



The Divine as Feral in Salabega's Song "Bagha Matilare"

Dr. Bibhudutt Dash

Of the different incarnations of Vishnu, in some, as in the Matsya Avatar, Kurma Avatar, Varaha Avatar, and Narasingha Avatar, God has assumed non-human forms. In the Narasingha Avatar, the merciful Lord has appeared in an extremely furious form. He has also assumed a mixture of different forms in the Navagunjara *rupa*. In so far as the necessity of incarnations is concerned, God decides to manifest in His chosen form, be it human or non-human. And such manifestation is a historical necessity. As Sri Krishna says in *Gita*, "Arjuna, whenever righteousness is on the decline, the unrighteousness is in the ascendant, then I body Myself forth. For the protection of the virtuous, for the extirpation of evil-doers, and for establishing Dharma (righteousness) on a firm footing, I am born from age to age (Chapter IV. 7-8).

In literature and art, God is at times portrayed as non-human. Such portrayal may be due to the faculty of imagination of the artist. In English literature, for instance, we find such pictures of God as appearing in the form of a swan in Yeats's poem "Leda and the Swan," and in T.S. Eliot's poem "Gerontion," we find the line, "In the juvencence of the year / Came Christ the tiger." In the case of such portrayal based on mythological facts, imagination plays a little role. But if it is a case of pure imagination, it is interesting

to see how the artist describes. A supreme example of this imagination is Salabega's song "Bagha matilare." This paper focuses on Salabega's description of Sri Krishna as a tiger, bedazzling in the Nikunja *vana* with His might and briskness. The word 'feral' connotes a state of being wild.

At the outset, the poet creates an atmosphere of awe that arises out of the fact that a tiger is prowling in the Nikunja *vana*, the sylvan arboreal grove where Krishna engages in divine *lila* with Radha. This feral introduction to the song is buttressed by further depictions of the tiger's wildness. In the first two lines, Salabega writes,

Bagha matilare Nikunja vanara
Birahi hoichhi bagha na pai aadhara go.

The three critically important words "matilare," "birahi," and "aadhara" heighten the intensity of the fear that supercharges the atmosphere. "Matilare" refers to an uncontrollable state of the tiger along with an evocation of fury. What is interesting to see is the collocation of the other two words that betrays the poet's withholding of suspense. While "aadhara" (food) suggests a picture of hunger, or the need to have food, "birahi" (lovesick) suggests a searing loneliness that is existential or ontological. These words may not usually collocate except in subtle



cases. And this happens here. In the first two lines of the song, Salabega, unwittingly though, leads us to believe that he is *not* writing about a tiger!

Salabega's description of the exploits of the tiger is very graphic and beautiful. What is intriguing is Salabega's simultaneous description of the tiger as tender and violent. The poet tells that a tiger has unleashed terror near river Yamuna and it immediately pounces on its prey and takes it to the nikunja (grove). It is fascinating to see the expression, "Kakha karinei bagha nikunje pasai go". "Kakha" in Odia means armpit, and to take one, especially a child, to one's armpit is a gesture of affection. We see this in the case of a mother taking her child to her armpit. But a similar gesture from a tiger might seem suspect. What Salabega intends to highlight is the playfulness of the tiger. Since this tiger is "chhualia" that is, very tender, the poet underscores its innocence rather than its violence:

*Bagha goti chhualia bata jagithai go
Gopastiri dekhile se deina pasai go.*

Salabega mystifies the reader as to the reality of the tiger who, far from displaying properties common to tigers, manifests celestial, divine characteristics. But when the poet pairs contrasting pictures of beauty and terror in respect of the tiger, the reader is again flabbergasted.

Salabega describes the beauty of the tiger with great aestheticism, but this aestheticism makes tacit references to something other than the tiger. He describes its lips, body, forehead, and eyes:

*Adhara sundar bagha dehajaka kala go
Kapole chandan bindu akhi chakadola go.*

Precisely, at this point, Salabega reveals that he is not talking about an ordinary tiger since, as we see, the attributes referred to the tiger in question are hardly seen in any tiger. Although at the end of the song, the poet reveals the name of

the tiger, we still understand beforehand to whom he is referring to.

The expressions that particularly unravel the mystery are "chandan bindu" and "chakadola." In "Bagha Matilare," the poet is, in reality, singing of the beauty of Krishna. The word "Chakadola" makes reference to Lord Jagannath. In another song, Salabega has addressed Jagannath as "Kala hati" (black elephant) and chakadola: Kala hati kala-srimukha, / kalajaka daki na gala dukha / taba nama karina mala / tarijibi he chakadola."

In "Bagha matilare," Salabega's wondrous discovery of such a tiger named Kanhai mesmerizing by its ineffable beauty and gracefulness is expressed in the last lines of the song:

*Kahun e aila bagha dekhila ta nahin go
Kahe Salabega bagha namati Kanhai go.*

The poet's exclamation as to the appearance of this tiger is no expression of wonder. Since he knows who the tiger is, it is no revelation either. This song is a paean to the glory of God. Salabega compares Kanhai (Krishna) with a tiger, and the alternating descriptions of the tiger's innocence and fury fill the atmosphere with suspense. What is interesting is that the poet goes on giving clues as to the reality of the tiger. Throughout the song, the poet describes the divine *lila* of the Lord.

Works Cited :

Eliot, T.S. "Gerontion." *Collected Poems: 1909-1962*. New Delhi: Rupa & Co., 1993.

Salabega Bhajan O Jagannath Janana. Cuttack: Dharmagranth Store.

The Bhagavad Gita or The Song Divine. Gorakhpur: Gita Press, 2000.

Dr. Bibhudutt Dash, Plot No.307, Haladipadia, Laxmisagar, Bhubaneswar-751006.