

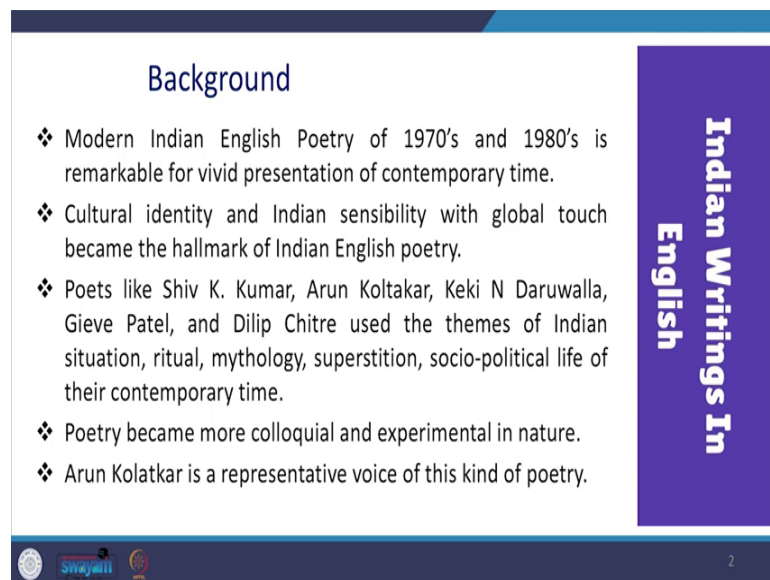
Indian Poetry in English
Prof. Binod Mishra
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Roorkee

Lecture - 12
Arun Kolatkar

Good morning, friends, and welcome to NPTEL online certification course on Indian Poetry in English. You might remember well that presently we have been doing the lectures specially on Indian English poets, who were quite modern in their outlook. And today, in that series we are going to have one more very significant and celebrated name that is of Arun Kolatkar.

Kolatkar, was not only a modern poet but as a modern poet, he was actually one of the most experimental poets, and today we shall see how Kolatkar with his professional etiquettes, with his professional expertise made Indian English poetry vibrant with his experimental poetry. But before we go on, and examine the works of Kolatkar, let us have a look at Kolatkar's life and the background that Kolatkar had.

(Refer Slide Time: 01:41)



Background

- ❖ Modern Indian English Poetry of 1970's and 1980's is remarkable for vivid presentation of contemporary time.
- ❖ Cultural identity and Indian sensibility with global touch became the hallmark of Indian English poetry.
- ❖ Poets like Shiv K. Kumar, Arun Koltakar, Keki N Daruwalla, Gieve Patel, and Dilip Chitre used the themes of Indian situation, ritual, mythology, superstition, socio-political life of their contemporary time.
- ❖ Poetry became more colloquial and experimental in nature.
- ❖ Arun Kolatkar is a representative voice of this kind of poetry.

Indian Writings In English

2

Friends, modern Indian English poetry specially in 1970s, because we are dealing with post- independence poetry. So, modern Indian English poetry of 70s and 80s, actually are quite remarkable for the vivid presentation of contemporary time. I mean all over the

world there were several changes and these changes also had an imprint and affect on Indian English poetry.

Cultural identity and Indian sensibility with global touch became the hallmark of Indian English poetry, and in this regard there are certain names to be taken with utmost respect and one is that of Shiv K. Kumar, then Arun Kolatkar, Keki N. Daruwalla. We have already read Keki N. Daruwalla. Then Gieve Patel, Dilip Chitre all these people actually used the themes of Indian situation, ritual, mythology, superstition, socio- political life of their contemporary times.

All of them even though they were modern, but their outlook on life and their depiction in their poetic world, was quite different. Poetry had actually become more colloquial; it was not like a sort of imitation the way we had been reading about how early Indian English poets imitated. But then poetry became very much experimental in nature, and when we talk about poetry becoming experimental in nature we must also try to understand what exactly we mean by experimental poetry. And in this regard, Arun Kolatkar is a representative voice of this kind of poetry.

Now experimental poetry my dear friends, when we talk about we also ought to understand the nature of experimental poetry. Experimental poetry, if we take, the words of Bruce King, who in his book *Modern Indian English Poetry* says, "experimental poetry not only foregrounds techniques, it actually applies a different sort of technique, but it also explores uncommon experiences". Now poetry would not be the same as it had been when we were talking about the early modern poets and all.

So, here you can find a sort of uncommon experience, and there is also a rejection of the common world or environment. These poets actually wanted to experiment not only with the form, but also their vision and everything were treated quite unconventionally.

(Refer Slide Time: 04:35)

Experimental Poetry

- ❖ Foregrounds technique
- ❖ Explores uncommon experiences
- ❖ Neglects the common world /environment
- ❖ Treats everything unconventionally

Breton defined surrealism as "pure psychic automatism by which it is intended to express either verbally or in writing, the true function of thought. Thought dictated in the absence of all control exerted by reason and outside all aesthetic or moral control."

It is always better to say that experimental poetry, if experimental poetry can also be considered to be surrealistic in nature. Now, you also might be interested to know, what is actually surrealism?

Surrealism was actually a movement in the world of art. And after the First World War you know, this movement became very popular and one of the main exponents of this art Andre Breton has defined surrealism as "pure psychic automatism" by which he means that the focus was on unconscious, and it was through the unconscious that the wisdom of the heart or the imagination was explored.


So, what Breton defines Surrealism is quite significant and Breton says, "it was a sort of pure psychic automation in which it is intended to express either verbally or in writing, the true function of thought. It is actually since it is related to the movement which is from the world of arts. So, thought was actually dictated in the absence of all control exerted by reason and outside all aesthetic or moral control."

So, that is how experimental poetry is different, and those people who practice this experimental poetry are in some way or the other related to the world of art, related to the world of visual, and Arun Kolatkar was also one such.

(Refer Slide Time: 06:14)

Introduction to the poet

- ❖ Born on 1st November, 1932 in a patriarchal Hindu family
- ❖ Bilingual poet who wrote both in Marathi and in English
- ❖ Translator, painter and graphic designer
- ❖ Won Commonwealth Prize in 1977
- ❖ Won Sahitya Akademy Award in 2005 for his *Bhijki Vahi*
- ❖ Translated great Marathi saint Tukaram into English
- ❖ Kolatkar left for heavenly abode in 2004.



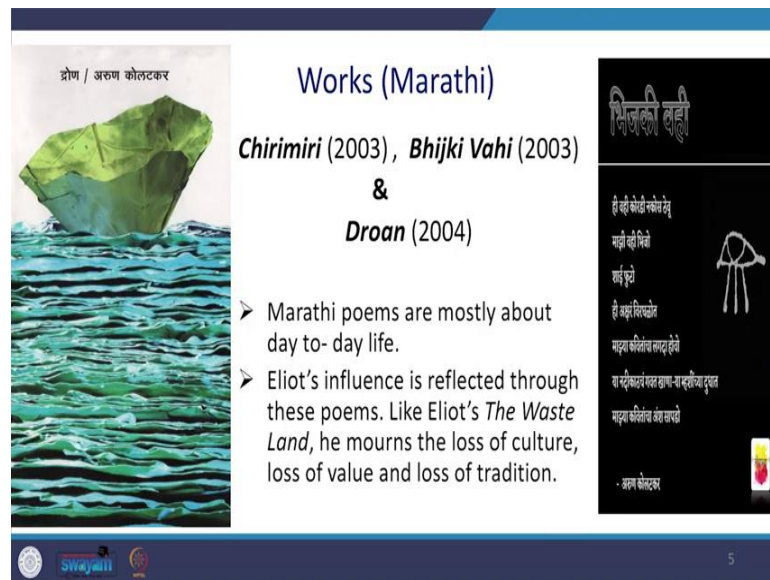
Arun Kolatkar

swajati 4

Now, let us have a look at Arun Kolatkar's life, he was actually born in Kolhapur of Maharashtra in 1932 in a Hindu patriarchal family. With Kolatkar we have one advantage that even though he is experimental, he is a bilingual ---he writes both in Marathi as well as in English. And not only was he a poet, but he was a translator, a graphic designer that he was, because he was not a professor like many other poets of Indian English poetry, but he was actually a graphic designer, but then with the help of his art because he brought his art in the world of poetry.

And then in 1977, he won the Commonwealth Prize. He also won Sahitya Akademy award in 2005 for one of his Marathi poems meaning naming named *Bhijki Vahi*. *Bhijki Vahi* which was which was later translated into English as *Sarpa Satra*. And he came to the limelight when he translated the Marathi *saint Tukaram* into English. It was very sad of Arun Kolatkar who actually left us in 2004, he also did not have a very comfortable and cherishing married life because he had to leave his first wife and then he married the second one as well.

(Refer Slide Time: 07:47)



Works (Marathi)

Chirimiri (2003), *Bhijki Vahi* (2003)
&
Droan (2004)

- Marathi poems are mostly about day-to-day life.
- Eliot's influence is reflected through these poems. Like Eliot's *The Waste Land*, he mourns the loss of culture, loss of value and loss of tradition.

The slide also displays three book covers: 'Droan' (left), 'Chirimiri' (middle), and 'Bhijki Vahi' (right). The 'Droan' cover shows a green paper boat on blue water. The 'Chirimiri' cover is black with white text and a small illustration of a person. The 'Bhijki Vahi' cover is black with white text and a small illustration of a person.

So, now let us try to see, what were the works of Kolatkar for which he is very famous. As I told you earlier that, Kolatkar had also been writing in Marathi and his Marathi poems mostly are about everyday life, day-to-day life. One of them is named *Chirimiri* which came out in 2003. And then *Bhijki Vahi* which got awarded the Sahitya Akademy award in 2005, the book got published in 2003 and it was awarded in 2005 by Sahitya Akademy and then came *Droan* in 2004.

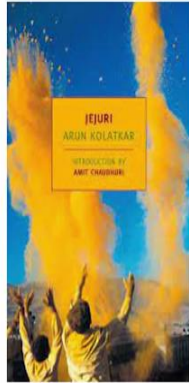
It is often said, that though majority of these poems are actually influenced by many modern poets namely T. S Eliot, then Ezra Pound, then some French poets as well. So, Eliot's influence is also found, and many critics have gone to the extent of saying that Kolatkar's very famous poem named *Jejuri* actually resembles *The Waste Land*.

So, Eliot's influence is reflected through these poems like Eliot's *The Waste Land*, in *Jejuri* you will find there is a sort of mourning, mourning or the poet actually rues the loss of culture, loss of values and loss of tradition.


That is why, one may find that Kolatkar's metrical compositions are not metrical because it does not follow a proper rhyme. You can find that there is a free flow as the artist would like it a sort of automatic. Because Kolatkar and other poets who were actually the followers of the experimental poetry, believed that freedom was more important than anything else.

(Refer Slide Time: 09:42)

Kolatkár's English Poetry Collections



- ❑ *Jejuri* (1976)
- ❑ *Kala Ghoda Poems* (2004)
- ❑ *Sarpa Satra* (2004)
- ❑ *The Boatride and Other Poems* (2009)



swajali 6

So, Kolatkar's English poetry collections comprise *Jejuri* which came out in 1976. And if Kolatkar can be remembered only for one major work I think *Jejuri* alone, fills the gap and it was because of *Jejuri* that Kolatkar came into being not only in India, he became popular rather he became an international figure.

This book *Jejuri* was published in 1967 for the first time. It is often said that the initial manuscript got lost and Kolatkar had to write it once again. And then came in 2004 *Kala Ghoda* and this *Kala Ghoda* is a square, I mean, in Mumbai where Kolatkar always used to visit. And it also talks about the everyday life, the mannerisms, the social behaviours of people.

Then came the *Sarpa Satra* which *Bhijki Vahi* we have already talked about which was in Marathi literature. And then *The Boatride and Other Poems* which came in 2009, but it did not come during his own lifetime. And it is said that A.K Mehrotra; Arvind K Mehrotra edited it, and published it, because Arun Kolatkar and Mehrotra were very good friends my dear friend.


So, let us see why is *Jejuri* so famous and what is actually the significance of *Jejuri*. Now as I have been saying, these modern poets who were not only modern rather they were more experimental. So, what they did? They were actually trying to make a sort of, you know, imitation of what the Western world was thinking and that is why the influence is found in their works. So, now, what is *Jejuri*, where is it?

(Refer Slide Time: 11:38)

Jejuri (1976)

- It's a religious place where the temple of Khandoba
- (a form of Shiva) and other gods exist.
- The collection comprises 31 sections.
- Relation between art and life
- Commercialization of religion and religious places :
*"there is no crop
other than god
and god is harvested here
around the year ..."* (A Scratch)

"It is a conflict between the rational, Western educated narrator and irrational, uneducated, superstitious pilgrims. The volume is the poet's quest for spiritual truth, an examination and investigation of the past legends and myths." (Patil)



swjain 7

Jejuri is actually a very small place, it is a very small place it is a place of pilgrimage and, it is a place where the temple of Khandoba, Khandoba is considered to be an incarnate or form of Shiva and other Gods. Now when the poet actually deliberates upon this, the poet actually talks about, how in *Jejuri* everything has come to a stop, even though there are remains only fine. But then he actually discusses how people still throng to it and how everything all around *Jejuri* has got a sort of divinity.

So, the collection comprises 31 sections, it is often said that in *Jejuri* whatever stones were there, all these stones had a sort of divinity and the poet actually, at times, exaggerate also. Since he is a modern poet naturally he will not believe in a sort of logical thing rather illogical, psychological things would also be there. But then since he was a graphic artist, one can also find an imprint or a sort of relationship between life and art in *Jejuri*.

So, the *Jejuri* has got 31 sections, most of the poems they are, it is actually about how people go to *Jejuri* to worship and how in and between I mean, the poet, because he makes his own observations.

So, it is his own observation, and then he also tries to find out how you know this pilgrim place has been actually commercialized. So, everything has been commercialized, as in the modern world we would say that the way of the world has completely changed and there is a sort of commercialization of religion and religious places.

For example, we can take a line from one of the poems of *Jejuri* named *Scratch* where it is said

“ there is no crop

other than God

and God is harvested here

around the year...”

Now you see, the poet is actually talking about the superstitious attitude of the people, in a modern world but at the same time what the poet says is, because the poet at times, becomes a bit satiric as well and he says there is no crop other than God and God is harvested here around the year.

My dear friend, there could have been complete two or three lectures itself on *Jejuri*, but my intention here is to make you familiar with most of the major works of Kolatkar and many other Indian poets. So, I will rather be skipping the major details, but I will be familiarizing you with the major works of this poet. One critic, in one of his articles has gone to the extent of saying about *Jejuri* :“It is actually a conflict between the rational western educated narrator and irrational uneducated superstitious pilgrims. The volume is the poet’s quest for a spiritual truth an examination and investigation of the past legends and myths”.

So, when you know the poet goes there to *Jejuri* and then the poet goes there with one of his friends or one of his brothers and then the characters all these characters who have been mentioned there some way or the other are related to him see.

So, a sort of you know, dialogue goes on between the two while the one says, one must take off the shirt and go to the temple, but at the same time there is a rational voice which says oh. No, what he says--- ‘Give me a match box before you go so, that I can smoke.’ Now the question is, how religion for one person is something whereas religion for the modern man is somehow different. So, these two, you know, these two poles of thoughts are actually delineated very beautifully by the poet Kolatkar in *Jejuri*.

(Refer Slide Time: 15:39)

The slide is titled "Characteristics of Kolatkar's Poetry" and lists six characteristics:

- ❖ Defamiliarisation
- ❖ Surrealistic
- ❖ Cosmic vision of life
- ❖ Imagism and symbolism
- ❖ Visual effects , opaqueness
- ❖ Modern sensibility

A circular callout on the right contains the following text:

Chaitanya
'Sweet as grapes
are the stones of Jejuri',
said Chaitanya.

He popped a stone
in his mouth
and spat out gods

The slide footer includes a logo for "Swajati" and the number "8".

Now, what are the other characteristics of Jejuri and also of Kolatkar's world? Kolatkar actually tries to bring a sort of defamiliarization, at Jejuri you will find the remnants are there, the stones are there. But then, what actually he does is he defamiliarizes it, it appears as if, even though it is a place of worship. But then in what state this place of worship is? And with his own expertise of being a graphic designer, he actually makes it surrealistic.

And this surrealistic, when he makes it surrealistic he is actually quite confident of the workings of the unconscious mind, to synthesize these workings with the conscious mind. So, synergy of the unconscious with the conscious mind, one can also find a sort of cosmic vision of life in the world of Kolatkar. Kolatkar's poetic world is full of imagism and symbolism, and as a graphic artist what he tries to lend to his literary world also, the visual effects full of opaqueness, of course, one cannot say that Kolatkar's world loses this modern sensibility.

We can take here one poem which is actually quite reminiscent of how, what a sort of place this Jejuri is and in today's world how. So, when there are three Chaitanya's being mentioned and it is said that Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, you know, one ancient Indian saint had also visited Jejuri. So, Jejuri has got a rich history, but then the poet actually tries to show it, the way it is today in the modern world. And he says what Chaitanya there is another poem named Chaitanya where it is said,

“Sweet as grapes
are the stones of Jejury’,
said Chaitanya.
he popped a stone
in his mouth
and spat out Gods.

So, every God, every piece of stone in Jejury is actually a representation of God. So, this is how Arun Kolatkar; Arun Balkrishna Kolatkar actually converts this common experience into an uncommon one as is reminiscent of, as is actually identical of the modern poetry. Now the very first poem of this collection Jejury, starts with the bus, and in this bus you will find the poet actually mentions poet is an observer. So, he mentions and he actually transcribes in the same way that how this bus ride, because in this bus he goes to Jejury and other people also go. So, now, see the description, and the description will actually display the graphic and the images of a visual artist, let us have a look at some of the lines.

(Refer Slide Time: 18:42)


The Bus

*The tarpaulin flaps are buttoned down
on the windows of the state transport bus.
all the way up to jejury.*

*a cold wind keeps whipping
and slapping a corner of tarpaulin at your elbow.*

*you look down to the roaring road.
you search for the signs of daybreak in what little
light spills out of bus.*

*your own divided face in the pair of glasses
on an old man's nose
is all the countryside you get to see.*



10/26/2021 NPTEL Online Certification Course 9

The tarpaulin flaps are buttoned down

On the windows of the state transport bus
all the way up to Jejuri;
a cold wind keeps whipping
and slapping a corner of tarpaulin at your elbow.

You look down to the roaring road.
you search for the signs of daybreak in what little
light spills out of bus.

So, now, the image that the poet actually creates is not only visual, but rather it also takes us back to our old ancient beliefs how a man when goes on pilgrimage;
your own divided face in the pair of glasses.

So, this place has actually got such a sort of magnet effect, that you are yourself divided and you are not at rest to find what you are.

(Refer Slide Time: 19:36)

Contd...



*you seem to move continually forward.
toward a destination
just beyond the caste mark beyond his eyebrows.*

*outside, the sun has risen quietly
it aims through an eyelet in the tarpaulin.
and shoots at the old man's glasses.*

*a sawed off sunbeam comes to rest gently against the driver's right temple.
the bus seems to change direction.*

*at the end of bumpy ride with your own face on the either side
when you get off the bus.*

you don't step inside the old man's head.



NPTEL Online Certification Course 10

On an old man's nose
is all the countryside you get to see

you seem to move continually forward

towards the destination

just beyond the caste mark beyond his eyebrows.

Outside the sun has risen quietly

it aims through an eyelet in the tarpaulin

and shoots at the old man's glasses,

a sawed off sunbeam comes to rest gently against the drivers right temple.

And the bus seems to change direction

at the end of a bumpy ride with your own face on the either side

when you get off the bus

you don't step inside the old man's head.

So, by the time you reach there, your mind your psyche your belief is thoroughly changed, is completely changed. My dear friends, the question is that, when you are going to a religious place like this Jejuri where there is no count of time even the station that the poet actually mentions, the station master is simply worried about the morning and the evening, and the signals at the station appears to be very wooden.

So, the time has come to a halt and then the poet when and you see the poet interrogates also, this is if this is a religious place the Gods must have the power. But then in the second poem *The Heart of the Ruin* where the poet himself interrogates that in this age of region where we are talking of blind superstitious, beliefs and all.

(Refer Slide Time: 21:02)

“Heart of Ruin”

The roof comes down on Maruti's head.
Nobody seems to mind.

Least of all Maruti himself
May be he likes a temple better this way.

A mongrel bitch has found a place
for herself and her puppies

in the heart of the ruin.
May be she likes a temple better this way.
The bitch looks at you guardedly
past a doorway cluttered with broken tiles.

The pariah puppies tumble over her.
May be they like a temple better this way.



swajati 11

So, let us see some of the lines of the heart of ruin where the poet says,

The roof comes down on Maruti's head.

Maruti is Hanumana and then here the poet actually in a very indirect manner says, if Gods are so powerful why cannot the Gods actually stop the roof coming down on its own head

Least of all Maruti himself

May be he likes a temple better this way

A mongrel bitch has found a place
for herself and her puppies.

So, you see how this religious place, how this representative religious place has become actually a shelter for the bitch, and for the mice, and for other things as well. So, in an age of reasoning the poet actually questions and the poet says,

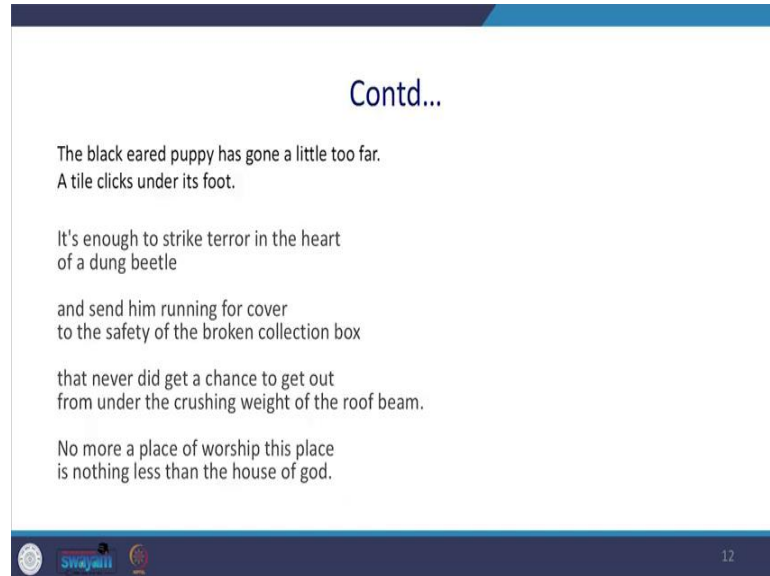
The pariah puppies tumble over her

May be they like a temple better this way.

perhaps they want this temple to be this way.

Because they do not want that there should be a sort of renovation of this temple and even Gods do not perhaps want.

(Refer Slide Time: 22:02)



And then as the lines follow I have already provided the poem here, you can have a look at it and you can read. I will read simply some of the lines that actually are very effective:

that never did get a chance to get out
from under the crushing weight of the roof beam.

So, the beam is also hanging and the Gods are there no more a place of worship this place. Now towards the end the poet actually says is it now can it be a place of worship.

And then the poet says no more a place of worship this place is nothing less than the house of God. So, when the house of God now the poet actually here takes a dig at the poem can be interpreted at several levels, but the poet actually takes a dig at the superstitious belief of the modern day mankind. And then questions that can this be a place of worship

No more a place of worship this place
is nothing less than the house of God.


So, my dear friends with Jejuri the poet, Kolatkar Arun; Krishna Kolatkar actually puts a question mark to everyone and warns us and provides us with the foods of thought that, in an age of reasoning what sort of. So, it is an age of fragmentation everything has been fragmented here, there are allusions and then the poet also talks about how Maruti or the Hanuman even cannot save himself and then it has become only a place.

Even though Chaitanya himself had said, that every stone here has got a sort of divine touch. You can read at a leisure Jejuri and you can enjoy a lot. I come to the next one that is *Sarpa Satra* or *Bhijki Vahi* which actually got awarded and got translated into English.

(Refer Slide Time: 23:54)

Sarpa Satra

- ❖ It's a narrative poem which has three sections: *Janamejaya, Jaratkaru Speaks to Her Son Aastika, The Ritual Bath*.
- ❖ It's based on the great epic, *The Mahabharata*. The episode of King Parikshit's death by snake-bite and his son, Janmejjaya's oath to burn all the snakes is the background of this poem.
- ❖ Ecological imbalance
"My vengeance will be swift and terrible.
I will not rest
until I've exterminated them all.
They'll discover
that no hole is deep enough
to hide from Janamejaya." (187)



13

Here also we can find that the story is related to the Mahabharata, it is based on the Mahabharata, and this is a narrative poem which has got three sections Janamejaya, Jaratkaru speaks to her son Aastika and the ritual bath. Now, the story behind this is, that Janamejaya who is Parikshit's son. Actually what happens is the episode of king Parikshit's death, Parikshit was actually dead because of the snake bite.

And Janamejaya had taken an oath, Janamejaya had sworn, that he will actually destroy all the snakes and that is actually the background of the poem. Now, here also the poet actually has a name, an objective, as a visual artist. He says that this should actually reawaken people and from the ecological points of view also because Janamejaya wanted to burn the entire forest so, that the snake world is actually distracted.

So, there is also a hint about the ecological imbalance fine, and you know the lines of the poem can always testify and justify. But at the same time, the poet as a graphic painter was so conscious of, you know so, conscious of the beauty, so, conscious of the flora and fauna that he actually wanted to put his own subtle mission through this, and that is why he took recourse to Sarpa Satra. Now let us take some lines from that

“My vengeance will be swift and terrible/ these are actually the lines of Janamejaya my vengeance will be swift and terrible

I will not rest

until I have exterminated them all.

They will discover

that no hole is deep enough

to hide from Janamejaya.”


It is said that Janamejaya and Aastika I mean, Jaratkaru’s son were friends and Aastika was actually requested to persuade Janamejaya. But Janamejaya, because he was quite angry with the king Parikshit’s death, because of snake bite, that is why he wanted to destroy the kingdom, the entire kingdom. And if you might have watched Mahabharata, you might have also watched there this episode is very much there.

(Refer Slide Time: 26:19)

Contd.

- The female protagonist, Jaratkaru, sends her son Aastika to convince Janamejaya to stop this violence because it’s against humanity.
- The poetry ends without any hope.
- Kolatkar, through this poetry, presents the contemporary theme of corruption, terrorism and violence.

“It only shows what cowards all terrorists are behind their snarling ferocious masks. (193)



10/26/2021

NPTEL Online Certification Course

14

So, in this *Sarpa Satra* we find that female protagonist Jaratkaru who tells her son Aastika to convince Janamejaya as I told you, and the poetry, this the book *Sarpa Satra* ends without any hope. Now this is here also reminiscent of the modern man's helplessness in this world, where there is no hope. Kolatkar through this poetry, presents the contemporary theme of corruption, terrorism and violence and then there are some lines that can also be quite reminiscent.

It only shows what cowards--- all terrorists are behind their snarling ferocious masks.

(Refer Slide Time: 27:05)

Kala Ghoda and Other Poems(2004)

- A sequence of 28 poems
- Reflection of Mumbai's life style, depiction of common people
- Kolatkar's personal experience and his observation of city life-

*"This is the time of day I like best,
and this is the hour
when I can call this city my own;*

*when I like nothing better
than to lie down here, at the exact center
of this traffic island"* (15)

Kala Ghoda Poems
Anun Kolatkar

But nobody knows better than I
that time
is one thing I'm running out of fast,
and my one regret is going to be this:
to leave the world
so full of girls I never kissed.

Malati, Niloufer, Anjali, Shanta,
Alpana, Kalpana, Shirin, Zarine, Sylvia,
Maria,
Harlene, Yasmin, Nina, Kamala, Mona,
Lopa;

I love you one and all,
and wish I could kiss a long goodbye
to each of you, individually.
(Man of the Year)

The last one which I think is very important from the point of view of Kolatkar's being a visual artist is *Kala Ghoda and Other Poems*, it came out in 2004, it also has got a sequence of 28 poems. And as I told you in the beginning it is a reflection of Mumbai's lifestyle. It is a Mumbai, Mumbai's everyday lifestyle where people from all walks of life gathered there and they had different talks and as well, and he was also a frequent visitor.

Now in this poem which is actually, now in some way or the other the poet also talks about the modern man's despair, the modern man's instability. And in one of the poem entitled man of the year what the poet says, may not be poet's own personal feeling. But maybe he is actually trying to point out to the modern man's restlessness when he says, "But nobody knows better than I that time/ is one thing I am running out of fast/ and my one regret is going to be this/ to leave this world so, full of girls I never kissed."


This is despair, people may get it confused with the poet's own despair. But then the poet actually tries to hint at the instability of a modern man when he says Malati, Niloufer, Anjali, Shanta, Alpana, Kalpana, Shirin, Zarine Sylvia, Maria, Harlene Yasmin, Nina, Kamala, Mona, Lopa I love you all and all and I wish I could kiss long goodbye to each of you individually. So, there is actually once again there is a sort of despair, a sort of a loss, my dear friend.



(Refer Slide Time: 28:49)

The Boatribe and Other Poems (2009)

- Published posthumously, edited by Arvind Krishna Mehrotra
- Eleven sections ranging from satire on the absurdities of social behavior to surrealistic fantasies
- Radicalness in poetry
- Commonplace into aesthetic

because a sailor waved
back
to a boy
another boy
waves to another sailor





16

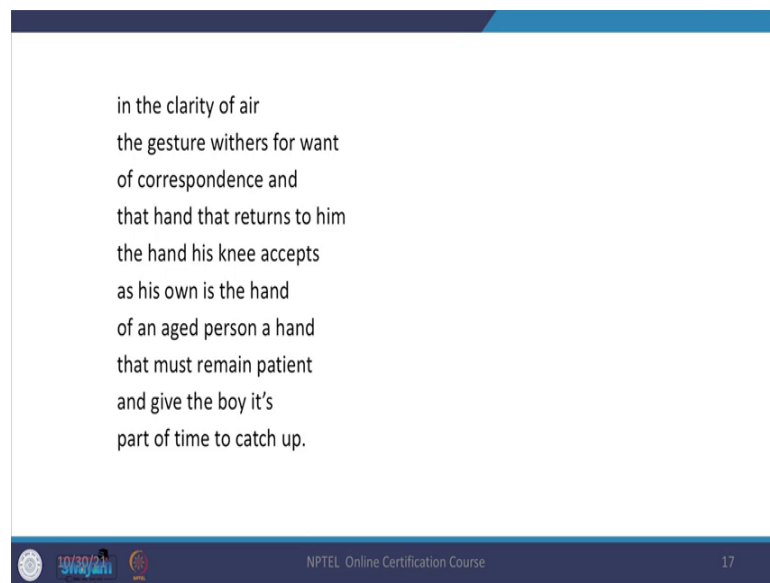
And then the last one which I said is *Boatribe and Other Poems* which was actually compiled and edited by none other than Arun Kolatkar's friend, Arvind Krishna Mehrotra. So, here there are scattered poems which have been brought together and there also it actually talks about the absurdities of social behavior to surrealistic fantasies. There is a sort of radicalism as well.

And commonplace things have been converted into aesthetic and then you find that there are certain lines the poet actually also tries to experiment with the lines you can find how they are so, now structurally also.

Because a sailor waved back
to a boy another boy
waves to another sailor
in the clarity of air
the gestures withers for want

of correspondence and
that hand that returns to him
the hand his knee accepts
as his own is the hand
of an aged person a hand
that must remain patient
and give the boy it's
part of time to catch up.

(Refer Slide Time: 29:31)




So, once again, he actually talks about the modern man's restlessness, fragmentation and all. My dear friend, in a way if we talk about the general themes and characteristics of Kolatkar's poetic world we can find that Mumbai has been a background. Because all these poets----- Arun Kolatkar, then Dilip Chitre, then Arvind Krishna Mehrotra had actually formed a Mumbai circle of poets.

And the tone in most of the poems are colloquial. It is not as metrical as we have found. So, and you know, even the common incidents they are actually converted into an uncommon ones, for the one which the lines are mentioned.

(Refer Slide Time: 30:28)

General Themes and Characteristics of his Poems

- ✓ Everyday life, Bombay as background
- ✓ Contemporary Issues
- ✓ Mythology, Mourning of the loss of culture
- ✓ Religious hypocrisies, corruption and superstition
- ✓ Juxtaposition of past and present
- ✓ Combination of surreal and spiritual
- ✓ Irony
- ✓ Colloquial tone
- ✓ Personal Tone



*"Tell me why the black dog died intriguing between
God and our heads." (The Renunciation of the Dog)*

18

“Tell me why the black dog died intriguing between
God and our heads.”

The conflict, the modern man’s conflict is also mentioned. Now before we come to wind up this lecture let us also see what other people say about Kolatkar, because Kolatkar was one such poet who actually generated a lot of heat and dust.

(Refer Slide Time: 30:53)

What others say about Kolatkar

- ❑ “Kolatkar is aware as a visual artist that a slight manipulation of sight lines, of angle of vision, can defamiliarize and turn into art what is normally regarded as dull, commonplace reality.” (Bruce King)
- ❑ “Jejuri could have been a far more substantial achievement had the poet’s vision been less fragmentary and had he not remained content with scratching the surface of the problem.” (M. K. Naik)
- ❑ “His evocations of the past make it seem as if every event, circumstance, voice, or predicament that he retrieves from a host of cultures and time zones is like a person asking us to return a gaze, so that the acceptance of what is thus proffered enacts a binding complicity between us and that which the poet mediates.” (Rajeev Patke)

19

So, Bruce King has rightly said: “Kolatkhar is aware as a visual artist that a slight manipulation of sight lines of angle of vision can defamiliarize and turn into art what is normally regarded as dull and commonplace reality.”

(Refer Slide Time: 31:09)

Kolatkhar as an Indian English Experimentalist & Modern Poet

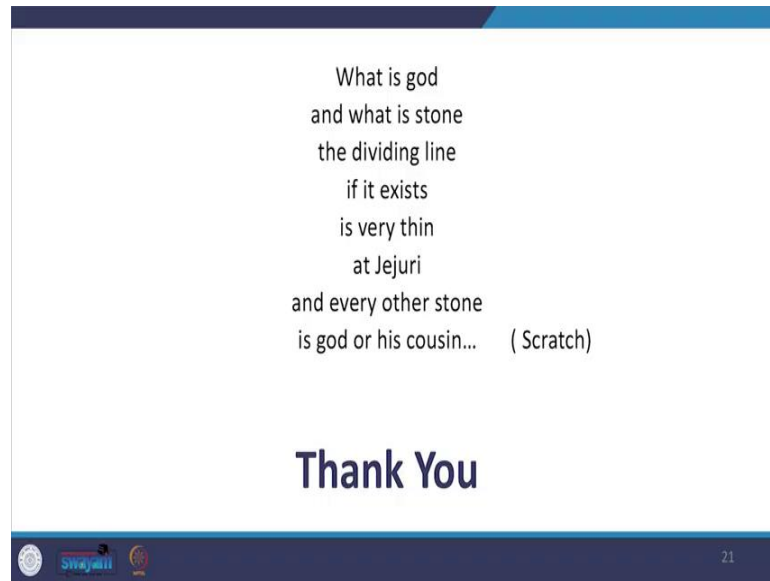
- Ordinary Indian reality made extraordinary
- Ordinary reality with possibilities for the artist's mind
- Abstract quality
- Non-committal attitude
- Failure to perceive
- Style-less poetry

swayam 20

It is quite important that we must assess Arun Balkrishna Kolatkhar as a modern poet and what are the elements that we find in his poetry is that ordinary Indian reality has been made quite extraordinary. Ordinary reality has the possibilities for the artist’s mind, because the artist looks at a looks at an object in a different way the poem for him is an an object. And then he will transport his own ideas Kolatkhar was very non-committal in his attitude, it is also said that majority of his poems actually record a sort of failure to perceive.

And then he is a follower of style-less poetry, but then Kolatkhar as an Indian English poet is quite remarkable for his experimentation, and then the more you delve into the world of Kolatkhar, you can find the hidden gems that are there. Before I conclude, let me take one line some lines from the “Scratch” which actually are quite representative of Kolatkhar’s poetic art.

(Refer Slide Time: 32:15)



What he says is,
What is God
and what is stone
the dividing line
if it exists
is very thin
at Jejuri
and every other stone
is God or his cousin...

So, in a way you know even though he is satirical, but then at times he becomes so ironic, that the details that he provides are really very mesmerizing and they are very eye-opening. So, every stone at Jejuri is God or his cousin.

We Indians are capable of creating and establishing relationships not only of human beings, but also of Gods. And to the Gods, we often must interrogate in a modern world which is actually one, which is actually dominated by reason, by logic, but then does life go simply on reasoning, that is a question we shall discuss in the next lecture.

Thank you very much have a nice day!