

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

AN INTRODUCTION

Arun Kolatkar, born in Kolhapur in 1932 and matriculated from Bombay University, lives in Bombay where he freelances as a visualizer. His main creative output include Jejury (1976), which received the coveted Commonwealth poetry prize in 1977 and Arun Kolatkarchya Kavita, a volume of his poems in Marathi which was awarded the H.S. Gokhale Prize in 1977. Jejury has been translated into German by G.D. Southmeir. Besides this, Kolatkar has contributed to Kavi, Opinion Literary Quarterly, An Anthology of Marathi Poetry (Nirmala Sadanand Publishers, 1967), New Writing in India (Penguin Books, 1974) and The Shell and the Rain (Allen and Unwin, 1973).

Kolatkar writes in English and Marathi and since some of his poems in Marathi are available in their English versions, it is interesting to study them from a comparative perspective. Such a comparison might help us understand some of the problems an Indian, writing in English, usually faces. As B.V. Nemade rightly observes, poetry is largely an exploration into language and a poet who lives in the first language culture but writes in a second language is upto creating problems for his own cognitive system. In literary communication this phenomenon results in the confrontation of two linguistic and stylistic systems leading to the problem whether the Indian bilingual poet has in fact developed two personalities language-wise or not.¹ In the context of this parameter, the present dissertation

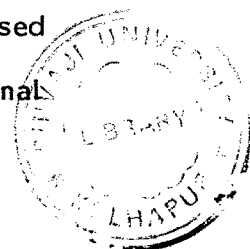
seeks to analyse Kolatkar as a bilingual poet and comment on his creative process, and ultimately the authenticity of the medium used by the poet.

It has been an acknowledged fact that bilingualism is undoubtedly a fact of life for the majority of world population. In the field of creative literature and criticism bilingualism has acquired a status of a special branch of study. A number of creative writers who produce in two or more languages form a sizable body in modern world literature. It is, therefore, significant to note the nature and scope of bilingualism, especially from the viewpoint of how bilingualism can operate as a source of enrichment and diversity. At this juncture it becomes imperative to arrive at certain parameters of a bilingual study. However, at the outset mention must be made of the fact that the present discussion does not aim at a comprehensive treatment of bilingualism, though, of course, it tries to explore the scope and complexity of bilingualism in general, and a creative writer's bilingualism in particular.

A seminal work on bilingualism, Bilingualism: An Introduction and Overview, edited by Peter Hornby offers a multi-dimensional consideration of the problem. Some critics have tried to define the term 'bilingualism' on the basis of the writer's bilingual competence. For instance, according to Bloomfield, the term should be applied only to those individuals who possess 'nativelike' ability in both languages. Peter Hornby considers the criterion of a writer's ability

to use two different languages as deceptive since, for him, it is inadequate and lacks clarity.³ Weinreich appears to be vague in his definition when he calls bilingualism as 'the practice of alternatively using two languages'.⁴ The definition becomes vague as Weinreich doesn't say anything about the context regarding the use of two different languages. Coming back to Peter Hornby, he sounds convincing when he says that any system that is intended to be employed for evaluating bilingual competence in both comprehension and production in the spoken as well as the written mode.⁵ Here it must be noted that such an evaluative system would also have to consider the relative competence of the individual in the numerous stylistic variations in the speech code that characterize a native speaker. Sometimes the term 'balanced bilingualism' is also used to refer to individuals fully competent in both languages. But the term seems to be only an ideal because most bilinguals are probably more fluent and more at ease in their native language than in the foreign one. For this reason, the commonly employed convention of listing the native language first is followed. For example, a Marathi-English bilingual should not be confused with an English-Marathi bilingual. Here the native language marker is used in the beginning.

As far as the degree of competence in the second language is concerned, it is significant to study how this competence affects the consciousness of a bilingual writer. It is important to explore how this second language competence, which is normally based on the age and order of acquisition, governs the degree of emotional



involvement or the vision of a writer.

Besides the bilingual competence of a writer, one more issue to be studied in the problematics of bilingualism is the question of what actually constitutes 'different language'. A variety of factors related to historical, sociocultural, political and geographic considerations have been usually employed in attempting to determine whether two linguistic varieties should properly be considered as distinct languages or whether certain varieties might better be characterized as dialectical variations. In addition, distinct codes or simple stylistic differences within a single language have often been taken as significant linguistic variations. Here again, the issue would seem to be one of degrees. At one extreme an individual might be fluent in two languages from distinctly different language families or he might simply possess more than one stylistic variation of the same language. Bilingualism has sometimes been defined to include the latter group. For example, Taylor defines a bilingual as a person who speaks two or more 'languages, dialects, or styles of speech that involve differences in sound, vocabulary and syntax'.⁶ According to this definition, the bilingual competence of a writer is to be assessed on the following three levels of language: phonological, syntactic and semantic. In other words, under this definition, most normal adult speakers of any language would be considered bilingual. The present dissertation is concerned with the bilingual situation in which two different language competencies are present in the same individual.

A good deal of research on the effects of bilingualism has come out with certain important results. For example, a research project undertaken by Wallace Lambert points out these effects.⁷ The largest portion of these investigations points out that bilingualism has a detrimental effect on intellectual functioning and the smallest portion points out little or no relation between bilingualism and intelligence and only two cases suggested that bilingualism might have favourable effects on cognition. Lambert's contention is that the bilinguals have a more diversified structure of intelligence and more flexibility in thought. He further proves that in relation to the monolinguals the bilinguals show definite advantage on measures of 'cognitive flexibility', 'creativity' or 'divergent thought'. Some researchers consider divergent thinking as an index of creativity. Sometimes, bilingualism creates the issue of the identity of bilinguals. However, the studies show that there are no signs of personality disturbances, social alienation or anxiety. The study further states that there is no basis in reality for the belief that becoming bilinguals or bicultural necessarily means a loss or dissolution of identity. Within this point of reference the present dissertation seeks to analyse and comment on Arun Kolatkar's bilingual poetry.

Since Arun Kolatkar is considered as an eminent Indo-Anglian and Marathi poet it is pertinent to see the two poetic traditions. Indo-Anglian poetry is an established genre with the tradition of nearly a hundred and fifty years. As rightly pointed out by V.K. Gokak, "Indo-Anglian Poetry was born under a Romantic Star. It

learned to lisp in the manner of Byron and Scott in the verse of Henry Derozio, M.M. Dutta and others."⁸ The romantic tradition became mature during the last quarter of the 19th century in the hands of Manmohan Ghose, Sri Aurobindo and Sarojini Naidu. During the first quarter of the 20th century poets like Meherjee, A.F. Khabardar, Nizamat Jung, Harindranath Chattopadhyaya continued to write in the Romantic and Victorian manner. The humanistic trend was introduced during the second quarter of the 20th century by poets like T.P. Kailason, A. Menezes and V.N. Bhushan. E.L. Vaswani, J. Krishnamurti and Nishikanto continued the mystic tradition. However, some poets like Manjeri Iswaran, B. Rajan and B. Dhingra introduced modernistic techniques. During the third quarter of the 20th century the modernistic approach was strengthened and the neo-symbolist trend was introduced. The poetry of Kamala Das, A.K. Ramanujan reveals significant developments on modernist lines in Indo-Anglian poetry. The present generation of poets consisting of Nissim Ezekiel, Dilip Chitre, S. Mokashi-Punekar, Arun Kolatkar, Jayant Mahapatra, etc. has totally changed the complexion of Indo-Anglian poetry and therefore, it can be said in the words of Gokak, "Indo-Anglian Poetry is no mere satellite moving around the sun of English Poetry".⁹ Mrinalini Sarabhai, the celebrated dancer, is unusual in the use of imagery. M.F. Husain, the famous painter, offers a totally new facet to Indo-Anglian poetry and besides this there are the bilinguals like Kolatkar and Dilip Chitre. Thus, Indo-Anglian Poetry today has undoubtedly achieved the distinction of a respectable genre.

Marathi poetry has a tradition which is no less than seven centuries old. The first major Marathi poet, Dnyanadeva, a contemporary of Dante Alighieiri, laid the solid foundation. Tukaram, the 17th century mystic poet, produced a kind of poetry that has gained in living significance three centuries after his death. From the first decade of the 19th century to the first four decades of the present one was a period of two dominant but decadent influences in Marathi literature. When British education replaced the native tradition, a period of 'cultural dislocation'¹⁰ began. The British Victorian norms of poetry were not applicable to the native literary tradition. On the other hand, the influence of English Poetry was a peculiarly limited influence.

During the Second World War the Romantic Movement came to an end and the attitude of the poets matured and ripened. According to Dilip Chitre, "The attitude became bold enough to shatter the gestalt established by the immediately preceding generations and an authentic quest for identity in the contemporary world began".¹¹ In this context the poet B.S. Mardhekar is a remarkable product. He returned to the poetry of Tukaram and Ramdas. This tradition is enriched by Arun Kolatkar and Bhalchandra Nemade. Mention must be made of other poets who, with their highly original works, strengthened the tradition of modern Marathi poetry - P.S. Rege, Manmohan Natu and Saratchandra Muktibodh.

Since Kolatkar is one of the most enigmatic poetic figures of our days, it is significant to view his poetic world. Dilip Chitre has brilliantly summed up Kolatkar. In Chitre's view, Kolatkar's surrealist experiment is an exercise in catharsis.¹² In his poems the imagery is propelled by psychological tensions. The nightmarish treatment of the coital motif in his sex poems has a Freudian character. This is blended with an expressionistic technique in his later poems where the psychological fear of sex and life is transformed into enigmatic variations on a metaphysical plane. He is always apt to become esoteric and cryptic. He suppresses feeling through a symbol or an image. There is a certain inner violence in this. He is obsessed with sex, death, disintegration and the strangeness of living things. Sometimes he can resolve these tensions and achieve the lyrical freedom so typical of the traditional saint poets. His recent poems, 'Three Cups of Tea' and 'Irani Restaurant, Bombay', break away sharply from his earlier ones. For instance, the latter poem attempts to transform a familiar place in the city of Bombay into an elemental symbol. His metaphysical leanings are seen here in a new form.

Though Kolatkar likes to write in Free Verse, sometimes he is very much conscious of the prosodic features of his poems.¹³ Kolatkar states that there is no influence of any established poet on his career.¹⁴ Upon receiving the 'Rashtrakul Paritoshik' he says that any award is an 'occupational hazard' for him.¹⁵ Talking about the use of 'non-Indian' imagery by the Indian poets like Sadanand

Rege and Dilip Chitre he says that sometimes such a use is inevitable and it doesn't hamper the appreciation of a poem.¹⁶ Replying to the comment on his irreverence in Jejuri he says that there is nothing new in it, it is there in the tradition. As far as irreverence goes, says Kolatkar, there is irreverence found in Tukaram. It is interesting to note that irreverence as an attitude is to be found in the saint poets as well.¹⁷

Taking these views into account the present dissertation aims at studying Arun Kolatkar as a bilingual poet with a view to finding out his competence in English and Marathi with special reference to the themes handled and the stylistic devices used by the poet in both the languages.

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