

“JEJURI”: FAITH AND SCEPTICISM

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ABSTRACT

Oscillates between faith and skepticism is one of the dominant theme in "Jejuri" a collection of poem. Arun Kolatkar wrote the poem about Jejuri is a small town in western Maharashtra, situated at a distance about thirty miles from Pune. It is we known for its god Khandoba. The poet gave to his poem the title "Jejuri". But the most important aspect of his writing this poem is the faith, which the people of Maharashtra have, in the miraculous powers of Khandoba. This god is worshiped not only from different part of Maharashtra but also other part of India. The devotees go there worship the deity and effort to placate him to win his favor. But Kolatkar has not written the poem "Jejuri" to celebrate this god or to pay his personal tribute and homage.

INTRODUCTION

In fact he does not even fully believe in idol-worship of the worship of god in Jejuri. He believes this worship to be kind of superstition though he does not openly say so anywhere in the poem. Although the attitude of unbelief, or at least of skepticism, predominates in the poem. Yet some critics are of the view that his vision of Khandoba worship has a positive aspect to it. In this regard we can quote by R. Parthasarthy "In reality, however, the poem oscillates between faith and skepticism in a tradition that has run its course."¹ It is clear that the poem, "Jejuri", depicts a direct and unflinching attitude of denial and disbelief. The poem Heart of Ruin's last two lines are very important.

*"No more a place of worship this place
Is nothing less than the house of god"*

This line makes a clear affirmation of Kolatkar's faith in God. This conformist view of Kolatkar can be supported by the words of Ashok Mohaptra as: "The Heart of Rain's last two lines make a clear affirmation of Kolatkar's faith in God though not the conventional religious beliefs and practices"². This same conformist attitude can be observed in the interview.

*"A religious poet? No or may be religious in the sense
That any experience can be religious if experienced deeply
Enough.....I can't say I have much faith. I suppose. I do
Believe in God in some way, but I don't have any clear cut
Ideas about religion. Frankly, I don't have define anything"³*

Above statement present Kolatkar's self-description is ambiguous. But this ambiguity suggests an immensely deep experience and sincere expression having conformist attitude.

Almost of all the poems in "Jejuri" are the embodiment of god Khandoba. Kolatkar has depicted the object at Jejuri in such a manner that nobody would think the place is meant for sacred. Skepticism is a recurrent theme of the entire poem, including Jejuri. For the first time the pilgrim is faced with the problem of worshipping god in 'Makarand'. He would much rather smoke outside then go in shirtless for the worship. His objection is not merely to the taking off his shirt but worship itself. There is a tone of impatience at the very idea.

*"No me
But you go right ahead
If that's what you want to de
Give me the match box
Before you go
Will you?"*

Kolatkar's skepticism is revealed by the tone of 'Not me and' will you. In the next section, 'The Temple Rat', one may find the protagonist in the inner sanctum, face to face with the 'warrior god', but there is no clear evidence of his having done any 'puja'. In this way, all reactions of the narrator to Jejuri show his skeptical mind.

In the poem 'A Low Temple' the priest who sees no difference between eight arms and eighteen arms bores the pilgrim. So narrator gets out of the temple to put the match to a better use to light a charminar, a cheap cigarette. Here Kolatkar's skepticism is high lightened by the protagonist's coming out in the sun and lighting a cigarette to smoke.

In the sections 'the cupboard' and 'Yeshwant Rao' the narrator's skepticism caught a cutting irony. In the cupboard, gold idols in tidy rows, and since the glass is broken it is held together by pieces of an old newspaper. There is a comic juxtaposition of the modern and the ancient profane and sacred. 'Yashwant Rao' is a mainly important poem. The protagonist in the poem describes hanuman as one of the best gods even though he is not a god of the highest rank. Yashwant Rao is only a second class god whose stay has been installed outside the main temple. These poems are skeptical in the sense that the god Yashwant Rao and gold

idols are given subdue importance. Though they are as important as other spiritual object to the pilgrims,

The entire description in “Jejuri” is vivid picture of the temple town, the temple, the goods, the priests and religious objects. The presentation of these religious objects brings out the aridity and ugliness, decay and neglect in the religious tradition. ‘Hills’ is one of the poems where exploits the natural objects. The first four stanzas are a description of desolate landscape. The hills have nothing to show except.

*“Bladed with shale
Cactus thrust
Up through ribs of rock
Cactus fang”*

At another place, attention is drawn to a scanty path of scruffy dry grass/burnt brown in the sun. This desolated and hostile condition of hill presents nonconformist attitude at the place of temple of Khandoba at Jejuri.

There are poems like “water Supply” and “The Reservoir” reiterates the aridity of the place of Jejuri. ”Water supply” offers a picture of dry water tap, which looks like “a brass mouse with a broken neck”. The broken tap and the able-bodied millstone underline the random present of tradition objects. Note that the world ‘broken’ and dry once again add do the narrator ‘perception of Jejuri as mundane and degenerate place. A dry water conduit pipe presents the lack of faith. The Reservoir dryly states:

*“There is not a drop of water
In the great reservoir the peshwas built
There is nothing in it
Except a hundred years of silt”*

Here narrator observed a certain and stagnation of reservoir. Thus poet shows the contrast in the faith of ancient and modern people.

“The doorstep” is a short conversational Poem. The narrator’s claim appear to be the doorstep is actually a pillar that fallen down once again present the ruinous state of the temple. Here narrator bears skeptical attitude for the doorstep in a temple which is revered by the traditional devotees who show their devotion by touching the doorstep. The protagonist’s treatment of metal-plated figure of holy bull calf in the temple courtyard also indicated his general attitude. Holy bull calf in the temple courtyard shows his general attitude of irreverence. In this way, mostly religious aspect is presented in the dilapidated condition shows the narrator’s disbelief in religious aspect.

There are poems like, The doorstep, The heart of Rain, Manohar that are ambiguous in their tone. Here narrator is not firm what he sees at Jejuri . Each and every religious object is made him to think weather it is spiritual one or not. This kind of denied and affirmation tone of ambiguity presents Kolatkar's attitude to the religious aspect. "The ambiguity of experience and paradox of meaning resulting from this principal elucidate Kolatkar's moral and psychic tension between belief and skepticism"⁴. This statement clears that Kolatkar is found in the clutches of belief and disbelief. In fact there are many more instances in the poem that demonstrate how the denial-affirmation equation functions as the main semantic and discursive principal. For instance, the poems like Doorstep, Manohar have this kind of presentations.

Kotakar seemed all the appearances, the object, personas and events, in Jejuri meaningless. The poem ' Heart of Rain' is the presentation of dilapidated conditions of religious aspect and the temple. A stray bitch of low breed had been able to make use of the ruined premise of the temple. The doorstep is depicted in the ruinous state of the temple. Actually the doorstep is worshiped by traditional devotees. The poem, 'A Low Temple' itself suggests the status of temple. Kolatkar's disbelief in the divine attributes of the status at Jejuri is evident in this poem. The ignorance of priest bores the pilgrims. So the protagonist gets out of the temple to put the match to a better use to light a charminar, cheap cigarette. This presents poet's skepticism and priest's ignorance. 'The pattern' where a sacred object, tortoise, is not treated as well. In the poem Manohar temple is compared with cowshed. Thus this all kind of meaningless religious object peeps in the Kolatkar's sceptic mind.

Discrepancy between priests and narrator is often found in Jejuri. A low Temple where the narrator counted eighteen arms to the goddess and the priest insisted that she had still 'an eight armed' this contrast in opinion is also observed in 'The Blue House'. The priest is ignorant about the two kinds of horses referred to in khandoba legend in "A Low Temple" the horse that khandoba normally used was a white horse. One can understand that the poet is observed each and every object at Jejuri that he is sceptic minded like modern urbanized city man. Objectivity is the essence of this poem.

There are incidents in "Jejuri "that reveal a typical modern urban septic mind of the poet. The specialty of this poem is that it is objective scrutiny of ancient religious tradition. Whatever is observed by the narrator, it has not the sensitivity where the past does not dominate the present, where the present is all that matter. In this regard S. K. Desai compare Kolatkar with T. S. Eliot. "Eliot mind is full of history, myth, legend and strong emotional attitudes, whereas kolatkars mind is free from knowledge which is always of the past, but fully engaged in the present with an implied convocation that simple, direct engagement with present is a way to truth"⁵. In order to search the religious tradition, Kolatkar used his present sensibility. The poem like Manohar and 'Makarand' is typical example of poet's sceptic mind. M. K.

Naik says, "In any case, all his reactions to Jejuri manifestly show his to be a typical modern urban sceptic"⁶. Narrator having his own consciousness and his typical urban sensibility observes each and every object at Jejuri.

Kolatkhar described his visit to Jejuri reaching it by bus returning by train. Jejuri is a travelogue-poem with the form of the pilgrim used only as a structural aid. In "Jejuri", we have an urban educated middle class intellectual not troubled with questions such as the belief in god. As kolatkhar puts it:

"I leave the question alone.

*I don't have to take a position about god one way or the other"*⁷.

Kolatkhar's tone, no doubt, is ironic; but without total rejection. Poem like the priest strike a balance between skepticism and acceptance. Although the attitude of unbelief or at least of skepticism predominates in the poem, yet some critics are of the view that his vision of khandoba worship as a positive aspect to it."Jejuri", the poem depicts a direct and unflinching attitude of denial and disbelief.

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