



Post-Colonial Interpretation of Bharat Sasane's Short Story *Appa's Coat*

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Abstract

The Research Paper will focus on few post-colonial aspects of the short story '*Appa's Coat*'. It begins with the translation of the short story from Marathi into English and then discuss the post-colonial aspects in the conclusion.

Key words: Marathi, Post-colonial, culture, translation

English Translation of the Marathi Short Story *Appa's Coat*

I was quite young then, might have been twelve years old. We used to live in the Bombay Suburbans then. 'We' means me, my *Aajji* (grandmother) and *Aajoba* (grandfather). Only three of us. I used to call my *Aajoba Appa*; because *Baba* (father) addressed him like that. *Baba* and *Aai* (mother) were employed. They thought that it was convenient if I lived with *Appa*. *Baba* and *Aai* used to come on Sunday or holiday because *Aai* could not take me to school, looking after me properly on account of her job.

She used to go a long distance for her job and used to return exhausted at night. They had taken the decision to me keep at *Appa* when I was very young. Since *Appa-Aajji* were quite fond of me I had no reason to complain. *Appa-Aajji* were quite happy in my company. Otherwise how could they have spent their time? On whom would they have shouted at? Moreover, *Appa* was tired due to old age. I used to take him for a stroll holding his hand. In this manner, it was convenient for *Appa* and *Baba-Aai* that I stayed at his home. Therefore, I lived in the suburbs with *Appa*. My friendship with *Appa* was

deep down. I could correctly guess what he wants and doesn't want. The first thing was that there was no peer around. And even if there was any one around I didn't have time to play with them. After returning from school I was supposed to take *Appa* for a stroll or to a friend of his. Therefore, *Appa's* friends were my friends too. They used to adore me. I used to run for errands for them. I had mixed up and had become the part of the circle of those tired people.

That was the age of imbibing the family culture. It was the age of learning by heart that one must never lie. Not as simple as that but the training was on those lines, clear and easy to follow. It was given in each possible way, in school, in books and at homes. I suddenly realized in this age that a truth is sometimes a lie and a lie could sometimes be a truth and my acquisition changed at once. Further I realized that things taught in a simplistic manner were quite taken for granted. Actually, things have many shades of meaning. A particular thing is true in a given situation and it is not true in another situation. Nobody teaches us these things. I learnt it from an incident. Further, I could only analyze it. Activities of these pensioner people started in

the evening. They were not supposed to go by local (suburban train) anywhere. Very slowly their life of 'no crowd and haste' used to creep ahead. I used to help *Appa* holding his hand climb down the staircase in the evening. Then we used to walk slowly to his friend, *Datar Ajjoba* (grandfather uncle). Another 'Smoker *kaka*' (grandfather uncle) already used to be there. He was named like that because he always smoked beeris. *Deshpande Ajjoba* (grandfather uncle) also used to be there. These old men then played cards and chess. Quarrels and debates also ensued. I was a jury at such instances. Sometimes they spoke on politics too. During such times I used to sit reading in the balcony or just heard their radio. There was no one of my age there. These three friends of *Appa* lived in various localities. Among them the Smoker *kaka* was poor. He lived in congested and shabby locality.

There was a mystery behind the Smoker *kaka*. He had a son called *Shambhu*. *Kaka* never pronounced his name. If someone called his name, remembered him *kaka* used to get quite nervous. He used to abuse him. He used to say that his son was dead for him. This *Shambhu* was in bad company. Once upon a time he was insane but he improved. He was an addict and a criminal. Police used to visit *kaka* once in a while to enquire about *Shambhu*. He had been absconding quite for some time. *Kaka* used to shout when the police came. He used to say, "He is not my son, he is dead. Why do you come here?" Then *Appa* used to pacify him saying, "You be silent. Let him face the consequences of his deeds." Always the police followed him and he missed arrest. People used to thrash him if he was caught committing a trifle crime. It was torturous for him. He used to beg sometimes. These were quite terrifying things. I knew these things because I witnessed and heard about them. *Kaku* (wife of Smoker *kaka*) used to cry at the mention of *Shambhu's* name. *Shambhu* used to approach the back door of his home at odd night time in a gap of a month or two or even after a year, skipping people's sight. He never entered home. He used to stay outside, linger around. He used to be quite woe-begone. *Kaku* used to stealthily serve him food. Hiding from Smoker *kaka* and the police. Meanwhile someone in *Khaki* (color of the police uniform) used to come for his enquiry. Then he used

to run away. Such terrible things used to occur in that home. We, means *Appa* and me used to visit that home on each Thursday. However, I was never at home there. They used to offer *Aarati* (prayer in praise of God). My job was to break the coconut. I used to get lots of sugar crystals.

Once I had gone with *Baba* to that home on a Sunday. I lived for a day and a night. *Aai* said, "I feel bad that I am keeping you away from me, you are being brought up there, but..." Then she started crying. I said, "I am quite happy here. You just keep on visiting me, that's all!" It used to be like that many times, and then *Baba* used to sit in a serious posture, *Aai* used to cry. I returned on Monday noon. Of late I had started to travel alone by local. It was a close distance.

When I reached home, I saw *Appa* and *Aajji* sitting in anxiety. I said, "What happened?" at that time *Appa* said, "I returned just now and realized that I had forgotten the coat. What will happen now? I lost it somewhere or kept it somewhere. He was right. His woollen coat was the most essential thing for him in that age. It was certainly an incident which will make him restless. *Aajji* said, "Can we buy the new one now? If ask *Laxman* (my father) can we buy a new one now, then he quotes daughter in law and says 'To buy woollen cloth, to get it stitched. All is quite expensive.'" I said like a matured person, "Why do you suppose that it is lost? You tell me which places you visited; I will check whether you kept it there." *Appa* was quite pleased. He said, "My dear, there is a ten rupee note in it. But it's raining heavily outside. How will you go?" I said, "I will go, tell me." He said, "I went to *Datar*, then went to *Deshpande*, at last to your Smoker *kaka*." I started immediately. I said, "I will be back soon, don't you worry." As if they had suffered a great financial loss; *Aajoba-Aajji* kept waiting at home. Since he had lost the coat *Aajji* gave a cotton quilt and her saree to cover. She said, "Cover tightly with these and sit quiet. He will enquire and come back." We could not afford to buy a warm shawl at that time. But I loved their caring for each other. I went out in rain. I wanted to get drenched too.

Datar smiled and said, "Dear, why did you come in this rain? But your grandpa is a fool." I was

angry on this. I said, "How can you say like this?" He replied, "Dear, when he left from here, he was wearing coat. He must have left it somewhere else! Wait, have tea." I did not stay there. Deshpande was quivering in cold, wearing a sweater on a sweater. Meanwhile it had started raining heavily. He started shouting looking me drenched. Then said, "He hasn't forgotten his coat here, take this umbrella." His daughter in law didn't like him, she said, "Look here, I need an umbrella, I'm going out." I said, "I don't want an umbrella, I'm going." I reached the Smoker *kaka*.

I was exasperated coming fast in the first place and was also drenched. As if I had taken bath. Jumping I climbed the staircase. Smoker *kaka's* door was closed. The atmosphere inside was somber. *Kaka* was smoking a *beeri*, looking beyond eternity. The whole house was leaking. Everywhere there was water. Outside quite a few people were sitting in filth. Their homes must be leaking as well. Someone said, "What will happen if the building collapsed. There a building collapsed in Girgaon." etc. I opened the full door slowly and went in. Stood over there. Uncle was quite taken aback looking at me. Said, "Yes?" But before I started his wife came ahead. She asked in high tone, "Yes?". I said, "Did *Appa* forget his coat here?" She said, "Coat? Which coat of *Appa*?" I said, "It seems he forgot it here,". She said on this, "Oh come on, if it was here, wouldn't I have given it to you? And why have you come in such a rain? Don't you trust us?". I said, "*Appa* sent me, so I came, he doesn't have other coat. *Aajji* is crying." She said, "It's not here, see elsewhere." Then I returned.

This put *Appa* in terrible anxiety. He said, "Look here, I didn't go anywhere else. If at all its forgotten then it must be at your Smoker *kaka*. Because I remember I had taken it off there. While returning I must have totally forgotten it. So once again, you....". I said, "That's okay, I will go." This time *Aajji* searched for an umbrella. It was quite worn out. We always had discussions on getting it repaired.

I was back to Smoker *kaka*. It must have already been 7 pm in the evening. It was getting dark. Heavy showers ensued. I was quite drenched. Holding the big umbrella on the head was of little

use. Wind was in heavy gusts. I climbed the creaking and dwindling staircase once again. I saw Smoker *kaka* sleeping as if he was guilty. *Kaku* was scolding him in harsh words while weeping. As soon as she noticed me she was frightened and quiet as if I was the ghost. I said resting on closed torn umbrella, "*Appa* says it's here only". She said, "No, it's not here, we aren't thieves, why do you come again and again? Now don't come again. No coat, nothing doing! Get lost! Now don't come again." I was quite surprised. Was angry too. Felt humiliated. I climbed down the staircase.

Down there was ankle deep water. It was still raining. Stood there holding the umbrella. Suddenly felt, *Appa* must have forgotten the coat here but these people are deliberately denying, there is something fishy, I must reveal this mystery. Somehow, I felt I should stay, keep watch the Smoker *kaka's* home - let's see, whether I get some clue. I went in the backyard of the chawl indeed. It was getting dark. Stayed, behind a drumstick tree. Drumsticks were quite drenched and around at the place; grass had grown to knees. Some sort of bad smell was spread over there. Rain was dripping incessantly as if it was in no hurry. I stayed, and stayed. Someone would have killed me in suspicion. However, I stayed and indeed, it happened as unexpectedly as I had guessed. Indeed *Kaku* came briskly, behind her home. She had packed *chapatis* (flat rolled baked bread of wheat flour) in a paper. She looked around, in suspicion, as if she was frightened. She crossed the marshy grass in hurry. She was drenched. She came to a small tree. Her feet were covered in ash and mud. I saw suddenly, like an old animal, under that tree, Shambhu had been sitting there, folded down. Holding both hands to his bosom. *Kaku* gave those *chapatis* to him in hurry. Poured the rice held in her saree fold. I was just five ten feet away from them. They didn't notice me. Then she started abusing him asking him to go. Again, she started looking around. Shambhu was sitting quite pitiful, torn off, woe-begone, drenching. He didn't pay any heed to *Kaku* and just started gulping the pack of *chapatis*, started eating like a wild animal. I looked around. There was nobody. A police jeep, however, moved slowly on the road. *Kaku* must have noticed it. She was frightened.

Started saying, "Scoundrel, quite ungrateful son you are, why don't you die? Get lost, get lost! They are coming. Hide somewhere and eat it all." Shambhu too had no other option left, got up like a dog woken up forcefully. In great hurry he just covered food and started running in the grass. Fell on knees. Got up. Again, started running with great efforts. At that time, I saw *Appa's* coat on him. It was looking strange on him. It was quite loose for him. Otherwise, he moved bare bodied. Now he was covered from rain. He somehow managed to run away in that warm coat. Controlled from a steep fall. Went beyond sight. I was flabbergasted. Didn't know how but from within some sympathetic notes started emanating.

Kaku suddenly noticed me. I too started staring at her. I noticed that she was quite shocked to see me. She was dumbstruck. She stood quiet, in rain. Then slowly her eyes were filled with tears. She said, stammering, in blocked throat, 'It's not here, your *Appa's* Coat. Indeed, not here, look for it elsewhere. I too said, "Yes, it's not here, my *Appa's* Coat is not here. I will look for it elsewhere." Then I returned.

Appa was quite disappointed to hear that coat was not forgotten anywhere, he was thrown in anxiety. *Aajji* was extremely woe-begone. *Appa* didn't have any other coat. I said, "I will ask *Baba* to get another one stitched for you." I didn't say anything about Shambhu and *Kaku*. It was true that the coat was forgotten, but it was also true that the coat was not forgotten. I realised a different type of dimension of things. Certain things are understood on our own. Standing under the drumstick tree, watching that spectacle my mental age had suddenly grown. I didn't tell about that incident to *Appa*, not even to *Aajji*. *Baba* got another coat stitched for *Appa*, notwithstanding while grumbling. After a year, when I had grown a bit more, I was once travelling in a local train. I noticed that someone was dead on the railroad. There was crowd and police. I recognised that must be Shambhu. Because I could recognise *Appa's* Coat from any distance. The coat had covered his face and body. I was once again not sorry about not telling *Appa* the incident of that coat. I didn't feel that I had committed a sin or that I had lied to *Appa*. *Kaku* never could see me eye into

eye after the incident. I was satisfied that even when he died Shambhu had covered himself with that coat. What else one would want? Situations changed the value of that coat. When *Kaku* gave it to him and even now.

Later I read a theory in Philosophy, two into twos are not always four, sometimes they are five, sometimes three too. The mystery in this was revealed to me then. I understood a new dimension of things. My mental age was grown, and kept on growing.

Post-Colonial Aspects

In her Postcolonial Theory Presentation Irene Jade argues that Colonialism means governing influence of a nation over a dependent country or territory. Postcolonial study aims to show themes that link to Postcolonial Theory, Identity, Power, Control, Race Postcolonial, Subjectivity, nationality and Leadership. The Oxford Bibliographies argues that Postcolonial theory is a body of thought primarily concerned with accounting for the political, aesthetic, economic, historical, and social impact of European colonial rule around the world in the 18th through the 20th century.

The title of the short story '*Appa's Coat*' itself is the major metaphor indicating the influence of colonial culture on Indian psyche. Coat was not the natural attire of Indians before the British came to rule us. When they left, wearing the coat acquired cultural significance. People always looked in awe to anyone who wore a coat. It is not an ordinary coat; it is a woollen coat which reminds us of the exploitation of the poor shepherds by the British rulers. They fleeced (literally and metaphorically) the shepherds here by taking the raw wool to England and made fine woollen fabric in England. Those who wore such woollen coat were considered to be very rich.

Then there is this 'smoker Kaka'. Smoking a cigarette as a sign of frustration or rebellion too entered our cultural world during the British rule. Only the rich smoked tobacco in India before this colonial habit came. It has ruined generations and generations. The coloniser and the colonised

relationship are clearly seen in these and other few images in the short story. The writer has successfully pointed out these relationships with these colonial images of coat, cigarette and other images. We can say that 'Appa's Coat' is the best example of post-colonial writing.

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