

Becoming Animal: A Critical Study on Popati Hiranandani's *My Granny* and Sanjukta Rout's *Curfew*

Kousik Adhikari

"We love nature the less humanly it behaves,

And art when it is the artist's escape from man."

-F. Nietzsche (The Gay Science.)

"We believe in the existence of very special becomings –animal traversing human beings and sweeping them away..."-G. Deleuze and F. Guattari (A Thousand Plateaus)

The question and relevance of animal has been rather set aside in the discourses of western philosophy for a quite few centuries. Though, undoubtedly it could have been a possible essential as well as inevitable narration in the history of human race and narration with all its wide fields and even unearthed possibilities. In the 1st century C.E, Plutarch was wondering how the human beings could eat animals with clear conscience. In India, various religious sects like the Jains, Buddhists and later the Baishnab saints not only thoroughly denounced the very idea of making meal with animals, but also propounded the idea of 'ahinsa' or non-violence, as one of the most influential religious and sociological motifs, later adopted by Gandhi in his structure of the idea of nonviolence as well as consequent deliverance. The two greatest epics of human civilizations, '*The Ramayana*' and '*The Mahabharata*', attest numerous examples of man-animal interrelationships and consequences that can be interpreted in various theological as well as sociological aspects. The very image of Hanuman, Lord Ram's general in fighting with King Ravana and others of his clan testify the possibility of becoming animal, a kind of surreal figure or missing link or like Francis Bacon's paintings. Judhistira in his ascending towards heaven is accompanied by a dog, who is told to be the incarnation of the god of death or Dharma. But for most part, western philosophy has regarded this question as only perhaps a subtopic in the related field of ethics, that is only relevant in deciding about matters related to rights, duties etc., but not to be an essential and independent topic or issue in the sense of the term. On the other hand, they concluded philosophically that human beings are rather alone in this vast universe, but gradually the new coming of ecological and environmental related issues towering gradually in the broad field of humanities and social sciences, have delved a definite part for the question of animal in the field. It is rather a matter of intense surprise that the philosophers who were so immensely absorbed in such structures and discourses like 'the human', 'inhuman', 'post-human' etc., could have so slightly deviated themselves from the question of animal for such a long time. Michel Foucault in his seminal '*Madness and Civilization*' points out how in the 17th century onwards, madness came to be associated and designated with animality, the mad "were no longer men whose minds had wandered, but beasts preyed upon by a natural frenzy."

One of the major problems that natural history is concerned with is how to deal and negotiate with the very structure of relationships between animals. This animal relationship is one of the basic subjects that different subfields of humanities deal with like literature, dream, poetry and different kinds of fictions including the folk literature of almost every kind. On the other hand, the relationships between animal also tries to figure out the relationships between man and animal. Jung's theory of archetype as the

collective unconsciousness of the primordial residue assigns a particular as well as major role in the process and series of myths, dreams and different human intuitive faculties.

Franz Deleuze (1925-1995) and his philosophy is something which can be deemed in a way both above and different from the line of all the conception of on this subject. He was the part of French post-structuralism movement that consists of figures such as Lyotard, Foucault, Derrida and Lacan. Though he was slightly oblique figure, never quite akin to the process and evolution to thinking that his perhaps more well known contemporaries uphold. As all the practitioners of post structuralism do, he also hold a same process of concern with such pioneering figures like Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche etc., but he was different from his perhaps more famous contemporaries or the great stalwarts of his time in the fact that he took his inspiration and process of thinking also from Hume, Spinoza, Bergson and also from the people from the other fields such as Bateson. One of the principal motif and concern of post structuralism was a kind of theoretical anti-humanism which placed and pointed rigorously itself in the definite opposition of any thought or thinking process that could possibly centered man as the prime category or concern of any analogy or exploration of any kind. He met Felix Guattari (1930-1992), a psychoanalyst, a political thinker and activist in 1968. The collaboration something like Marx and Engels, that they established and shared was both radical and intensive in the thinking process that certainly established them in the line of great philosophers and thinkers of the century. They published the first part of their series '*Capitalism and Schizophrenia*', originally called as '*L'Anti-Oedipe*', (1972) that made both tremor and fame that consequently created a prominent place for them in the circle of intellect quite relevantly. In the publication of the second part, '*A Thousand Plateaus*', originally called as '*Mille Plateaux*', they give an example of becoming citing from a horror film, '*Willard*' (1972), directed by Daniel Mann, where the protagonist Willard resides with his dog like mother under authoritarian and somewhat oedipal surroundings. When asked to kill a pack of rats he manages to save some of the rats and gradually begins to spend to more and more time and like the intelligent and principal rat, called Ben and a white rat who is his regular companion. Willard's mother dies and there is the imminent danger of losing the family house to a prosperous businessman and so Willard takes his packs of rats who in the mean time become multiplied and makes them enter in the house where the rats tear the businessman to pieces to suffer a terrible death. The white rat becomes died in the action and Ben turns to be his enemy. Deleuze opines that in this stage there is a break to the process of Willard's becoming rat, where he tries to revive his own human nature and destiny by dating with an woman, who only according to him is somewhat rat like, but that process fails and he drives her out who could be a possible help in his tearing the bond with rats and he gradually becomes absorbed with them. At the end, Ben leads him to a basement where he is torn to pieces by the packs of rats.

Becoming is not akin to any imitation or become identified in a manner with something or other, neither can it be categorized into any kind of relation establishing or in a matter of fact corresponding in a sense of the term, or any kind of producing or filiations or 'producing through filiations'. Deleuze in the way also points out in the process several literary examples like '*Moby Dick*' by Herman Melville, which is according to him the greatest masterpiece as the example of becoming. Captain Ahab has an irresistible urge of becoming whale. Kafka, another author of this process and evolutions of becoming has a significant place in this field; several of his narrations have multiple examples of becoming. In the discussion, we can surely name Mary Shelley's

'Frankenstein', where its creator-scientist, Frankenstein is a similar prototype of Captain Ahab, though there may be debates of whether it is right to term the creation of Frankenstein as animal, but the basic instinct readily refers it in the kingdom of animal undoubtedly.

Deleuze considers the term writing and thinking as something which is basically a private affair for the 'predefined public.' He had the idea that animals who are thought to be 'pre-civilized' and in a way uneducated and 'idiots' as per the common general idea do have a kind of ordained intuition to express that is termed as 'impersonal work'. Thus it can be said for Deleuze, the animals, who are in way may be called non human have a kind of superiority over the human race, thought to be the master of this universe in every matter. As perhaps they can point and figure out how the human can progress towards a relation with organic life. Thus the fact remains that the creative impulse of writers, philosophers and thinkers also certainly belongs in orchestrating the forces of an impersonal life in a similar manner with the behaviors and its projections of an animal with its habitats. Deleuze also argues that the animals only know how to die. It is they who escaped into solitary at the time of imminent death that inevitably attach some dignity and solemn grandeur in their even destined death.

It is very natural that Deleuze and Guattari took Franz Kafka as their writer to focus on this philosophy that they propounded. Kafka's writing has abundant examples on the study of animal very naturally inhabiting the moulds of earth, where we have such becoming animals or animalized human as Gregor Samsa, the hunger artist, and Josephine, Red Peter etc., though Kafka's ready concern for animal can be seen as his sympathy for the cornerised people of the earth and society as something like the animal, pushed aside beyond the boundary of natural inhabitance. Samsa wakes up one morning to find out that he is changed into a cockroach, it is not to "flee his father but rather to find an escape where his father didn't know to find one, in order to flee the direction, the business and the bureaucrats." Deleuze's typical love for obscurantism made their theory rather prone to misunderstanding. However, Deleuze's '*Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*' (1981), can be assessed for some reasonable understanding and clarity, Bacon's paintings, according to him is "a zone of the indescribable, of the undecidable, between man and animal." Thus becoming animal can be assessed as a kind of 'desubjectification' and proceeds into 'human-animal dualism'. Hume said that we, the human beings have no 'idea of self' and that we "are nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, and are in a perpetual flux and movement."

India and Indians got freedom and partition in the eve of 1947 and the event of partition becomes a major watershed in the history, sociology, economics, and literature-all the spheres of human tale in the subcontinent. It's such a made-up, pent-up scar that no one dares to cover it up and which expresses itself in literature in the trauma, despair, longings, and laments that create a specific subgenre in the Indian subcontinent's literary field-the partition literature or literature dealing with partition. Notable works are written not only in Indian English but also in different regional languages like Amrita Pritam's '*Pinjar*' (1950), Bhisma Sahni's '*Tamas*' (1972), '*Keya Patar Nouko*' by Prafulla Ray and many others. Indian English literature saw the works like Khuswant Singh's '*Train to Pakistan*' (1956), Manohar Malgaonkar's '*A Bend in the Ganges*'(1964), Bapsi Sidhwa's '*Ice-Candy-Man*'(1989), Anita Desai's '*Clear Light of Day*'(1980), Amitabha Ghosh's '*The Shadow Lines*'(1988) etc. For the present study two short stories, Popati Hiranandani's '*My Granny*', and Sanjukta Rout's '*Curfew*' are

chosen, which may be called partition literature or literature related to partition, the partition consisting not only of boundaries of world but also of boundaries of mind, bringing human beings into a veritable no man's land. One of the most prominent features of the partition of India is certainly related to religion, however different historians and sociologists have tried to cover it with different paradigm like socio-cultural features etc., however solely religious features is not perhaps the only responsible matter, other factors also contribute to the partition.

The present essay aims not to dig up the same hole of partition literature, concerning with its sociological aspects, but to point out the possible perspectives of these two short stories which can be re-interpreted in Deleuze-Guattari's philosophy and concept of becoming animal. Popati Hiranandani (1924-2005) is one of the leading voices in Sindhi literature, recipient of several awards, including the prestigious Sahitya Academy award for her autobiography '*The Pages of My Life*', her works are thoroughly replete with the experience and identity of post colonial womanhood and the agonies of partition. Hiranandani's '*My Granny*' is a powerful specimen of this concept. The story opens in a very acute mythic-historic manner that denies abruptly the very reasons that could contain it within the space of present but on the other hand the very undecidability of its times does not totally debar the very possibility of its being present, present in the eternal time. This technique certainly accumulates the narrative into an almost identical space that could serve better with the story that is in an order prehistoric. The story opens with "I heard a voice. Was it yesterday, or ages ago?" and the first person narrator goes on telling the story of her grandmother who had the habit of losing her way and managed to enter the wrong lane. The narrator sadly and nostalgically recounts how they surround their grandmother who never tires from spinning the web of story around them. By the way, she mentions two stories or folktales. In the first one, an earthen pitcher abducts a bride while she was sitting in a horse carriage. In the other tale which was the narrator's 'favourite' a small girl had been transformed into a sparrow with a magic wand by her cruel stepmother. These recounting of the stories certainly demand our sincere attention while the first story leads one to something abstract and beyond humanity and the other which is the narrator's favorite certainly leads one to animality and simultaneously we can ascribe the very image of India which is thought to be the girl turned into a sparrow. Thus in the story Popati obliquely and silently uses several images that links the human, animal and abstract ideas in a simultaneous whole. We can also conceptualize the image of India, which is thought to be the mother from Bankimchandra to different authors, painters and etc., is allegorically ascribed the image of bird in a sense, turned to a sparrow, a bird which is never thought to be a beautiful one. The British could really serve as the stepmother in this context. Even the bird would sit on a tree, just opposite to her once house and ask the servants questions in the terms of a song:

"Have you filled the buckets with water?

Have you made the beds for the family?

Have they taken their meals?

Is my step-sister happy without me?"

The questions could be very finely attributed to the India's tryst with destiny also. We can fairly recall Jinnah's term of 'moth-eaten Pakistan', which also very significantly alludes to the animal imagery. However the point is that the servants answered always a melodious 'yes'. Here becoming animal is rather free, substantive

without opposite remarking. The narrator further says that “All of us would chant ‘yes’ in chorus and laugh with the innocent joy of childhood.” Granny would also laugh, nodding her head along with the children. The imagery of prison and abduction comes again in granny’s humming of a popular folktale:

“Umar, the king, abducted Marui,
 A poor girl from the village.
 He looted the shepherds
 And took away the beauty of village.
 It was fated that Marui should suffer
 The torture of the king’s prison.
 Umar was an excuse-
 Oh, a mere excuse for the gods.”

One of the specificity of the story is the simultaneous handling as well as the exposition of two layers of connotations and meanings. By the repeated projections of folktale and mythic stories, she manages at once to deliver the allegorical projections of frustrations bordering cloud from the historic fact of partition. The imagery of stepmother and Umar, the king diverting, transforming the girl into sparrow, abducting girl into prison etc., refers to this history and simultaneously it offers the road to becoming animal in a very abstract level. It is further strengthened by another folktale:

“Dear rose, come hither
 Your face is drawn
 Tell me, my beautiful flower,
 What makes you wither?
 The rose replied,
 When I opened my lips, the gardener
 Plucked me and threw me in a bhati (brick oven)”

Perhaps with these, granny’s personal habitation should be taken into account also, who was married to a widower who had six children and she had the opportunity to meet son-in-law and daughter-in-law at her wedding ceremony!

The story ends in the year 1947 where this narration of ages, eternal time, and timeless floating history halts in a climatic way. With the rumors of India’s partition and Hindus of Sindh would have to migrate in the midst of thick and suspended air of suspicion and apprehension, all the elders of the community decided to send their unmarried girls to India immediately. So the narrator, who is supposedly a teen age young girl, had to depart now and the story ends in a very symbolic as well as nostalgic last meeting with the granny. Granny asked, “My child! Are you really leaving your own land?” She asked, “Do you know the saying that a corpse needs to be buried in the same dust from which it sprung?” and she suddenly knelt down and “started crawling on the floor.” The narrator presents the human transposed into animal at her most embittered agony as the human in figure becomes helpless who can no longer protect the land, neither able to pick it out, she becomes a veritable animal to take out a little bit of dust

of the native land. The transformation is totally complete when she says, "Has it suddenly become dark or have I lost my eyesight? Popati dear daughter of mine! Will you give me your hand and help me to get up." The narrator records, "I stretched out my hand, but she started to search something on the floor." It is the space where human is in the way of becoming animal and human can't understand this process as the narrator admits, "I could not understand the agony of her mind at that time."

The second story that shall be dealt with is '*Curfew*' by Sanjukta Rout, who is a leading voice in post independent Oria literature. Her publication includes '*Mukta Bihanga*'(The Free Bird) '*Jeunthi Arambha Seithi Sesho*',(Where It Starts There It Ends) '*Nibuja Ghara*' (The Lightless House) etc. and was awarded with many prestigious awards. The present story is set in the context of riot in the city of Cuttak, Orissa. Nowhere the word partition or its nuances are mentioned but it looms large in the textualisation of structures and discourses of the narration. The very first opening deviates from the humanly way as we are presented with a Muslim family, living in subhuman conditions because of curfew making their livelihood a firm negation as Sattar, the male of the family cannot work because of the curfew that is going on for five days. The picture of Nagma's baby who is seen, "squirming for a long time, hungry, and now was pulling at the dry skin hanging from her chest with its new-sprouted infant teeth. No milk. But then as if there was some strange delight in nibbling, pulling, suckling at its mother's flesh ...", is thoroughly verging the borderlands of inhumanity. The narrator goes on describing the helpless circumstances of the family that the curfew has pushed them into, to an utterly inhuman condition. Akhtar and Dulla, the two sons of Nagma, are desperately glancing at the handful of rice-puffs and, "they could quickly snatch the basket away." Thus the author prepares the readers from the very beginning for oncoming man-animal relation as well as the projections that can be defined into concept of becoming animal.

The author presents a veritable picture of human-nonhuman-animal structure by the picture of hens who "were calling from inside, once in a while, flapping their wings, they would move around their enclosure." At the desperation, she appealed for some food to Mrs. Panda, their mistress but could hear, "whispers from within. She listened carefully. The mistress was saying, "Poor girl, please, let's give her some rice." But the master said, "No. No use showing mercy to that lot. That scoundrel Sattar is hiding petrol bombs inside his house. He is a friend of Gaffur. Once the curfew is over, I will not let him have the rickshaw anymore."

The story ends with Sattar's freeing the hens out of their prison "white and black, grey and brown hens of all colours ruffled their feathers, and spilled out into the hut making clucking noises, on to the veranda, digging the earth in search of food." Sattar could feel their rapid movements and their pecking all around him. Raising his hands above his head, roaring with laughter, he said, "Go away. Nothing to worry. Roam freely. Peck on the roads, bushes, drains and garbage dumps-peck away and eat worms and grains, eat your fill. What is the curfew to you? It is made by man for man. Religion is only an excuse here. ...Go, shoo, go away. I tell you, go away!"

When human beings are fettered in chains of the world, that they are unable to set aside, they can only aspire and think the long-desired freedom through the God's ordained free creatures. Thus these two short stories can fairly be interpreted in Deleuze and Guattari's concept of becoming animal, where boundaries seem to be eclipsed and there is no man's land.

WORKS CITED

Azad, Maulana Abul Kalam, *India Wins Freedom*, New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1988.

Baker, S. *The Postmodern Animal*, London: R. Books, 2000.

Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. *A Thousand Plateaus*, Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 2008.

Haraway, D. *When Species Meet*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008.

Hiranandani, Popati, *The Pages of My Life, Autobiography and Selected Stories*, trans. Jyoti Panjwani, New Delhi: OUP, 2010.

Rout, Sanjukta, *Curfew*, Trans. Priyadarshi Patnaik in Journal Of The Comparative Literature Association Of India, Number1, February, 2011.

Sarkar, Sumit. *Modern India: 1885-1947*, New Delhi: Macmillan, 1983.

**Mr.Kousik Adhikari, MA., NET (UGC), M.Phil.,
Ph.D Research Scholar,
National Institute of Technology,
Durgapur,
West Bengal, India.**