

CHAPTER III
ARUN KOLATKAR AS A POET

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While deciding the subject for my dissertation, I preferred to study the Indian 'writing in English'. Here 'Indian' implies that there is a sensibility that is identified with the land and the people of India. In India, English has been used for creative writing, particularly poetry, for over 150 years. There are number of Indian poets who have earned a fame and popularity by writing in English. e.g. the pre-independent poets like Sarojini Naidu, Aurbindo, Ravindranath Tagore, Toru Datta, Manmohan Ghosh etc. and some post-independence poets like Nissim Ezekiel, A. K. Ramanujan, P. Lal, Kamala Das, Jayanta Mahapatra, Gieve Patel, Arun Kolatkar, Dilip Chitre etc. The emergence of Nissim Ezekiel, A. K. Ramanujan, and Kamala Das heralds a new bearing in Anglo-Indian poetry. The poets of second generation like Parthsarathy, Jayant Mahapatra, and Arun Kolatkar are also characterised by a distinct personal voice. They bring a genuine poetic response to Indian landscape marked by realism. Though there are many well-known poets in Indian writing in English, I have made a choice of Arun Kolatkar's 'Jejuri' for my stylistics analysis. The purpose of my dissertation is to study not only the content of the poetry and write a criticism of it but to find out startling usages and the structure of language, eye-catching style, and

mainly , various experiments with the use of language. I found all these elements in Arun Kolatkar's poetry, which are very interesting and important from the point of view of stylistic analysis. It does not mean that Arun Kolatkar is not conscious about content of the subject matter of his poem, but he is a brilliant poet who is conscious of what to write as well as how to write.

It is quite obvious that Arun Kolatkar is a significant and well known poet in Indian Writing In English. He is a gifted poet writing both in Marathi and English. He won the 1977 commonwealth poetry prize for 'Jejuri'. Through this volume, he got reputation and recognition . His Marathi volume 'Arun Kolatkarchya Kavita' was awarded the H.S.Gokhale prize in 1977. Kolatkar's poems are extremely striking in themes and structure of style also. He has unique sensibility described as neutral, serene, ironical, surrealist, metaphysical and so on. Some of the significant characteristics of Arun Kolatkar as a poet are- discussed below :

The important thing about Arun Kolatkar is that he is a major experimentalist. He makes constant experimentation with style and structure, and this shows his modern and urban sensibility. He is experimentalist both in form and the vision of reality. He goes on programming through various kinds of experimental verse. His early verse seems to be surreal, obscure and difficult for interpretation. But during 1960, he changed his style from highly imaginistic and uninterpretable to

anti poetic. One of the experiments in the use of Language is that in some of his poems, he does not use the punctuation marks or capitalization .

for instance - what is good
 and what is stone
 the dividing line
 if it exists
 is very thin
 at jejuri
 and every other stone
 is god or his cousin.¹

Arun Kolatkar as a visual artist is aware that a slight manipulation of angle of vision can defamiliarize and turn dull commonplace reality into art. Kolatkar uses an odd, non-committal tone, unusual perspectives and turns the common typical experiences into aesthetic experiences. While using the experimentation, Kolatkar is conscious of tradition also. In his poetry we see both the trends. ²Prof. S. Z. H.Abid says that , “ His poetry is mainly experimentative, but the experimentation is not the only leading trend, there is a co-existence of tradition and experiment ” .

Stillness is another typical characteristic of Arun Kolatkar. ³Keki Daruwala states that “ His narrative moves still to still ”. The well known writers like Parthasarathi Krishnamurthy, noticed “stillness” in Arun Kolatkar’s poetry. A stillness in Arun Kolatkar implies contemplation. He tries to explore the significance of external facts. He contemplates the things as they are in their reality.

Irony is unavoidable part in Arun Kolatkar's poetry. His irony is woven into the very texture of his poetry. Ironic mode is a true modernistic quality and as a modern Anglo-Indian poet, he has ironic mode. His tone is no doubt ironical but without any rejection. Kolatkar writes poetry saturated with irony as though ironic mode is his supreme poetic path. In 'Jejuri' many of his poems are ironical. For instance :

4“ There is not a drop of water
in the great reservoir the Peshwas built
There is nothing in it
Except a hundred years of silt”.

Arun Kolatkar is famous for his use of imagery and symbolism which are the characteristics of modernity. ⁵Dr.S.K.Desai has given the description of a symbolist according to John Wain. He says that “Symbolist is he who surrounds himself with stillness and non-event. His instrument is contemplation and power to concentrate on reality to draw scattered impressions of human mind into focus. This description of a symbolist applies to Arun Kolatkar.

The poem of ' Irani Restaurant Bombay ' is a good example of imagery. Kolatkar has given an appropriate and arresting image of a thirsty loafer putting the match in the tea circle and beholding it rise :

⁶as when to identify a corpse one visits a morgue
and politely the corpse rises from a block of ice.

and further -

the burnt match with a tea circle makes a rude
compass, the heretic needle jabs of black star.

We find modern trends in Arun Kolatkar's poetry. Much more complex sensibility, irony, parody, urban consciousness, detailed imagery of life and experimentation are some of them. In some poems, Arun Kolatkar uses American English which is a good example of his original talent. He had never left the shores of India. He must have absorbed American English only through popular fiction, comics, films, and put it to clever use in his poems. In some of his poems, he does not use punctuation marks.

For instance

i want my pay I said
to the manager
you'll get paid said
the manager
but not before the first
don't you know the rule

The maximum use of linguistic foregrounding at all levels is another important characteristic of Arun Kolatkar which is seen in his famous poetry 'Jejuri'. These are some of the characteristics of Arun Kolatkar's poetry which induced me to choose him.

Many critics have given their opinions which are helpful to understand Arun Kolatkar as a poet. Vilas Sarang says that Kolatkar's

English is more effective than Marathi. He maintains that his English poetry shows much more regard for logic and reason than Marathi poetry. His English poems are made up of conscious mind but his Marathi poems are based upon the resources of unconscious. According to ¹⁰Bijoy Kumar Das, Arun Kolatkar is much more honest and true to his experiences compared to others. He has a general intellectual ambience. ¹¹R.S.Kimbahune criticises Kolatkar's tendency of non-involvement. He states that the use of foreign language as a medium of creative expression distorts some of the subtleties of nature experience. ¹²M.Shivaramkrishna considers Kolatkar's poetry as an extension not only of stylistic purity and simplicity but also of the attitude of protest implicit in his basic stance. ¹³Keki Daruwala includes the opinion of G.Whitman in his "Two Decades". As G. Whitman observed 'Arun Kolatkar has a crystallographer's eye for the particularities of a scene'.

In the light of these critical comments, we may say that Arun Kolatkar is one of the significant Indian poets writing in English. Now let us discuss his major work 'Jejuri' and its critical assessment.

'Jejuri' by Arun Kolatkar is a significant landmark in Indian poetry in English. It was awarded commonwealth poetry prize in 1977. It is one of the long and sustained poems on meaningful experiences. It has an Aristotelian magnitude and is complete with a beginning, middle and end. Thematically it is a noteworthy poem because it is about a significant encounter between two cultures the urbanised, western, educated and secular on the one hand and non-urban, traditional, religious on the other.

'Jejuri' is a place of pilgrimage thirty miles away from Pune. At Jejuri, there is a temple famous in western Maharashtra, as well as in Karnataka. It attracts the people of all religions.

'Jejuri' written by Kolatkar is a long poem of thirty one sections, the last of which consists of six sub - sections. The whole poem gives a sense of continuity. The opening section ends with the mention of the priest and in the next section also, there is priest. The image of the sun at the beginning of the poem is taken up at the end. All these things come together in a very closely-knit pattern. The movement is arranged chronologically and doesn't shift or move haphazardly.

Like a graphic artist, the poet makes an effective use of visual effects like his topographical handling of words 'up' and 'down', patterned on the page as to suggest the craziest dance of cock and hens in jwar field the poet ever saw. Kolatkar uses the camera-technique. It is as if the camera is moving from one thing to another capturing with it all its relevant details. ¹⁴ Dr.S.K.Desai, in his article 'Jejuri' 'A house of God' collects some comments on 'Jejuri': "The most exciting unusual and extraordinary book of poems----- as 'a poem large as a life'. 'as Arun Kolatkar's waste land' giving a symbolic picture of modern predicament', as a poem of unexpected power and beauty as 'a personal comment on the material landscape of India', and so on. All these comments show how popular and rich the poem is. ¹⁵Mr.M. K.Naik considers 'Jejuri' from the point of view of three value systems : tradition, modern civilization, and a value system older than both these-the life principle in nature. In Jejuri, Arun Kolatkar

shows the surrealist similarities between Hindu religious tradition and equally rigid scientific civilization represented by the railway station and demonstrate the superiority of value system older than both these . The example of this is the primeaval life-force represented by the cocks and hens doing 'a kind of a harvest dance' in the field of Jwar. The review of M.K.Naik shows that 'Jejuri' has a complex thematic structure. It is a thematic study.

Every poem has a theme or themes. In 'Jejuri', we find different themes : Various forms of animate and inanimate events exist in Jejuri alongwith man's consciousness and we can say that this is the basic theme of Jejuri. Most important theme of Jejuri is Time. The whole poem is framed between the sunrise and sunset, a single revolution of the sun. The sun appears in the poem from time to time. There is an existence of life with it's various forms. This is another important theme of Jejuri. There are various things which show the existence of life. The examples such as the bitch and its puppies in the ruined temple, the wide-eyed calf in the cow-shed which Manohar mistakes for the temple; the butterfly which disappears in a split second, the temple rat on the body of Khandoba, the station dog, the dozen cocks and hens, the protagonist Manohar, the priest and his son, the old beggar woman pestering for money the waghyas and muralies, teastall boy, the booking clerk and the station master, all these characters represent reality of life and its variety. Creative process which is central to life is another theme of Jejuri. The stones are turned into

Gods through imagination, the building of Jejuri, are a few examples of creativity.

Another revealing theme of Jejuri is the study of human beings and their relationships in Jejuri. Though the protagonist is an outsider, he does not suffer from loneliness. He is enjoying the trip. He discusses with the priest the number of hands the Goddess 'Ashtabhuja' has. The priest insists that she has eight arms and the protagonist says that she has eighteen arms. The discrepancy between the name of the goddess and the actual idol with eighteen arms irritates him. The protagonist asks the priest's son whether he believes in the legend, the boy does not answer but he directs his attention to another subject. There is a newly married girl in the poem, 'A Little Pile of Stones', who is willing to perform the ritual to appease her in-laws and the old woman constantly begging and pestering for money, show the poet's deep study of human beings and their relationships.

For a casual reader, the poem has a religious theme. The title of the poem itself shows it. But after studying it deeply and carefully I would say that it is not a religious poem even though it deals with pilgrimage, Jejuri or God Khandoba. In Jejuri Arun Kolatkar speaks of the surrounding temples, the priest, the atmosphere of Jejuri, devotees like Vaghyas and Murali. But his tone is not religious. If he is really a devoted pilgrim and religious man, he would never show his disbelief towards the legend that the priest's son told him, or he would never raise the question as to why the goddess is called 'Ashtabhuja'.

It is revealed that he is not interested in religious matters . It seems , he is interested in observing the things in Jejuri. ¹⁸Dr.S.K.Desai's statement makes this point strong , " The protagonist goes to Jejuri not as a seeker nor as a pilgrim he is a kind of traveller-a tourist. One might say, he is interested in sight-seeing. Thus in 'Jejuri' we are not aware of personality but of conscious operating in its secular manner upon things 'seen' in Jejuri on a particular day from morning till sunset ". But I think he is not just a sightseer or traveller but he is a keen, studious observer who gives a detailed description of things seen in Jejuri with a conscious and rational mind. The poet visits, the pilgrimage and returns from this holy place but nowhere we find any evidence of mystical devotion. The narrator and the chief visitor prefer to smoke a cigarette rather than to worship God or to go for Pooja. For a true devotee, the hills are seen as demons which are transformed into geological forms, but the narrator sees them as hills and rocks only. In " The Little Pile of Stones" the poet finds the rite which is performed by newly married girl is nothing but empty, superstitious and meaningless exercise. Such instances in the poem show that the poem is full of scepticism and cynicism.

'Jejuri' is a spiritual journey of man brought up in city . The poem reveals uneasy conditions of modern Indian intellectual belonging to the middle class. The narrator is a man of twentieth century with no religious fervour, devotion, no sentimentalism. It is a presentation of modern urban scepticism, which makes an impact upon ancient religious tradition . The protagonist goes round the temple of Khandoba at Jejuri. He gives us

cynical and sceptical impressions about the holy temple but that does not mean that he tries to degenerate the holy place or the God Khandoba.

¹⁷Bhalchandra Nemade angrily criticises Kolatkar : 'Jejuri' pilgrimage is after all not so degenerate as, for example, Juhu Beach cocktail party'. This seems to me a very harsh and far-fetched criticism. I do not agree with the view of Bhalachandra Nemade. Nowhere in the poem we find any line which shows that Arun Kolatkar considers Jejuri as a degenerate place, nor does he criticise God Khandoba. What he points out is how the people (pilgrims and the priest etc) accept the social evils, false beliefs and superstitions unconsciously. In 'Jejuri', the poet sees the things, with conscious and rational mind, which are really irritating. He does not have any motive to criticise God Khandoba. He tries to point out the reality he observes at 'Jejuri'.

The first impression after casual reading brings out the view that the tradition at 'Jejuri' is 'lost' or 'dead' but I think there is no sense of loss or despair or hopelessness in Jejuri. It is just a portrayal of what it is. The narrator sees the ruins of the Maruti temple and the mongrel bitch and her puppies 'in the heart of the ruins'. He accepts it without any comment and does not lament for this. I do not agree with the opinion of ⁽¹⁸⁾ Shubhangi Raykar who says- "Kolatkar's poem gives the impression of being detached and objective account of the visit but his very effort to hide the 'I' and his tone suggest, that the poem is highly subjective". He reveals the reality objectively with the experimentative use of language.

Therefore after studying the poem ' Jejuri ', I feel that this is a poem of detached tone and objective in its presentation.

'Jejuri' is a group of poems. It is an ironical description of a journey to Jejuri. The poem begins with the first section entitled "The Bus". The bus describes the poet's journey into the world of experience. The opening of the poem is very suggestive and it shows mental insulation and narrowmindedness of pilgrims of Jejuri. The narrator also describes the people around him.

The second section "The priest" ironically pictures a portrait of a temple, the priest waiting for the arrival of bus in the hope of getting ' puran-poli in his plate '. The priest shown in this section is not sacred but he is money minded and greedy. Then the poet moves through the Maruti temple at Karhe Pathar. In ' Heart of Ruin ' he sees the ruins of Maruti temple and a mongrel bitch and her puppies in the temple. The title itself suggests the lack of faith which is characteristic of the modern time. Here we do not find any lament for the lost tradition.

In the next section " The Doorstep ", though the poet doesn't want to express the sense of loss or despair, there is a tone of disappointment which makes clear what appears to be the doorstep is actually a pillar. This underlines the ruinous state of the temple. ' Water-Supply ' shows the narrator's sense of dryness and chaos. It also describes metaphorically the lack of faith by relating it to dry water conduit pipe. Here the narrator feels Jejuri as an arid place.

In the section 'The Door' the hanging door evokes the facility of using any religion. It is again the continuation of the description of the ruined temple. The old dangling door with dust and satin suggests the decay of religion and religious practices. It is significant that the door should make the narrator think of Christ and Crucifixion. It means, in this section also, the feeling of irreverence is there.

In 'Jejuri', there are three 'Chaitanya' poems which are significant. Chaitanya may be suggesting Bengali saint Mahaprabhu who visited Jejuri in the year 1510 A.D. Chaitanya also means a life force or dynamism. The first Chaitanya poem contrasts the red painted stone to simple adoration with zendu flowers. In the second chaitanya poem, there is an ironical contrast between the ruined temple and the surprising faith of the saints. It is about the creator of gods - a god who eats a stone and spits out gods. It may be a symbol of human energy and creativity.

In the next section 'The Low Temple', there is a mild argument between the narrator and the priest about an 'eight arm goddess'. The poem shows the rational mind of the narrator. In this section, there are bronze gods in the dark temple - the gods who should bring light to others are themselves covered by the darkness. The priest does not carry a lamp. He borrows a box of matches from one of the visitors to the temple. Then the gods are seen 'for a moment of' 'the length of matchstick'. The situation given here is very ironical and irritating to the narrator.

'The pattern' is a continuation of the previous poem. It conveys the theme of loss of meaning. Here the tortoise and the pattern stands for

traditional type of worship and children fail to understand the meaning of worship. It means here the poet wants to reveal the idea that old interpretations are meaningless for the present generation.

'The Horseshoe shrine' describes the legend. This piece of the poem brings out the irreverent attitude of the narrator. In 'Jejuri', the combination of the sacred and profane creates a strange effect on the narrator. Manohar is in the confused state that he can not distinguish between the temple and the cowshed.

The next section, 'The Old Woman' creates the picture of helpless old woman suffering from poverty. Eventhough she is helpless, she offers a help to the narrator to get a fifty paise coin. The poem presents men in relation to nature.

'Hills' gives the imaginative picture of hills as demons. There are surrealistic elements showing the demons killed by Khandoba and transformed into hills. Kolatkar gives the mythological references here and presents the features of hills in terms of human anatomy. The story of the transformation of the demons makes the narrator protest and confused. The poem shows the rebellious nature of the narrator. The reference to the legend of the demons is given in the next section, 'The Priest's Son'. The priest's son is an educated young boy with a scientific outlook. He narrates the legend very sincerely but the question of the narrator : 'Do you believe all this?' makes the boy feel embarrassed and uncomfortable but he is very honest and not pretentious so he diverts his attention towards a butterfly. The narrator does not accept any legend due to his rational mind.

He likes the butterfly because it has no past behind it, no future to bind to it. 'The Butterfly' contains the poet's concept of the life-force. It is a symbol of life and joy of existence.

'Ajamil And The Tigers' also shows a significant aspect of the life-principle in nature. It is a legend about a shepherd named Ajamil and his relations with the tiger-king and the tigers. Ajamil's dog protects his sheep so well that the tigers can not get food. At last, Ajamil signs a long-term friendship treaty with the tiger-king who was frustrated with the behavior of sheep-dog. Ajamil allows the tigers to have their food occasionally and gets free time and peace of mind. Thus the life-principle of 'Live and Let Live' is shown in this section, which is a modern interpretation of the traditional story.

Vaghya and Murali are traditional male and female servant devotees of Khandoba. They were given up in the name of Khandoba when they were just small children. The job of Vaghya is to go round the holy place and collect oil for lighting the Khandoba temple. His only aim is devotion towards Khandoba. For that he is ready to use unfair means like stealing oil. His one-string instrument is symbolic of his single-minded dedication to Khandoba. The poem brings out an ironic note. Vaghya tries to show his might by getting oil from anywhere for god Khandoba but one thing is important here that his existence has meaning only with reference to Khandoba.

The next section 'The Song For Murali' is linked with the previous poem. Murali is a female dedicater of Khandoba who makes use of god's

name and earns money as a prostitute. The poem is full of irony. Murali feels proud of Khandoba's woman but it is hypocritical because she is just a woman to make money by offering her body. The reservoir points out the dryness, and from aridity in 'Water-Supply' we can say that the religious ideas in Jejuri are gradually disappearing like dry reservoir.

The next section 'A Little Of Stones' describes another legend that if a newly married girl makes a little pile of stones and it stands still, she gets happiness and prosperity in her life. But the narrator looks at it as an empty fertility ritual. He thinks it as a meaningless ritual. Makarand also is unwilling to do pooja, and turns away from the temple, for rituals are meaningless for him. 'The Temple Rat' is an ironical poem. The narrator finds rat sitting on the shoulders of mighty Khandoba and the irony here is that Khandoba can't keep the rat away. In the next section, 'A kind of cross', at first, the description of Bull-calf, Nandi is given but then the religious tone

disappears completely. The narrator shows his secular mind talking about both Christianity and Hinduism.

'The cupboard' expresses the narrator's scepticism with sharp irony. It describes the cupboard which contains broken and damaged things. The combination of stock-exchange quotations and golden gods is strange here. Yashwant Rao is one of the gods unlike the golden gods in the cupboard. He is to be found outside the temple walls in the street. It is also the most ironical poem like the last one Though Yeshwant Rao is second-class God to his devotee, he is more useful god to them.

In the next section, 'The Blue Horse', there is also an encounter between rational narrator and tradition-bound priest and their argument about the discrepancy in the horse's colour. 'Between Jejuri and The Railway Station' is very important and central poem. There is a sharp comment on the deadness of Jejuri. The two worlds are represented there - the world of Jejuri and the world of railway station. The last poem 'The Railway Station' brings the narrator's visits to an end and shows the picture of the Railway Station. The poem is full of irony for the railway station. Not only 'The Railway Station' but also the poems like 'Reservoir', 'The Cupboard', 'The Temple Rat', 'The Low Temple', 'The Priest', are ironical poems. Most of the poems are without punctuation marks. The objective interpretation of the poem is an important factor in the process of stylistic analysis. It helps the reader to bring out the poetic devices in the poem. In the next chapter, I am going to locate and discuss the stylistic devices used in order to support the interpretation or otherwise. I would, therefore like to find out the formal structure, the use of diction and sounds, use of syntax, imagery and symbolism. Thus I would like to confirm the response from criticism by looking at Arun Kolatkar's 'Jejuri' closely with a view to finding out established relationship between the use of language and meaning in the poem 'Jejuri'.

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