

Arun Kolatkar : A Postmodern Critic of Indian Society and Religion

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Arun kolatkar can be termed as the post modern poet of India in the true sense. After the 1980s, a drastic shift could be observed in the form as well as the style of Indian English poetry. The unusual way how kolatkar used his poetry to shed light on the various contemporary social evils is apparent through his many poems like The Old Woman, The Bus, etc. Various issues like religion, caste, old age maladies and society can be seen in a multidimensional aspect presented with such ease in his poems. His distinct use of dark humour with a biting criticism of post colonial Indian scenario is one of his many features. His poetry highlights alternative ways of perception discarding the majoritarian exclusive classical perceptions of identity and culture. He is a poet of bizarre, ugly, obnoxious, downtrodden and forgotten yet with a minutely observant eye and a sympathetic outlook for the obscure.

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Indian English poetry after 80's begin to flourish in a new way as so many poets come there, who with their free thinking, style and technique, Imagery, irony, experiments uplift the level of Indian

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poetry. In that period we got Arun Kolatkar who comes with a zeal to uplift and enrich the traditions set by other Indian English poets. He is a poet par excellence as he has the brave heart to experiment with the fusion of modern and traditional models of poetry. He is a realistic poet with faith or God and religion. But he hates the hypocrisy prevailed in Indian society and his sceptic, rationalism mind along with the ability to observe anything with Openness allows him to comment on anything and it also help him to assess the unknown world in a surrealist way very few things are lift unnoticed and unsaid in his poetry and he comments on everything that comes into his close observation and scrutiny.

Kolatkar is a very keen observer of all the places that he has visited in his 'Jejuri', he shows pilgrimage, myth, religion, god, rituals and in every aspect he wants to discover the actual truth behind everything. His quest for reality gives birth to scepticism. When scepticism and quest come, then obviously irony and satire will also come. Actually he is reality a postmodern critic and his criticism lies in his use of irony and satire. I agree totally what A. Dubey said about the poem, "Jejuri is full of pictures of aridity and ugliness, decay and neglect, fossilization and perversion. In Kolatkar's poems, inanimate objects often from a parallel world constantly endeavouring to defeat human beings. Their behaviour often assumes ironical human ways."

Before starting the discussion of his representation of society and his criticism, it is important to how what is the actual social outlook towards religion and religious people. He is a free thinker and he does not want to follow any blind rituals and customs. He believes in himself and also he wants to create belief among others including his readers by his poem. But it also true that he never makes objections and never prevents other. But his own thought proves that perhaps he wants to show the religion, religious persons and rituals not in this way. In his poem 'MAKARAND' he shows the society and puts forward a question about the plausibility of all the rituals that are going on :

"Take my shirt off and go in there to do pooja?

No Thanks

But you go right ahead

If that's what you want to do

Give me a matchbox, before you so will you?

I will be out in the courtyard."

After visiting the temples and gods, he realizes that superstitions among people. He sees the money minded priests and also the attitude of the so called religious people. Even the criticizes the very almighty in a very pleasant way. He wants to convey his thought about the futility and absurdity among all these things. In his very first poem 'Jejuri', he shows that every human being is divided in their thought end reality and this can be seen everywhere. In that bus except Manohar, everyone is pious and peregrine. He portrays the bus journey in a very critical mocking way:

“Your own divided face in a pair of glasses on an old man’s nose is all countryside you get to see.” -The Bus

In his 'The Priest', he criticizes the priests as he is not a real priest in true sense of term. He is more interested in making money from the pilgrims. He shows almost no interest and concern to give any real advice to man and any kind of social and religious activities are less present in him. When the bus was late to reach, he was anxious and uttered mantra.

When he got something from pilgrims, he looked and counted these greedily. This is the actual scenario of our priest who we believe. Here he shows :

**“Purring soffer in front of the priest”
A cat gain on its' face and a like,
ready to eat pilgrim held between its' teeth.”**

-The Priest

If the priest does this kind of thing then naturally his son will be not better than him. The poet also shows this in his 'THE PRIEST'S SON'. In the poem we see the priest's son shows five hills to the pilgrims and tells that these five hills are actually five demons. These demons are killed by Khandeba. Such is the story that the boy narrates to attract the pilgrims and the superstitious people are ready to believe this. But when the narrator shows his disbelief and asks the boy about his opinion regarding the truth behind this story, he stands silent. It is really an unexpected question and the boy has not grown enough to give a false satisfying answer. so he shows a butterfly in order to forget the actual question asked by him. Really the irony and humour are found in his words :

**“... Look
there's a butterfly there.” -The Priest's Son**

In his "A SCRATCH". He shows were the false story enraperes the place and the mythology is here under his scrutiny. We are told were that God is the producer of food as he harvests the crop, turning of Khandaoba's wife into a stone by Khandaba's anger and lastly the story of the rock which can produce legends by a scratch. Really the pilgrims believe the story. But Kolatkar does not want to believe such foolish story and he doubts at the very existence of Gods and myths. Were he shows:

**"There is no crop other than god
And god is harvested these around the year
...scratch a rock
And legend springs".** *-A scratch*

In Jejuri there are so many gods and even in stones one can find it. In his 'Chaitanya' poems he wants to break the superstition related to those stones as those are nothing but stone and no god will come out from there. It is not necessary to believe in everything just thinking that god exists everywhere. He wants to make us aware about the actual scenario and as a postmodern critic it is also his responsibility to do so. In a mocking tone he tells that:

**"Sweet as grapes are the stones of Jejuri
said Chaitanya."** *-Chaitanya*

In all his poems, Kolatkar's criticism is visible. He is a been observer and straight cut person in expression. In 'A LOW TEMPLE', he shows that the goddess has eighteen areas but the priest tells that she has eight areas. Disbelief can be seen as well fat is also there. What kind of priest one believes now?

One is told to believe what they tell rather than what on actually sew. Mory irony and criticism can be seen when the protagonist lights a Charminar in that place. Here he shows all these :

**"But she has eighteen, you protest. All the same she is
still an eight area goddess to the priest.**

You come out in the sun and light a Charminar."
-A Low Temple

Most of the hypocrisy can be seen in religious places and this is true in case of Kolatkar's poems. In his 'Heart of Ruin'. he shows how the premises of a temple becomes the living place of a bitch and her puppies. The temple is now in ruined condition and people abandon the temple and the gods reside in it. Really people want to see temple

also in a clean sophisticated condition. Irony and criticism are at its best in this poem as the poet gives importance to the bitch and its puppies as those are in a pleasant condition there. Inspire of these things god still resides in that place. People want to worship god in a good condition and if they say that god can be felt everywhere then no need to go to good conditioned temples. Here he shows :

**“A mongrel bitch has found a place for herself and her
puppies ...No more a place of worship
his place is nothing less than the house of god.”**

-Heart of Ruin

In his ‘And Old Woman’, he shows the actual picture of the society where people ignore to give an old woman fifty paisa but donates many rupees in the charity be to fulfil their aims. The poet compares the woman with a burr. The woman despite being in a deplorable plight, tries all her possible means to get that paisa. Here the poet shows the mind of the society.

**“She wants a fifty paisa coin
... she won’t let you go.
You know have old women are
They stick to you like burr.”**

- An old woman

In his ‘Yeswant Roa’, he breaks all the barriers and satirizes the god. It is a poem where gods are assaulted, insulted and mocked. Were the poet says the god can do everything and for different purpose different gods are available. He shows have man chooses the record close god to attain happiness, peace and wealth in this commercial materialistic world. Here he says :

**“Gods who soak you, for your gold Gods who soak you
for your soul Gods who make you walk**

On a bed of burning coal.” -Yeswant Rao

It may be concluded that Kolatkar’s poems have double meaning as the primary surface show the general discussion about the subject matter, but on per level these poems show his criticism and his Inver thought process, rationalism disbelief and scepticism on the society, the working place and the worshipper. With this irony and criticism he gives new diversions to Indian English poetry and the later poets follow him. He is really a postmodern poet as he show

satire, humour and playfulness in such a way that it seems that his poems are telling commentary on contemporary Indian, religion and society. His poems are presented from a Modern point of view by a modern rationalist.

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