



Interplay of Myth, Urbanization and Cultural Identity in Arun Kolatkar's 'Jejuri' And 'Sarpa Satra': A Critique on Religious Authority and Societal Norms

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Abstract- Arun Kolatkar, a prominent author in Indian English Poetry and a chief bi-lingual poet from Maharashtra, explores themes of faith and cultural identity in his work. The paper explores Arun Kolatkar's literary contributions, focusing on his unique perspective of modernity through the interplay of myth, urbanization and cultural identity in works like 'Jejuri' and 'Sarpa Satra'. It analyzes the tension between traditional mythological narratives and contemporary reality, highlighting Kolatkar's critiques of religious authority and societal norms. By employing humour and irony, Kolatkar challenges ancient views and offers a nuanced understanding of spirituality in a rapidly changing world, thereby affirming his relevance in modern Indian Literature. His poetry 'Jejuri', reflects rich religious and cultural significance centered on the temple of Lord Khandoba. Through satire, Kolatkar critiques blind faith and the materialism of priests while articulating the collective devotion of diverse worshippers. His juxtaposition of modern skepticism against traditional belief highlights the complexities of belief in contemporary society. The paper also revisits myths from The Mahabharata in 'Sarpa Satra' to critique societal hypocrisy and the moral failings of rulers. It examines the use of poetry as a form of resistance, highlighting themes of identity, history and ecological loss. Kolatkar's work serves as a poignant satire on the corrupt systems that undermine voices, drawing parallels between historical myth and contemporary issues such as violence and environmental degradation. Through this lens, the paper shows that Kolatkar's reimagining of myth exposes the moral absence of power and existential threats posed by governance's irrationalities.

Key words: myth, identity, traditional, modern, religious, society, history

I. Introduction

Arun Kolatkar was an Indian poet, translator and painter born in 1932 in Kolhapur, Maharashtra. He grew up in a traditional family and developed an early love for literature and art. Despite his father's disapproval, he attended the J.J. School of Art and studied English literature and economics at the University of Mumbai. During his university years, he began publishing poems in literary magazines which resulted in gaining recognition for his talent.

Kolatkar's poetic career began in the early 1960s with his first collection "Jejuri" published in 1976, which highlighted his unique voice



and deep engagement with human experiences. Jejuri gained him great recognition and won the Commonwealth Writers' Prize in 1977. Some critics regard Jejuri as one of the best works in Indian English poetry in recent decades. The collection has thirty-one poems, with the last poem divided into six sections, provoking discussions for its views on religious experiences. He later published other notable collections, including "Kala Ghoda Poems" and "Sarpa Satra" touching on themes like urban life, nature and the search for meaning. His poetry is celebrated for its precise language, vivid imagery and inspiration from personal experiences and travels. Throughout his career, Kolatkar received many honors, including the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1977 and the Commonwealth Poetry Prize in 1985. He is recognized as a major bilingual poet who influenced both Marathi and English poetry. Besides his poetry, he created graphic work, such as "The Policeman: A Wordless Play in Thirteen Scenes". He published regularly in magazines from the mid-1950s until his death in 2004. Kolatkar's contributions continue to shape modern Indian literature, making him one of the most popular poets of his time. His work describes how stories highlight different views of land and place, using rhythm, metaphor, song and rhyme to create lasting beauty. It emphasizes the role of narratives filled with themes like love, respect and tragedy, which reflect the history of people connected to the land. Through language, such as personal names and proverbs, his stories shows a deep understanding of place and connects memories, emotions and identities. This bond links us to our ancestors, whose spirits live on in the names of our homes. Finally, it notes that contemporary poets capture the spirit of the times by reflecting on changes in literature.

Arun Kolatkar was known for his experimental style, emerging prominently in the late '60s and early '70s. He contributed significantly to Indian English poetry and was also active in translating Marathi literature into English. His work often features surrealism and constructivism, moving away from traditional forms of logical and emotional expression. Jejuri is a revered pilgrimage site in Maharashtra, where devotees worship Lord Khandoba, an incarnation of Lord Shiva, symbolizing unity across different communities. Kolatkar found inspiration for Jejuri from a book about Maharashtra's temples and visited the site in 1963 with his brother and a friend. He initially published part of Jejuri in a small magazine but after the manuscript was lost, he rewrote it, leading to its publication in the Opinion Literary Quarterly in 1975 and later as a book in 1976.



The religious theme is apparent, as indicated by the title *Jejuri*. Kolatkar uses the pilgrimage setting and themes of myth and blind faith but aims to portray the socio-cultural and economic conditions of local people, often through satire. His protagonist, Manohar, represents a modern viewpoint, contrasting the traditional pilgrimage experience. Instead of a devout pilgrim, Manohar is depicted as a traveller or tourist, providing a sceptical perspective on the journey to Jejuri.

“*Sarpa Satra*” is a post-modern artwork by Arun Kolatkar, published in 2004. In this piece, the speaker reinterprets the Hindu epic, the *Mahabharata*, focusing on themes of ongoing hatred and violence through generations. It tells the story of Janamejaya, who conducts a snake sacrifice to avenge his father’s murder by the snake Takshaka. His actions provoke Jaratkaru, Takshaka’s sister, to persuade her son Astika to intervene and stop this destructive ritual. Kolatkar critiques the cycles of violence present in historical events, like the partition of India, the Holocaust and the Godhra massacre. The poem questions the cultural hostility and revenge that separate communities, using vengeance from Hindu myths to criticize the misuse of religion in justifying violence.

II. Research Objectives

The objectives are:

- To explore Kolatkar’s connection to myths and how they influence his poetry and literary approach.
- To examine how Arun Kolatkar integrate oral traditions into their literary creations, concentrating on the methods and narrative techniques they use to embody cultural heritage.
- To examine Kolatkar’s diverse poetic styles from experimental to post-modernism, highlighting his innovative techniques that combine various genres.
- To evaluate Arun Kolatkar’s vision of life reflected in his poetry and his awareness about inherent evil in human being.
- The paper looks into the significance of myths and modern thinking in intangible cultural heritage, particularly focusing on how the author portrays his experiences in this preservation through its literary outputs.

III. Methodology

- The paper employed qualitative and quantitative research techniques to analyze the texts of Arun Kolatkar focusing on their narrative



frameworks, themes and language shaped by the stories. A close examination of selected works was conducted to uncover elements of cultural heritage within their story. A review of the cultural and historical contexts related to the selected works was undertaken to enhance the understanding of the narratives. This framework illustrates the complex roles that myths and ancient stories serve as carriers of cultural heritage in the writings of Kolatkar providing a thorough insight into their contributions to literature.

IV. Review Of Literature

Arun Kolatkar stands out for using ancient myths and legends in his significant literary works. His poetry often explores the self in connection to the world, focusing on identity, alienation and the search for meaning in modern life. He celebrates nature's beauty and complexity in his poems, showing its relationship with human existence. Influenced by classical Sanskrit poetry and Western writers like T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, Kolatkar develops a distinct poetic voice characterized by depth and insight into human experiences. Poets use myths to question established institutions and inspire imagination and many Indian poets draw from these myths to highlight aspects of Indian culture. Notable poets and scholars, such as Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Toru Dutt, Aurobindo Ghosh, Tagore, Nissim Ezekiel, Ramanujan, Jayanta Mahapatra, Kamala Das, Arun Kolatkar and Niranjan Mohanty, incorporate myths from the Vedas and Upanishads into their works, adding themes of cultural ecology, nationalism, spirituality and mysticism.

Kolatkar was an accomplished translator, known for accurately translating Marathi and Sanskrit literature into English while maintaining poetic quality. He was also a painter whose abstract and expressionist art echoed his poetry's themes. This fusion of art and literature highlights his unique style and existential themes, significantly impacting Indian literature. His poetry is studied in academic contexts and translated into various languages, reaching global audiences. Kolatkar's work continues to inspire new generations of poets who reflect on his artistic vision. His poetry merges traditional and contemporary elements, using myths for vivid imagery and symbolism. His work reinterprets ancient stories, making them relevant for modern readers while respecting their cultural significance and sometimes challenging traditional perspectives. This duality is especially evident in



his acclaimed collection “Jejuri” which contemplates faith and spirituality’s complexities.

Kolatkár’s earlier work, “Jejuri” published in 1976, is recognized for challenging fixed identities through language and imagery. It consists of 36 poems that depict his experiences in Jejuri from morning to evening and won the Commonwealth Poetry Prize in 1977. His poetry reflects modernist traits from the Tittle Magazine Movement and incorporates styles from European avant-garde movements, producing works that are often strange, humorous and dark. Despite facing criticism, “Jejuri” gained scholarly attention and is now considered a classic of modern literature. Kolatkár’s writing may seem disconnected from reality, yet it provides profound insights into local life and his connection to India. “Jejuri” composed of thirty-one sections, is particularly significant and requires detailed analysis due to its complex themes, challenging traditional pilgrimage concepts while revealing the sacred in unexpected places.

Kolatkár’s style changes in Jejuri, moving away from surrealism to explore how classic epics relate to today’s world. In the poem Sarpa Satra published in 2004, Kolatkár uses myths from the Mahabharata, focusing on King Janamejaya and his Snake Sacrifice for revenge as well as Krishna and Arjuna’s destruction of Khandava Forest. He presents these ancient stories through a mix of mythology, pointing out the harsh realities of modern life filled with greed and violence, while also referencing sacred past elements. Sarpa Satra has a Marathi counterpart called Bhijki Vahi, which deals with current issues like corruption and moral decline. Kolatkár’s innovative approach seeks to reframe traditional myths to address modern problems and clarify uncertainties of postmodern life. His work shows a dedication to blending past traditions with contemporary experiences, reflecting the complexities of human life amid societal issues.

V. Myths And Modernity In The Works Of Arun Kolatkár: A Detailed Analysis

Jejuri is a significant pilgrimage site in Maharashtra where devotees worship Lord Khandoba, an incarnation of Lord Shiva, believing he will offer them prosperity and health. Kolatkár skillfully blends Marathi and English cultures in his writing. He holds a respected place in Indian English poetry, characterized by disbelief and critiques of religious practices, often questioning blind faith in his works.



The protagonists in Kolatkar's poems grapple with the confusion brought on by modern life and culture. His poems reflect a decline in contemporary religious sentiment and highlight the struggle between modernity and tradition as well as faith and doubt. In his poem "Yeshwant Rao", he effectively illustrates this tension. Modern Indian thinking embraces elements of faith and skepticism, where young people may be doubtful yet feel unable to challenge these beliefs. Mythology serves as a safeguard for religion in this context. Also, there's a troubling aspect in his poetry where pilgrims must fulfill their promises to avoid divine displeasure.

Some critics argue that while "Jejuri" may not reach the depth of works like T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land", it represents an important step for contemporary Indian English poets to reflect on their ancient heritage. However, it might have benefitted from a deeper exploration instead of merely touching on the issues. The poems in "Jejuri" move between themes of pilgrimage, the temple of Lord Khandoba and the experiences at bus stops and railway stations. Kolatkar expresses a rich tradition of faith observed among people from different communities who worship at the temple. At the same time, he conveys his modern distrust about customs and critiques the priest's material concerns. The poems express his impressions of the environment, including the gods, priests, people, animals and the condition of the temples, which appear to be in ruins with poor lighting, limited water supply and many beggars. The style of the poem is ironic and humorous, using casual language that fits the depicted lifestyle. The work represents a spiritual journey of a city dweller to the Jejuri temple but it is ironically devoid of any religious purpose or deep sensitivity towards the many deities present.

VI. Traditional Influence In Kolatkar's Work

Kolatkar uses established literary forms but gives them his unique style and viewpoint. In an interview, he discusses his Marathi collection, "Bhijki Vahi", expressing a desire to reclaim elements of his tradition. He includes characters from various backgrounds and historical contexts, indicating his wide-ranging interests and reflectiveness about what is relevant in India. For instance, he revitalizes Mukayakka, a Kannada poetic form for laments and uses it to connect broader themes. Critics suggest that late modernist poets, like Kolatkar, reinvent the modern concept by adapting literary forms that precede them. His translations of



bhakti poets aim to make their work more accessible while also reviving their significant elements.

Kolatkhar often revises myths to address both local and global issues. In “Kala Ghoda Poems”, he reinterprets the epic form and modernism to depict urban life, incorporating various sub-textual references that redefine Hindu myths. In “Sarpa Satra”, he revisits the Mahabharata, offering a new perspective on a significant event by exploring the mind-set of Janamajeya, who seeks revenge for his grandfather’s death. Kolatkhar captures the complexity of his characters’ thoughts briefly, effectively addressing the absurdity of historical events through a secular lens in these interpretations. His poetry is greatly influenced by myths, which enrich his writing style and allow him to explore complex themes. He uses myths to provide symbolism and imagery that connect readers to his work, making it more engaging and relatable. This is particularly clear in his poetry collection, “Jejuri”, where he retells Indian myths. By reinterpreting these stories, Kolatkhar encourages readers to delve into themes of faith, desire and the human struggle.

Myths and poetry have a long history together, enhancing each other through storytelling. Myths carry timeless narratives and characters that allow poets to address universal themes. In return, poetry adds new meanings and interpretations to myths. Myths hold deep cultural wisdom and reflect basic human experiences like love, death and transformation. They convey truths through metaphor and symbolism, transforming abstract concepts into tangible stories. Poetry, characterized by emotional depth and precise language, captures human experiences, inviting readers to explore complex emotions and perceptions. Both forms of expression shine a light on human consciousness and existence’s mysteries. Poets often draw from mythological themes and figures, enriching their work with age-old stories. Myth and poetry together create a rich tapestry that expands our understanding of life and culture.

Kolatkhar also uses myths to make social and political commentary. He reinterprets ancient narratives to challenge the dominant views of society. His poem “The Crows,” inspired by the Ramayana, critiques traditional interpretations and highlights the struggles of ordinary people. This ability to reinterpret myths distinguishes Kolatkhar’s poetic style. By drawing from both Indian and Western myths, he creates complex imagery and symbolism that reflect human experiences. Kolatkhar’s innovative approach to myths has shaped his legacy as a significant poet in India. His work is celebrated for its exploration of memory, time and



the human experience. Through his unique blend of lyrical language and keen observations, Kolatkar examines the intricate nature of memory and its profound effects on our lives. His poetry invites readers to engage deeply with its themes, ensuring his lasting impact on literature.

VII. Significance Of Memory In Kolatkar's Jejuri

Kolatkar's poetry presents memory as a vibrant tapestry that connects the past, present and future. In his poem "Jejuri", he describes a pilgrimage with an image of an 'old woman's feet' carrying the 'dust of time', emphasizing how past memories shape our current beliefs and experiences. He highlights the struggle between fleeting moments and lasting memories, noting that although memories can fade and become fragmented over time, certain significant memories can endure. For example, in "City Lights", he illustrates how memories can persist over time, akin to city lights shining through the night.

Kolatkar sees memory as essential to understanding ourselves and our surroundings. His poetry encourages readers to examine how memories affect our perceptions and decisions, emphasizing that memory is not just a storage of facts but an active process shaped by imagination. His minimalist style often portrays urban life and explores existential concerns in modern society. Also his work reflects on mortality while tackling the search for meaning in a seemingly chaotic universe.

Kolatkar also believed that language shapes our experience of the world. As a translator, he aimed to connect cultural gaps and explore universal human experiences. Considered a pioneer of modern Indian poetry, alongside figures like Nissim Ezekiel, his works remain significant for their truthfulness, exploration of existential themes and innovative language. Kolatkar's poetry connects memory and experience, showcasing how memories fill our identities with meaning. Through poetry, we can transcend time and space, with each memory contributing uniquely to our sense of self. Language plays a dual role in this exploration, acting both as a barrier and a bridge. Words strive to convey experiences that may be ineffable, with poetry serving as a transformative medium that captures profound emotions. Memory and poetry co-exist, enhancing each other in a dance of creation and recall.

Kolatkar's use of irony adds depth to his explorations. Irony reveals discrepancies between expectation and reality and can take many forms, creating layers of meaning in his work. His poetry often examines the complexities of post-colonial India, reflecting themes of identity, urban



life and the clash between tradition and modernity. In “An Old Woman”, he contrasts a beggar’s life with the potential for spiritual enlightenment, using irony to critique societal norms and the limitations of language. His poetry invites readers to confront contradictions in modern existence and engage with cultural and personal complexities. As a painter and graphic artist, Kolatkar captures the scene’s abstract qualities, portraying deities on the empty hills of Jejuri. At the journey’s end, a symbolic moment occurs when an old man’s satisfied view of the cocks and hens dancing in a jowar field suggests a divine spirit.

VIII. Modern And Cultural References In Kolatkar’s Writings

Kolatkar’s use of irony and the mix of cultural references, along with his unpredictable imagery and satire, reflects a modern sensibility. He incorporates contemporary terms like “secret police” and “plum job”, creating a jarring collage that reminds readers that the destructive forces in the world continue to burn as fiercely as ever.

The poem depicts a sceptical tourist at a place of pilgrimage, who waits impatiently for a train to leave. The opening poem, “The Bus”, introduces themes of alienation and divided identity, showing that the narrator feels disconnected from both himself and his surroundings. This idea of split identities is reflected in works by poets such as Ramanujan and Kamala Das, pointing to a deep social divide that suggests a destination that may never be reached, echoing traditional pilgrim literature’s theme of cyclical journeys. The poem employs various stanza forms but its narrative is more prosaic than poetic.

In the second poem, “The Priest”, the imagery challenges the sacred nature of pilgrimage, portraying a priest as someone more interested in material gains than spiritual guidance. As he waits for a bus, his greedy disposition is emphasized and the poet uses a cat metaphor to show how pilgrims can be unwitting victims of religious organizations. The contrast between appearance and reality is further explored in the poem “Heart of Ruin”, which illustrates the commercialization of sacred spaces. The poet enters post-modern territory in “The Doorstep”, questioning reality’s nature through unconventional imagery that emphasizes perception’s uncertainty.

Against this backdrop of skepticism are three poems about Chaitanya, a Bengali Vaishnava saint who aimed for spiritual reform. Through colloquialisms, these poems highlight the connection between Chaitanya and idol worship. In one instance, he tells a stone to remove its red paint,



suggesting that simplicity holds value. Another poem illustrates Chaitanya's recognition of life force in all beings, as he instils divinity in lifeless stones. The final Chaitanya poem connects the dynamic life force to a fresh perspective on life, similar to "The Butterfly", promoting appreciation for the conventional and the lifeless.

In "Between Jejuri and the Railway Station", the interactions of animals symbolize divine dynamism and perception, leading to the self-discovery through skepticism, humour and emotional detachment. The essence of the location is not found in religious shrines but in ordinary life, exemplified by the station dog. This conclusion turns the traditional notion of pilgrimage upside down, framing Jejuri as a secular place rich in paradoxes. The overall message contrasts a loss of faith with the capacity to see the divine in life's vibrancy.

"A Low Temple" illustrates the blind faith of worshippers as a visitor grapples with the priest's claim about an eight-armed goddess. When the protagonist doubts the priest's tale by counting the arms, the priest quickly suppresses this challenge, illustrating how he forces belief.

In "The Priest's Son," the son of the priest, though a schoolboy during breaks helps guide tourists, struggling with whether he truly believes in the myths he recounts. When questioned about these stories, he avoids an answer, indicating his discomfort with his inherited role.

"A Scratch" tells of a priest who uses myths to engage worshippers, claiming a scratch on a stone is from a god. The poet contrasts faith and skepticism, remarking on the thin line between a god and a stone, satirizing how easily any stone can be considered divine.

In "Makarand," the protagonist expresses his modern skepticism, preferring to smoke rather than partake in rituals. This illustrates a broader theme of the struggle between modern sensibilities and traditional religious practices, underscoring the diminishing influence of faith.

Ultimately, these poems explore the tension between tradition and modernity, faith and skepticism and the commercialization of religion experienced in Jejuri. Through various characters, the poet critiques blind faith and portrays the complexities and contradictions of belief in contemporary society, emphasizing how personal and communal identities intersect with religious practices.



IX. Modernity Versus Myth In Kolatkar's "Sarpa Satra"

As a bilingual poet, Kolatkar also transcreated some of his Marathi poems into English. His poem *Sarpa Satra* explores the theme of vengeance universally. Based on the *Mahabharata*, it tells the story of King Janamejaya, who performs a snake sacrifice to avenge his father, King Parikshit, who died from a snake bite. This ancient myth is reinvented in a modern context to highlight the chaos and despair in today's world.

Moving to "*Sarpa Satra*," a long poem based on the *Mahabharata*, it describes King Janamejaya's snake sacrifice meant to erase the Nagas. The poem fuses modern terminology with its mythical content, indicating the poet's contempt for violence in both myth and reality. Through collected detail, it reflects a critical view of historical and current conflicts, tying together the poem's themes of perception, faith and the often harsh realities of existence.

X. Discussions And Findings

In the poetry collection "*Jejuri*", Kolatkar critiques blind religious practices and the hypocrisy of profit-driven priests using irony. He explores faith and doubt in his spiritual journey but struggles to voice his questions about myths. The text illustrates how oral traditions adapt to written forms, merging different cultures and challenging the gap between orality and writing. Kolatkar aims to connect with a global audience by using varied English styles and modern translations of classic themes. He blends epic techniques with world literature, highlighting marginalized voices and depicting modernity through folk and mythic stories that emphasize unique aspects of women.

Myths are an important part of human culture and influence literature across all societies. They inspire creativity in authors by giving them themes and symbols that help readers better understand their works. The collection is significant because it highlights a conflict between the legendary stories associated with Khandoba and the real social and cultural experiences of the people in Jejuri, showcasing the clash between faith and urban skepticism.

The poet's journey to Jejuri takes place in one day, beginning early in the morning and ending in the afternoon. In the opening poem "*The Bus*", Kolatkar introduces the character Manohar, who is traveling with an old pilgrim on a bus filled with others heading to the Khandoba



temple. The bus is covered with tarpaulin to shield passengers from the wind and rain, symbolizing the constraints of blind faith that affect the pilgrims even before they reach their destination. Manohar seeks enlightenment symbolized by sunlight but all he can see is his own reflection in the glasses of the old pilgrim, highlighting the tension between belief and skepticism.

The old man in the bus has a caste mark on his forehead, suggesting he is a devout high-caste Hindu, while Manohar maintains a sceptical perspective towards the devotion of these pilgrims. The poem conveys his detachment from their religious fervour. The subsequent poem, “The Priest”, further critiques the superficiality of religious practices. It depicts a priest who is more concerned with the offerings from pilgrims than with true worship. Despite his repetitive prayers, his thoughts are focused on attracting more pilgrims to sustain his livelihood, exposing the commercialization of religion.

Other poems such as “Heart of Ruin”, “The Door” and “A Scratch” reveal the neglected and decaying aspects of Jejuri and its people instead of glorifying the myths associated with the area. “Heart of Ruin” illustrates the run-down state of a temple, where a stray dog has taken up residence, showcasing an unideal reality rather than a romanticized version of the sacred site. Kolatkar’s objective observations and critical approach challenge the traditional narratives surrounding Jejuri, emphasizing the contrast between mythical stories and the harsh truths of life in the pilgrimage town.

XI. A Literary Examination of Sacred Ruins in Jejuri

Kolatkar reflects on the dilapidated state of temples in Jejuri, suggesting they no longer serve as places of worship, although he ultimately recognizes them as houses of God. In poems like “The Door” and “The Door Step”, he illustrates the sad condition of a medieval temple door that is broken and unusable, symbolizing the neglect of spiritual spaces. The descriptions convey irony and skepticism, with the persona questioning whether the temple entrance can still be considered as such. Kolatkar also highlights the plight of the local people, especially beggars in “An Old Woman”. The poem shows an elderly woman who relies on the charity of pilgrims, desperately asking for money. Despite her efforts to sell herself as a guide, her reality is bleak and she acknowledges her helplessness. This illustrates the harshness of life in a religious site that does not provide true refuge for its most vulnerable. Other poems like



“Hills”, “Water Supply” and “The Reservoir” reinforce the desolation of Jejuri. The speaker sees the hills, traditionally thought to be divine, as barren and lifeless. In “Water Supply”, he humorously depicts a dysfunctional water tap, while “The Reservoir” reveals that ancient structures, once sources of faith, now lie empty and full of silt. This suggests stagnation in both spirituality and physical sustenance.

Kolatkár critiques the blind faith of pilgrims in “A Scratch”. He uses the example of a rock believed to be the wife of a deity, noting how myths can elevate ordinary stones to divine status. This highlights the absurdity and fragility of such beliefs, as well as the cyclical nature of myth making in Jejuri.

In “Chaitanya”, he further examines the capability of a saint to transform stones into gods, once again conflating the mundane with the divine. The narrator’s skepticism extends to the treatment of deities, where gold gods are treated with reverence while stone gods are neglected. In “The Cupboard”, the contrast is drawn between the cares given to valuable idols versus those considered less important.

Kolatkár introduces characters like Yeshwant Rao, a marginal god, who symbolizes societal hierarchy within belief systems. Despite being a figure of healing, he is seen as lesser because of his lack of physical form, thereby questioning the perceived power associated with divinity. Conversations with priests in “A Low Temple” and “The Blue Horse” reveal their ignorance about the deities they serve. The protagonist’s interactions expose discrepancies in knowledge about the gods, offering a critique of the religious practices that maintain outdated beliefs. Overall, Kolatkár challenges the perception of spirituality in Jejuri, juxtaposing skepticism against traditional faith and unveiling the harsh realities of life that persist even in places deemed sacred.

XII. A Comparative Study Between Faith And Doubt

The text discusses the contrast between blind faith and scientific skepticism through the characters in the city of Jejuri, where religious practices seem hollow. The priest cleverly alters the appearance of a white horse to look blue, highlighting his ignorance regarding the true essence of the deity he serves. In contrast, the protagonist of “Makarand” openly rejects traditional worship by choosing to smoke in the courtyard instead of taking part in ceremonies.

The priest’s son, who studies in school and serves as a tour guide during vacations, shares local legends about the god Khandoba with the



protagonist. However, when asked if he believes in these myths, he becomes uncomfortable and tries to change the subject. His hesitation reveals that, despite being educated and sceptical, he continues to share these superstitions for his livelihood. This points to Jejuri's transformation into a commercialized space masquerading as a site of religious devotion.

As the protagonist prepares to leave Jejuri, he reflects on what he gained from his visit, symbolized by holding a coconut, a priest's visiting card and carrying unanswered questions. The final poem, "The Railway Station", consists of six sections that portray the absurdity and futility of the railway station as it reflects the mysticism associated with the gods in Jejuri. Each section describes characters and objects in ironic ways, underscoring the disconnection between the supposed importance of the rituals and their meaningless execution. The indicator at the station is likened to a "wooden saint" needing paint and the slumbering dog embodies the spirit of the place, having been in a state of penance for centuries. The young tea stall worker vows to silence and responds to queries with the act of washing dishes rather than providing useful answers. Even the station master appears mystically detached, watching the sunset anxiously as though it were part of some secret ritual. In the section titled "vows", the poet humorously suggests that one must perform bizarre ceremonies to learn the train schedule, illustrating the absurdity of rituals. The setting sun, described as massive and prophetic, symbolizes the decline of faith in God and religion.

The conclusion reflects on how Jejuri presents a blend of myth and reality, faith and doubt, illustrating the tension between traditional beliefs and modern skepticism represented by Kolatkar's protagonist. Although he encounters mythical stories and religious practices, he ultimately finds a lack of genuine spirituality among the people and in their gods. Instead, he discovers faith through his reflections and rational insights, showcasing a modern, objective viewpoint amidst the deeply rooted traditions of Jejuri.

XIII. A Critical Analysis Of Deconstructing Myth In Sarpa Satra

In the poem "Sarpa Satra", the poet uses myth not to celebrate figures or traditions but to critique the stubbornness and intolerance present in Indian politics and religious texts. The poem explores the theme of hatred as the root cause of wars throughout history, highlighting how all beings



are trapped by these negative emotions. The lines from the section titled “The Ritual Bath” emphasize this theme, as they depict priests and intellectuals taking home wealth after rituals, showcasing the irony in their actions. It also presents a critical view of Krishna and Arjuna, diverging from the traditional narrative by depicting them as morally flawed. Jaratkaru, a character in the poem, urges her son Astika to discover the truth about the Khandava forest, hinting that Vyasa’s account is biased in favour of powerful figures. The poem serves as an allegory for obsession and the ongoing cycle of violence. While the Khandava forest was destroyed, the bitterness in Takshaka’s heart remains, leading to further conflict.

Takshaka seeks revenge for the devastation but Jaratkaru does not sympathize with either Takshaka or Janamejaya, who conducts a snake sacrifice as a response. Jaratkaru confronts Takshaka, challenging the notion of revenge and criticizing his choice of target-Parikshit, Arjuna’s grandson-rather than Arjuna himself. She questions the wisdom of the sages who support Janamejaya’s misguided actions, pointing out the absurdity of the snake sacrifice, which should promote well-being instead of destruction.

The poet highlights the tragedy of powerful individuals acting on their anger, as Janamejaya’s sacrifice taints religious rituals with malice. Jaratkaru implores Astika to warn Janamejaya against the sinful nature of his sacrifice, believing Astika’s purity can guide him. She sees Astika as a suitable intermediary to stop the slaughter because his mind remains untainted by hatred.

The poet aims to prepare readers for the harsh realities of life, emphasizing that the story diverges from the final resolutions found in the Mahabharata. There is no clear victory for Astika and the poem suggests that future generations will still face wars. It conveys a message about the persistent nature of vengeance and hatred in humanity, symbolizing that even when conflicts seem to end, new topics will arise, masking the ongoing issues of violence.

The speaker warns against being deceived, indicating that the destructive fire of vengeance cannot be extinguished and will continue to consume everything in its path, reflecting on how such rituals mirror the historical patterns of mass violence across generations. Overall, the poem critiques the glorification of conflict and emphasizes the need for awareness of the consequences of fanaticism and revenge.

Irony and humour are crucial tools in the poem, which challenge traditional views of religion. The poet employs modern language while



discussing age-old myths, suggesting that greed and deceit have fallen into the minds of revered sages. The use of contemporary phrases like “sacrificial jamborees” and “intellectual superstars” illustrates the speaker’s disdain for those who embody hypocrisy in the name of spirituality. This language strips away the reverence typically associated with Brahmins, labelling them in derogatory terms like “mantra mutterer” and “hangers-on”.

The poem’s sarcasm and humour are further conveyed through every day terminology woven into its mythical themes, revealing the timeless nature of cycles of zealotry and revenge. The character of Jaratkaru, a snake woman and mother, takes a central role, delivering a harsh critique of the indifference of powerful figures in the Mahabharata, particularly highlighting a grandfather’s failure to intervene in familial destruction. Jaratkaru’s cynical remarks expose the flaws of celebrated heroes like Krishna and Arjuna, comparing their heroic acts with acts of senseless destruction. The poem condemns their reckless actions in the Khandava forest, showcasing a stark contrast to their exalted portrayals. The imagery of them as ruthless figures exacerbates the theme of violence and greed.

The poet’s language encapsulates disillusionment and brutality, exploring how historical narratives often mask cruelty and destruction. In addition to critiquing these epic heroes, the poem also addresses broader issues of power and aggression in society.

The conclusion of the poem presents a haunting reflection on human frailty, as kings, after their rituals, plot new conquests and taxes, highlighting that rituals fail to cleanse or heal human shortcomings. Despite historical disasters driven by greed and revenge, mankind remains blind to the lessons of the past, continually repeating its mistakes. This final message underscores a profound irony about the persistence of human flaws regardless of time or circumstance.

XIV. Literary Tradition, Myth And Ecology In Kolatkar’s Jejuri And Sarpa Satra

Kolatkar had diverse influences from many writers and poets, which shows his subversive effort against the concept of pure literary traditions, indicating a blend of cultural influences or hybridity. Hybridity counters essentialism by disrupting uniformity and challenging separations. “Jejuri” specifically critiques religious identity, with critics misinterpreting its stance against organized religion as atheism, which



inaccurately assigns an essential identity to the poet based on Western concepts.

Kolatkár avoids classifying himself as religious or non-religious, suggesting a rejection of fixed religious identity. His experiences in Jejuri suggest familiarity with its spiritual aspects, opposing ritualistic elements rather than outright religion. The poems focus more on the human aspects of religion, critiquing the business of religious practices instead of the existence of a divine entity. While some critics may label Kolatkár as non-religious, it may be more accurate to view him as anti-ritual.

Such critics often ignore the theme of a “divided face”, which symbolizes internal conflict and identity complexity. Kolatkár’s rejection of the old man’s representation may signify a refusal to adhere to a single essential identity, reflecting the multifaceted nature of personal and cultural identities within his work. Thus, the interpretative challenge lies in recognizing the layers and contradictions inherent in “Jejuri”, rather than imposing a rigid identity framework.

The poet’s satire in Jejuri targets the priestly class and their exploitation of the vulnerable in religious places. In poems like “Heart of Ruin”, the poet contrasts a “place of worship” with “the house of god”, highlighting how the ruins of a temple serve as refuge for the downtrodden, such as a stray dog and a dung beetle. The poet criticizes religious sites, suggesting they prioritize economic concerns over genuine spirituality, where devotion is linked to financial survival, depicted humorously in “The Priest”, which shows the priest’s greedy nature.

In contrast, the poem “A Song for a Vaghya” emphasizes the harsh realities of survival, while “A Song for a Murli” exposes hypocrisy, where a person tries to negotiate based on money, critiquing the culture where children are offered to deities by parents seeking financial gain, leading to cycles of poverty and exploitation. Moreover, the poet acknowledges the limitations of attaining idealistic or utopian visions, especially in “Ajamil and the Tigers,” which illustrates understanding the needs of both exploiters and the exploited. In this poem, Ajamil, the shepherd, realizes the necessity of balancing the needs of all parties, unlike the sheep dog, who remains unaware of this dynamic. The poet’s Vaghya expresses the struggle between recognizing divine truths and the harsh realities of existence. Some poems in Jejuri also carry romantic elements, balancing the poet’s pragmatism but not leaning towards nihilism. “The Butterfly” highlights a spiritual connection to nature,



contrasting the tendencies of glorifying objects with a focus on their immediate beauty, devoid of past or future stories.

The poet expresses a unique relationship with the concept of deification and criticizes unnecessary idolization, which he also addresses in a poem titled “A Scratch.” In his work, he seeks to remove the layers of identity added by myths and legends from various objects and people, contrasting his approach with that of saint-poets who sought to instil a divine essence in everything.

Besides, the poet is sceptical of modernity, suggesting that it offers false solutions to the failings of tradition. In several poems, he uses mock-rituals to slyly critique modern elements like industrialization and technology, illustrating the powerlessness of contemporary figures attempting to replace traditional beliefs. The rituals in these poems reflect a satirical view of modernity as an inadequate substitute for older values.

The cover design of his book “Jejuri” further reinforces his themes. The imagery and colours convey significant religious symbolism, juxtaposing traditional representations of divinity with modern elements like railway tracks. This duality critiques the inability of both tradition and modernity to improve human experience, suggesting that both systems are fundamentally flawed. Overall, the text emphasizes the poet’s deep examination of religious practices, critique of deification and skepticism toward modernity, all articulated through a unique linguistic expression that defies conventional labels of identity.

Kolatkár’s poetry focuses on the complexities of life, using vivid images filled with vernacular and slang to create an authentic and ironic portrayal. His collections explore various themes: “Jejuri” questions religious faith and doubt, while “Stupa Satra” addresses the flames of hatred, both set against a mythical backdrop that highlights ecological destruction and spiritual emptiness. The poet blends the real and the imaginary, creating a blurred line between the everyday and the miraculous. A consistent theme runs through his works, emphasizing the surreal and obscure. The absence of rhythm and the use of colloquial language give his poetry a distinct local flavour.

The poem by Arun Kolatkár reflects important ideas about the environment and ethics in the context of mythology, particularly focusing on figures like Arjuna and Krishna from the Mahabharata. The poem highlights that these characters are more concerned with their egos than with ecological balance, leading to destruction. Kolatkár criticizes how their actions, specifically the burning of the Khandava forest,



resulted in a tragic loss of biodiversity and habitat for countless species, contributing to a decline in human moral standards. His verses emphasize the intricate link between deforestation and dehumanization, noting the disappearance of various forms of life, including people who had lived in harmony with the forest.

XV. Ecological Misuse In Kolatkar Poetry: Sarpa Satra

Environmental issues extend beyond deforestation. Kolatkar expresses deep concern about air pollution, describing its harmful effects through vivid imagery of toxic smoke and its impact on the atmosphere, hinting at a larger environmental crisis. He integrates the thoughts of environmental thinkers like Joanna Macy and N. Leena, emphasizing the interconnectedness of all life forms and their shared responsibility for the health of ecosystems.

Moreover, Kolatkar examines the misuse of power, particularly through divine weapons wielded by Arjuna and Krishna, which were intended for protection but led instead to destruction. He questions the motives behind their actions, suggesting that the thrill of possessing such power can lead to irresponsible behavior. The poem critiques the religious practices of the time as well, noting that the counsel given to rulers often encourages wrongdoing, such as the snake sacrifice that goes against true religious principles.

The character Jaratkaru voices objections to the violence committed against the Nagas during the sacrifice, highlighting the need for accountability among leaders. She reflects on the emotional scars left by these events, suggesting that they have impacted her ability to think clearly and perhaps hinting at a collective trauma. Her concerns resonate with themes of social, political and religious responsibility, urging the ruler to protect the marginalized instead of exploiting them for personal gain.

Kolatkar suggests that many contemporary poets are driven by opportunist rather than genuine expression, disconnect between art and ethical responsibility. He questions the legacy of myth in Indian culture, suggesting that while it can provide comfort and identity, it may also obscure important social critiques. Ultimately, he calls for a recognition of the balance required in both ecological and societal realms, warning against the consequences of neglecting these responsibilities and the dangers of failing to uphold promises made to both humans and deities. The poem serves as a cautionary reminder of the fragile link between



humanity and the environment, as well as the moral implications of power and leadership in society.

XVI. Conclusion

The poem by Arun Kolatkar discusses important themes about the environment and ethics using characters from the Mahabharata, like Arjuna and Krishna. It points out that these figures focus more on their egos than on nature, leading to destruction. Kolatkar criticizes their actions, such as the burning of the Khandava forest, which caused significant loss of biodiversity and the decline of human morals. He connects deforestation to a loss of humanity and notes how many lives and communities disappeared as a result. Kolatkar's concerns go beyond deforestation to include air pollution, vividly describing its harmful effects and hinting at a larger environmental crisis. He also explores the misuse of divine power, questioning the motives behind Arjuna and Krishna's actions, suggesting that power can lead to harmful behavior. The poem critiques religious practices that guide rulers towards wrongdoing, such as snake sacrifices that contradict true spiritual values. The character Jaratkaru highlights violence against the Nagas during sacrifices and calls for leaders to be accountable, reflecting the emotional scars left by such events. His concerns touch on social, political and religious responsibilities, urging rulers to protect the marginalized instead of exploiting them. Kolatkar critiques contemporary poets for being opportunistic and raises questions about the legacy of myth in Indian culture. He urges recognition of the balance needed in ecological and social areas, warning against the neglect of these responsibilities and the dangers of failing to uphold promises to both people and deities. The poem serves as a reminder of the delicate link between humanity and the environment and the moral implications of power in leadership.

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