surprise begins on a fearsome tiger and its divine creator who has made this strikingly beautiful, yet, also horrific in its capacity for violence. T. S. Eliot wrote that Blake’s poetry in *Songs of Experience* and other writings contained:

“an honesty against which the whole world conspires because it is unpleasant.”ⁱⁱⁱ

No doubt application of bestiary in world literature is capable enough to reveal unpleasant, unholy, evil truth openly. Whenever the whole world conspires it gears back and has taken its firm stand time to time for wider interest of the common people. Kedarnath is not surprised at all for awesome creator God and his ‘fearful symmetry’. A case in point is that he wants to break this conventional thought of fearful symmetry regarding tiger. Kedarnath’s tiger is like some fearless element who did not protest or forgot to protest against unpleasant since long or who is being kept in certain periphery of conspiracy from where tiger will never be released. Nature’s ‘fearful symmetry’ tiger becomes unsymmetrical in this eccentric world. At the time of sunset the tiger watches entire locality from far and becomes annoyed thinking why the smoke is not exaggerating from chimney. Inflating smoke is not here symbolic expression of sadness but it becomes index of life. Kedarnath has written:

“Present
Present
and to be in continuous present
someday when tiger comes up to his liking”^{iv}

Dissatisfaction of the tiger is apparently abnormal but its inner meaning states that the tiger could not accept non-progressive, standstill human life. It could not understand the meaning of sadness because the most horrific and powerful creature of this world does not realize it at all. A conversation between Tiger and Wolf is one of the interesting parts in this poem. Tiger asks –

“Again ask gradually
‘do human beings / drink water?’
‘drink – the wolf replied
but they like us
do not drink only morning and evening....

‘but so much of water why do human beings drink?’
 the tiger asked astonishingly...
 nothing is understood by the tiger
 but heading down since long
 like that it continues thinking
 this ‘sorrow’ is such a word
 in that case the tiger
 was absolutely helpless.”

The tiger is used in this poem as sensible bestiary that does not know sorrow, cannot write ‘Iswar’ (God) cannot accept stagnant life, nor is used to crying for feeling helpless, venturing to think positive. Kedarnath has tried to assert that there is an existence of certain kind of tiger in most of the mind of human being but no one is ready to face the so called fear because they are habituated to be afraid and that’s the mystery of tiger. The penultimate stanzas of part 16 are extraordinarily affirmative and here bestiary turns into an optimistic figure. Kedarnath’s words are -

“This time in open day light
 a beautiful
 tiger like flaring fire
 nowhere fear no horror
 beautiful tiger was a mobile magic...
 the tiger was in prayer
 children were studying the tiger
 people were easily eating the tiger
 drinking the tiger / inside matchbox
 On cup of tea
 the tiger was walking on TV screen....
 all were busy when at own work
 then slightly by all
 the tiger was seen!”

The poet does not want to think of tiger as fearful creature of this world. He has symbolized in such a way that the society can be easily acquainted with this beast through their regular activities like studying, eating, drinking or in one word, by work. He has made it clear that the tiger decides to give up its own present because remaining in continuous present the tiger has faced a social rift which has kept it apart from other creatures of this beautiful world. The tiger somehow succeeds to writes vowel ‘I’ but he failed to write down half of the alphabet ‘S’ under guidance of Woolf. The sharp eyes of the tiger remain blunt with strange pain as if for the first time he is smashed down in tussle. He does not understand the importance of the word ‘Iswar’ but believes in strength, in social bonding, in gentle relations with everyone and dreams for progressive future. Kedarnath has pointed out the eternal relation of individuality to collectiveness and vice versa. At the end the poet has also made it clear that we all have to exist like water, like bolder, staying far away from killing zone. The stupendous bestiary of

Kedarnath's creation comes out for opening up our eyes, enlightening us with sense of existence. In "The Inquiry" the Italian dramatist and poet Ugo Betti has said about existence

"At a given moment I open my eyes and exist. And before that, during all eternity, what was there? Nothing"^v

Kedarnath has made it easy to disclose the belief on existence, an essential feeling of liberty in each human life where poet's tiger the bestiary dwells very lively without having no fear, no hesitation in each mind, in every event of life.

Sarbeswardayal Saksena (1927-1983) is another poet who has successfully used bestiary as an effective symbolic expression in Hindi poems. Especially his bestiary on wolf and fox represents tricky evils, double-faced opportunists and rich bloodsuckers, thereby indirectly referring to selfish people of our unfortunate societ. The poem 'Bheriya' (Wolf) written by Sarbeswar in the year 1976 is from his collection 'Jungle ka dard' (Pain of Jungle). Sarbeswar has symbolized 'Bheriye' (Wolves), 'Kutte' (Dogs), 'Tendua'(Cheetah) and many others to unwrap real truth of this uncanny world. Sarbeswar has written –

"If you escape hiding your face
then also you
in your self will get presence like this
if you remain alive!
Eyes of wolf are red
and yours?"

The wolf avoids fire, runs away facing fire torch but the most significant difference is that the wolf cannot ignite fire but man can. Significantly the poet has emphasized 'man' who can resist iniquities by his moral values. History contains this transformation of man to bestial condition and vice versa changes of face, opinion, position, prestige occur time to time. The simple truth of metamorphosis is illustrated by the poet in such a way where allegorical expression appears to be an alarming substance at present time for moral reformation of our society. Last lines of 'Bheriye-3' (Wolves) persuade us into deep thoughts of philosophy –

"History will remain alive
and also you
and the wolf?"

Such allegorical expression strikes on dreary sense of the human beings, which Sarbeswar has tried to indicate very precisely.

Kunwar Narayan (1927-) is one of the contemporary Hindi poets whose extreme effort to express truth in poetic form is no doubt creates remarkable feelings in our mind. In the year 1956 "Chakrabyuha" a collection of his poetry had been published. "Giddhho ki basti mein" (In the Slum of Vulture) is one of the poem from the aforesaid collection. It presents vulture as a cruel creature which always likes to dissect abundant dead bodies by

its massive hooked bill and enjoy food brutally. Such ugly and dreadful nature of vulture is portrayed by the poet Kunwar Narayan –

“On the filthy wall
the slum of vulture
got to eat
dead body here in cheap”

At the end the poet says that in such a way this creature by its pen like bill makes costing of income and expenditure dissecting dead bodies on filthy wall. Kunwar Narayan has written another poem “Titliyoin ke desh mein” (In the Land of Butterfly) which displays a clear impression of flying butterflies and a confused man. Actually both are confused of thinking who is following whom. The poet has portrayed this situation nicely –

“I halt
then it also halts
I turn back
then it also turns back
again when I run after it
it also runs after me”

A flying Butterfly can be imagined as invisible particles of this universe or inner soul and a mind of human being, where each and every moment, the game of running after each other is silently going on.

Srikant Verma (1931-1986) is a renowned poet in Hindi literature, associated with *The Times of India* for 13 years. In the year 1973 a collection of his poems named “Jalsaghar” (The Ball Room) had been published where the poem “Troy ka Ghora” (Horse of Troy) is a remarkable one. The horse is an example of powerful animal which possesses enormous energy and ability of running but it cannot fix up target by its own, without getting the whip. The poet wants to elucidate that will-power of human being is certain kind of energy which can be completely compared to the horse. It has to be motivated on right direction so that man can reach desired destination. Srikant wrote:

“I want
you ask yourself, who are you?’
‘I proclaim, I am human being’
‘No, you are wood!
there are ten thousand horses inside you
hundred thousand soldiers,
you are camouflage.”

This sort of allegorical expression enhances to strengthen the inner self, determine to win a battle like Troy which poet Srikant explicates very successfully. Unfortunately he was criticized but the poet who can compare man having no will-power with wood, who can portray horse as an animal of enormous mental strength of human being can never be cynical or his poetry is not imbued in cynicism.

Nobel laureate Orhan Pamuk once said – “A Poet is someone through whom God is speaking. You have to be possessed by poetry.”^{vi} On basis of his important comment it can be said that poets uses bestiary in form of allegory to express many unsaid words and feelings in poems, to convey certain messages having fluidity of all values. Bestiary on that note is nothing but a beacon of the good in our society.

Endnotes

ⁱ Agneya. *Pratinidhi Kawitayein*. Edited. Misra, Bidyaniwas. New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 1986. All the quoted lines have been translated by the author of the article.

ⁱⁱ Agneya. *Pratinidhi Kawitayein*. Edited. Misra, Bidyaniwas. New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 1986

ⁱⁱⁱ www.emcdownload.co.uk/files/Blake_EMCDnload_2011Preview.pdf

^{iv} Singh, Kedarnath. *Pratinidhi Kawitayein*. Ed. Sribastav Paramanand. New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 1985

^v Ugo Betti : 3 Plays (The Inquiry; Goat Island; The Gambler). Ed. Rizzo Gino. USA: A Mermaid Dreambook: Hill and Wang; 1968.

^{vi} Orhan Pamuk, The Art of Fiction No. 187, Interviewed by Ángel Gurría-Quintana. <http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/5587/the-art-of-fiction-no-187-orhan-pamuk>

Works Cited

Narayan, Kunwar. *Pratinidhi Kawitayein*. Edited. Agrawaal Purusottam. New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 2008.

Singh, Kedarnath. *Pratinidhi Kawitayein*. Edited. Sribastav Paramanand. New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 1985.

Verma, Srikant. *Pratinidhi Kawitayein*. Edited. Tiwari Biswanath Prasad. New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 1986.

Saksena, Sarbeswardayal. *Pratinidhi Kawitayein*. Edited. Sharma Suresh. New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 1999.

Chaturbedi, Ramswarup. *Hindi Kavya Ka Itihas*. Allahabad: Lokbharti Prakashan, 2007

Literary Criticism: An Introduction to Theory and Practice, New Delhi: Pearson Education, 2010.

Dr. Anindya Gangopadhyay is Assistant Professor, Department of Hindi, Presidency University. Email- anigreat@yahoo.co.uk
