



THE LAND OF THE GODLESS - MODERN VIEW ON FAITH, REALISM AND SKEPTICISM IN ARUN KOLATKAR'S 'JEJURI'

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Abstract

Arun Kolatkar, the Maharashtrian poet elaborates through his collection of poems, 'Jejuri', the blind faith of the pilgrims about Gods. There is a satirical note on the people's religious beliefs which are actually superstitious. Kolatkar tries to depict a realistic picture of the devotees of Khandoba at Jejuri from a social and cultural point of view. He writes Jejuri not to celebrate the Gods or pay his personal tribute and homage to him. Kolatkar seems to debunk not only people's faith in worship but also in their belief of existence in Gods and Goddesses.

Keywords: Quest, Disbelief, Skepticism and Faith.

Introduction

Modernity was readily available to the Indian English poets. Poets started writing with modern touch after the Independence from the British. They were influenced by modern Marathi literature also.

Arun Kolatkar has used the term Indianness in the poetry- which means these traits in the character of a man which shows him to be an Indian and certainly not these traits which show him as a foreigner. The Indian poets use the following sights in common - The pavements sleepers, hawkers, beggars, slum dwellers, the city, its tall buildings, the Gods and Goddesses, transport, rivers, landscapes, the people and so on. Though Kolatkar travelled all around the world he wrote only about Jejuri.

There appeared a group of talented poets on the Indian poetic scene. They have made their poems acceptable to large number of public. Some notable Indian English poets are - Nissim Ezekiel, A.K.Ramanujan, R. Parthasarathy, Keki N. Daruwalla, and Jayanta Mahapatra. Multi-faced themes were used in their poetry, such as rituals, corruption,

disbelief, political life, life and death, love, folklore, etc.,

Jejuri:

Jejuri carries its history with the folk God Khandoba, as it forms the background of the poem Jejuri, a small town at a distance of 30 miles from Pune. The Maharashtrians have a deep faith in the powers and miracles of the Khandoba. Jejuri is a poem that consists of thirty one sections with separate headings. The poem raises many questions many questions when read. The poet deals with various themes like tradition and customs spiritual hollowness in India, poverty and superstitious beliefs.

Khandoba was the folk God of the nomadic tribes by the lower castes. By this way many other sections of the society accepted Khandoba as their clan god or family God. This led to the sacrifice of their children to the God. The female children dedicated top God turns to be a devdasi or the keepers of the temple.

The second part of the poem 'The Priest' presents the portrait of the temple priest, waiting at the arrival of the pilgrims at Jejuri. The dominant themes of the poem is Hypocrisy. The priest is interested in collection and offerings by the pilgrims than any rituals. He is worried due to the delay of the bus

The poet says,

Is the bus a little late?

The Priest wonders

Will there be Puran Poli in his plate

(Jejuri, p.11)

'Puran poli' (prasad) offered to deities, but consumed by the priests as he is the chief worshipper of the deity and the guardian of the temple.

The third poem 'Heart of Ruin' shows the decaying of structures or heritage. Almost every historical, cultural and religious centre's are in ruined conditions in India. The roof of the temple of Maruthi is collapse exactly over his head.

The poet says,

The roof comes down on Maruthi's head

Nobody seems to mind

(Jejuri,p.11)

Low Temple, the eighth poem in the volume, the fine example of rationality and skepticism of the poem. The priest tells the pilgrims, the goddess has eight arms, the narrator counts the arms of the goddess and tells it has eighteen arms. The narrator lights a match from his pocket to view the goddess. He pictures the gods and Goddesses as being visible and invisible in the match light. The pilgrims believe the priest blindly and never check the actual number of arms nor do they want to question just like the poet does.

One by one the gods come to light.

Amused bronze. Smiling stone. Unsurprised.

For a moment the length of a matchstick

Gesture after gesture revives and dies.

(Jejuri, p. 17)

The poem 'A Scratch' mocks at converting every stone in Gods by adding a mythical story to them. The myth goes so- Khandoba struck his wife in rage with a sword and she turned into a stone, which is shown as a big crack on a huge stone. The speaker ironically says

What is God

And what is stone

The dividing line

If it exists

Is very thin

At Jejuri...

Scratch a rock

And a legend springs

(Jejuri,p.28)

The poem 'A Song of Vaghya' and 'A Song of Murali' shows the practise of dedicating men and women to serve Khandoba. The male dedicators to Khandoba called 'Vaghya' carries turmeric and oil in tiger skin bags to worship Khandoba. They earn their daily wages through the offerings from the pilgrims. The female dedicators, only spinsters are called 'Murali's' later turn into prostitution for their living.

Keep your hands of Khandoba's woman

You old lecher

Let's see the colour of your money first

(Jejuri,p.35)

The poet does not make a choice between God or Stone. He had said in an interview if he believed in God or not. He replied "I leave the question alone. I don't think I have to take a position about God one way or the other". (The Indian Literary Review, vol.1, no 4 August 1978,P. 6-10). He highlights the truth that he witnessed at Jejuri and does not debunk religion.

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