

## Arun Kolatkar : A Modernist

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“ Modernism”, writes Peter Barry, “is the name given to the movement which dominated the art and culture” (80). According to M.H Abrams “The specific features signified by ‘modernism’(or by the adjective modernist) vary with the user ,but many critics agree that it involves a deliberate and radical break with some of the traditional bases not only of Western art ,but of Western culture in general”( 167).

The post independence phase of Indian English Literature is strikingly different from all the previous period .Eliot’s “The Waste Land “influenced the entire Western world and also the east could not remain aloof from it. P.S.Kasture says as a result of Eliot’s deep influence images of destruction abound in modern Indo-Anglian poetry(42)Modern poetry is experimental in form, content, language and mode of expression.

Arun Kolatkar (1932-2004), a modernist bi-lingual poet received the

Commonwealth Poetry Award for *Jejuri* .Kolatkar’s genius lies in the fact that he gave

a new dimension to things already existed. Absurdity, ambiguity, depression, existential dilemma and all the stuff of modernism abound in the poetry of Arun Kolatkar .Sunita Rana says “Modern Poetry is full of ironic remark” (12).Arun Kolatkar made use of this weapon in profusion .He is a modernist poet in the sense that his experience deals with the here and now .He employs dictomies, irony and paradox, and eschews a facile and straight forward apprehension of the reality .His approach is constantly exploratory. The following lines corroborate this:

The bit of betel nut

Turning over and over on his tongue

Is a mantra (p.10)

Priest who sanctifies the place of god is indulging in defiling the place .These lines points the indifference of priest towards his

duty .It also expresses priest's interest in enjoyment and recreation. It reminds one of the priests of Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* .These lines absolutely describe that power corrupt man and absolute power corrupt man absolutely. With the influence of science and technology man is distancing himself from religion as in "Markand":

Take my shirt off  
 And go there to do pooja  
 No thanks /not me  
 But you go right ahead  
 If that is what you want to do  
 Give me the matchbox  
 Before you go/will you?  
 I will be out in the courtyard  
 Where no one will mind it/If I smoke  
 (p.39)

The lines above depict non-conformist predicament of modern man who comes at religious place for performing pooja but finds his comfort outside smoking a cigarette.

Kolatkhar satirizes commercialization of religion "there is no crop /other than god/and god is harvested here". The word "crop" typifies commercial importance of god .With his mocking irreverent tone Kolatkhar expresses that how people in modern world are growing "god" for their

mercenary benefits .Spiritual barrenness is wonderfully presented as:

a catgrin on its face  
 and a live, ready to eat pilgrim  
 held between its teeth (p.11)

With the priest as a predator waiting for his prey displays priest's function in the modern time .Kolatkhar in his sly ironical tone tries to present hypocrisy prevalent in our institutions .Kolatkhar is true to his poetic creed .Despite being *Brahmin* ,Kolatkhar does not hesitate to mirror the image of priest to his readers .Kolatkhar through his collection *Jejuri*

Doest not only attack temple and priest but also our modern institutions such as railway. In the poem "The Railway Station" shocked to find that at railway station there is no time table and no clerk to tell when the next train will arrive as:

Slaughter a goat before the clerk  
 Smash a coconut on the railway track  
 Smear the indicator with the blood of a cock  
 Bath the station master in milk  
 And promise you will give  
 A solid gold toy train to the book clerk  
 If only someone would tell you  
 When the train is due (p.57)

The word "slaughter a goat", "smash a coconut", "smear the indicator" and "bath the station master in milk" are mockery on

rituals .The imagery of the poem conveys the point which Kolatkar wants to make .By drawing parallel between railway station and temple Kolatkar highlights that both places are lacking their real purpose for which they are meant for .*Kala Ghoda Poems* are portrayal of underdogs, downtrodden, and neglected part of the society. In the poem “Meera” the following lines depicts Kolatkar’s masterly display:

As they sink deeper

Into themselves,

eggshells and dead flowers

dry leaves and melon rinds,

bread crumbs and condoms ,

chicken bones and potato peels

The details of garbage, waste materials collected by “Meera” describes Kolatkar’s keen sense of observation .These lines give us suggestion that beauty lies in its simpler and humbler aspect ,for this one does not require to wear 3D glasses to get the required image. What requires is change of perception .In poems such as “A Kind of Cross” and “The Cupboard” kolatkar attacks rituals and its practice in our society .There is ironic presentation of temple as palace of torture .It recalls crucification of Christ and fallacy associated with sacrifice even in the modern time as assort of panacea. In the

poem “The Cupboard” derelict shrine is covered with newspaper having details of recipes for eternal youth, stock-in trade information and dull editorials. The poem highlights the hypocrisy of both the newspaper details and temple. With biting humour satire, indifference and irreverence Kolatkar has directed his shaft against “golden god” and “strange instrument of torture”

Kolatkar creates ordinary experience and observation into poetry, sometimes with seriousness and sometimes with agility, but not without irony as in the poem “The Butterfly” in which ‘there is no story behind’ the butterfly, it is ‘just a pinch of yellow,/it opens before it closes ‘ and ‘it closes before it’ opens. But the butterfly ‘is a pun on the present ‘to a place full of legends and stories.

The irreverence and skeptical attitude of Kolatkar is revealed by the very name of the poem “Yeshwant Rao” which can be read in either ways as yes we want Rao or yes, Rao wants .The place of ‘Yeshwant Rao’ is among baggers and lepers ,he is second class god. The poem satirizes the hierarchy in every institution and dirty politics even the place of god doesn’t remain aloof from it .In the same poem the false show of those people who claim to cure you from all

problems is attacked as 'Yeshwant Rao' is a bone setter 'as he himself has no heads, hand and feet, /he happens to understand you a little better'.

In a modern way interrogating the entity of God as 'what is God'? and subverting it in the answer as 'God is the word /and I know it backwards'. Backward of God is dog juxtaposition of 'dog' and 'God' draws the point that no difference between God and dog and god lies in dog. It also reminds one of *Hindu 'Ram'* which on continuous recitation becomes '*Mara*' means dead reflects deadening of spirituality.

Kolatkars poetry is a meticulous x-ray vision that privileges the details over the whole.

In the *Sarpa Satra* Kolatkar is reinventing the myth of 'sarpa satra' in the modern context. The great Vyasa considers the occasion of Sarpa Satra as "a not – to –be missed opportunity"(35).The treatment of theme in Kolatkar's poetry is ironic, sarcastic, and cynical. By using these devices Kolatkar presents the reality of today. Kolatkar is a modernist poet in the sense that his experience deals with here and now .He employs irony, sarcasm, paradox and eschews a facile and straight forward apprehension of the reality. His approach is constantly exploratory .Although he evinces

little sympathy for the overtly ideological or social, he displays a deep concern for the socially oppressed and the underdog.

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