

# The Creative Launcher

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## *Jejuri* and the Poetics of Subcultural Resistance

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### **Abstract**

*Jejuri* is the name of a series of poems written in 1976 by Arun Kolatkar. *Jejuri* is made up of a series of short fragments which provides the experiences of a secular visitor to the ruins of Jejuri. Jejuri is a religious place in Pune district in Maharashtra. The poem is one of the better known poems in modern Indian literature. The paper argues that the critical reception to *Jejuri* from a nativist viewpoint does not do justice to its complexity. Rather than reading *Jejuri* as a Bombay bred elitist's denouncement of the subaltern, the paper argues that Kolatkar creates a fascinating and accurate picture of the power matrix that corroborates to create the shrine Jejuri. The paper draws from the notion of subculture propounded by Dick Hebdige who points out that subcultures rely on a replacement of normative world like sobriety, ambition and conformity with their opposites: hedonism and defiance of authority in an attempt to "express and resolve albeit magically the contradictions hidden or unresolved in parent culture. *Jejuri* constitutes an example of a subculture where the parent Brahminical culture is replicated through deification and legend creation, yet also contradicts the parent culture by rupturing hierarchal structures that are quite antithetical to the Brahminical discourse. The normative need for regularity, rationality and preservation for example are replaced by irregular shapes (of Gods and Mountains), irrational belief and decay. The poems testify to this interesting interplay by providing an accurate depiction of the place, as well as the various practices that create it. A closer reading of the poems reveals that by the end Kolatkar is able to juxtapose colonial modernity with the spiritual antiquity. The impression received is that Kolatkar becomes partially forgiving of the absurdity of the ritualistic day since he becomes aware of how the ritualistic subculture is not very different from modern culture.

**Keywords-** *Jejuri, modernity, subculture, Khandoba, Irony, subalternity, Power*

The all too apparent recent shifts in the 'global order', if we may presume the existence of such an order, has ensured that literature has shifted from its canonic centers to incorporate literatures produced in non-canonic centers like the Third World. The *New York Review of*

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*Books*, for example, recently brought out a special edition of Arun Kolatkar's *Jejuri* with an introduction by Amit Chaudhuri. The publication by such a canonic press of an Indian poet as a part of the classics series represents a paradigmatic shift in the literary psyche where the Third World is no longer studied as a pariah under the trivializing labels of oriental or commonwealth literature. Whether or not such a shift represents a move towards an expansion of the canon, or a step towards dismantling the canon, transcends the scope of our argument as it pertains to the realm of pedagogy. Rather, the interest of our argument lies in tracing the rich complexity and layered representations in *Jejuri* that make for fascinating reading as the poem encodes the multifaceted networks of power and social desire structured by a 'sub culture'.

The reception to *Jejuri* was far from positive, as one would expect, considering its canonic status. Critics were unanimous in accusing Kolatkar of scoffing at the beliefs of the poor shepherd class who constitute the bulk of the Jejuri devotee base. Kolatkar appeared as a prudish urban elite who goes all the way to Jejuri to irreverently mock at the superstitions and belief systems prevalent there; in the opinion of the critics, he came across as a tourist out to have some fun at the expense of poor, unsuspecting people. It did not help that Kolatkar employed language which was hardly in sync with a reverential attitude--blending sarcasm, irony, bitter humour and the obscene, to portray his impressions. Nor did he camouflage such criticism in euphemistic structures by relying on metaphor and suggestion. Instead Kolatkar, continuing the tradition of Ezekiel, employs the poetry of statement with its unambiguous denouncements. Consider for example the lines "scratch a rock/and a legend springs or he popped a stone/in his mouth/and spat out gods"--(notice how the capitalization of 'gods' has been omitted). Add to this, descriptions like those of the mongrel bitch in the temple, or Makarand smoking a Charminar cigarette outside the temple, and a strong case against Kolatkar emerges. *Jejuri* appears then as an exercise in indigenous orientalism or neo-orientalism positing a basic binary between the occidental urban skeptic poet and the oriental shepherd devotees.

Such a reading, however, does disservice to the rich complexity of the poems that conceal a dynamic interplay of power relations in an attempt to reconfigure the subaltern discourse. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the iconic poem "Ajamil and the Tigers". This is a transitory poem where a radical refiguring of power results in subaltern emancipation, and thus marks a sympathetic identification with the believer community who make up most of the work force at the temple complex. The poems "A Song for a Vaghya", "A Song for a Murli" and "The Blue Horse" continue with this strain of refiguring, and encompass a thematic movement away from the unsparing critique included in the first few poems like "The Temple Rat" or "Heart of Ruin". The earlier poems, usually seen as an attestation of Kolatkar's oriental viewpoint, and remarkable only for their skill, also merit revision in terms of theoretical frameworks applied in order to lay bare the stark accuracy

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with which they capture the ethos of a third world psyche and its manifestation in the outside world. I view *Jejuri* not, therefore, as an urban satire on rural belief, but an interstitial space where urbane rationality clashes with the depth of the representational networks etched in the belief system, thereby emerging with a new hybridized outlook that does more justice to the phenomenon called Jejuri.

A factor often overlooked in the examination of the temple complex at Jejuri is its value in the caste matrix which traditionally determines, and continues to determine, the socio-political and psycho-economical discourse. The main deity at Jejuri is Khandoba--the demon slayer, who commands a significant following *askuldevata* among several communities like the Laman community, a laborer community from Beed district. The value of Khandoba, however, from a literary point of view arises from his transgressive legacy, which includes not only bigamy but elopement with a lower caste woman, inviting the wrath of both communities. This cross-class transference, Khandoba being a Vaishya (the third in the caste hierarchy), and Bhano being a shudra (the lowest in the caste hierarchy), is indicative of the upward movement of the subaltern that is traced in the poems.

The transgressive legacy is traced further in the poem "The Priest's Son" where Khandoba is presented as a demon slayer. But what differentiates Khandoba from other slayers, which, incidentally, is a common structural trope in heroic and religious myths, with the adversary ranging from a dragon, as in medieval romances, to *Jins* in Oriental romances, is that the proof of slaying is etched permanently not only in textual spaces but also in geographical space. This permanence is a direct rebuttal to the brahmanical prohibition of an inter-caste relationship, since Khandoba is not only deified rather than reviled, but concrete proof of this deification exists in his possession of metamorphic powers, unlike the brahmanical Gods whose exploits remain confined to textual spaces. This is an important element of the Jejuri imagery that draws an urban skeptic to the place since it constitutes a discursive break in the hegemonic discourse of rigid casteism; it is thus an unambiguous step towards modernity upon which the skeptic prides himself.

It would be useful here to remember Foucault's assertion that epistemic shifts can be drawn from the new technologies and terminologies that occur as part of repetitive historical shifts. The creation of the demons Mani and Mallu, and their insulation against the divine and the worldly, constitutes the creation of a new technology--a technology of supreme destructive power and all-pervasive domination. This demonization constitutes the narrative space where Khandoba exercises his interruption, as *Malhari-Martand* restores the sanctity of the universal order. It is useful to recall here that according to legend, the demon Mallasur and his younger brother Maniksur had been blessed with the boon of invincibility by Brahma--the supreme God--and both Vishnu and Shiva (the other constituents of the basic trinity) had expressed their incapacity to the harassed seven sages concerning the elimination of the two brothers. This inversion is symbolic, since it entails that Brahmans who derive their power

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directly from Brahma and the ancestral seven sages had to rely on a lower caste God to help them out. Besides while Brahma only created a monster, Khandoba pardons Mallu in some legends, and at Jejuri he too is worshipped alongside Khandoba. Thus, Khandoba not only possesses the power of neutralization but also that of permanent exaltation, that is absent in the Brahmanical trinity in this case. Thus the exertion of power through historic and religious discourse by the brahmanical class meets resistance through subtle inversions by the lower classes who construe their own caste-specific Gods; the Sharil community - another Dalit sub-caste, thus appropriates Shiva, and transgressive mythologies, like Khandoba's infatuation with Bhano, are constructed. This mythology constitutes an important element towards the catalysis of a subculture and may be read as counter-discursive resistance.

The move towards the creation of a subculture is reflected quite early in the book. The first part that deals with the travel to Jejuri and the initial description of Jejuri portrays the place as a wasteland, a rupture from the colonial image of a religious place borrowed by early modernists and reformists. Like most ideas concerning 'reform', the place is dilapidated and left to natural elements. This shocks Kolatkar who paints an ironic picture of an abandoned temple occupied by a mongrel bitch and her brood:

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.

(“Heart of Ruin”)

Kolatkar concludes the poem with a tongue-in-cheek comment:

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

“The Doorstep” that associates trampling with desecration continues the mood of sarcasm:

That's no doorstep  
It's a pillar on its side.  
Yes.  
That's what it is.

The mimetic reproduction of the fallen doorstep in the first stanza, with lines of almost equal length, and its transformation as a doorstep with a sloping arrangement in the next two lines, is meant to heighten the element of parody.

“Water Supply” similarly tries to highlight the low ‘marginal utility’ (to borrow a term from economics) of the objects in Jejuri, as a conduit pipe supplies no water to the eternally dry broken tap and an ‘able bodied’ millstone under it.

“The Door” presents a scathing comment on a broken door which has been converted into a clothesline as a pair of shorts are “left to dry upon its shoulders”. The door is mock-

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apostrophized as “A prophet half bought down/ from the cross/ A dangling martyr”, the reference obviously being to the Christian image of Christ upon the cross, and the owner of shorts as Judas who sought to betray Christ for his own gain. The parodic use of choric rhythm in the line “Hell with the hinge and damn the jamb”, with its use of American slang, is intended to create an ironic effect that conforms to the modernist tradition; Ezekiel’s poetry of statement was often laced with ironic comment on the apparent backwardness of Indian society. This refrain of ruin, defacement and displacement continues in “Chaitanya”, a critique of the ritualized deification of stones; “A Low Temple” where the priest refuses to acknowledge the eight armed goddess as possessing eighteen arms, since that would constitute a violation of prevalent mythological nomenclature; “Manohar”, where a temple turns out to be a cowshed; “The Pattern” that makes fun of the apparent reincarnation of Khandoba as a tortoise; and other poems like “A Scratch” with its iconic lines

Scratch a rock  
and a legend springs .

All these poems provide sufficient armour for Kolatkar’s critics to dismiss him as an intrusive skeptic who ridicules native belief, being trained in the Anglicized secularism of Bombay--a charge similar to that leveled against Ezekiel. However, as defendants of Ezekiel would point out, he tried to evolve an Indianized creole that would be treated at par with the creole of post- colonial Africa and the West Indies; similarly, a defense of Kolatkar would have to acknowledge that his poems encompass more than mere sarcasm. If observed carefully, Kolatkar’s accurate descriptions point to key differential markers of the ethos of India, and to the subculture of Jejuri.

Unlike the European social aesthetic, the eastern and more specifically the Indian Non Abrahamic aesthetic does not focus on materiality but rather on spirituality. As a consequence, outward appearance is given little consideration as a cursory comparison between a Christian priest and a Hindu Sadhu would show. This apparent indifference is a natural consequence of the carefully cultivated notion of spirituality which is believed to be as engrossing and totalitarian as to leave the person immune to the considerations of the outer world. Unlike the Christian sensibility that pervades the west, the eastern sensibility offers a reclusive passive role for the religious with the individual focused on individual attainment of nirvana and not collective nirvana like the Christian missionary zeal for securing of heaven for the whole flock. It could be argued that the difference emerges from the socio-economic conditions with the richer west being able to afford a high lifestyle and subsequent emergence of high-cultured priestly class. The east on account of its poverty and lack of hygienic life offers no such promise and therefore the stripping to bare necessity emerges as the differential marker of religiosity. However, the argument transcends the scope of this argument and comes more within the domain of an anthropological analysis. I only intended to point out that the dilapidated condition of Jejuri is indicative of its religious sub culture. As

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Pandit observes elsewhere: “Religion insulates you against any social norm and transgression is a virtue rather than vice. Whereas smoking cannabis or being unhygienic and naked in public is unacceptable in the case of common man, the sadhu gets away with it easily. These vices, on the contrary, serve as the very markers of the holy man identity and grant him a status that at once transcends the common denominator and elevates him to a superior role.” (Pandit, 2012:6). What appears strange, shocking and inexplicable to Kolatkar is in fact a carefully cultivated image of a religious discourse that serves to construct the subculture that is necessary for the upward mobility of dispossessed.

I am borrowing the notion of subculture from Dick Hebdige who points out that subcultures rely on a replacement of normative world like sobriety, ambition and conformity with their opposites: hedonism and defiance of authority in an attempt to “express and resolve albeit magically the contradictions hidden or unresolved in parent culture. Hebdige quotes Cohen who pointed out a subculture refers to a compromise solution between two contradictory needs: the need to create and express autonomy and difference from parents and the need to maintain parental identification.

Following from this definition it is easy to see how Jejuri constitutes an example of a subculture where the parent Brahminical culture is replicated through deification and legend creation, yet also contradicts the parent culture by rupturing hierarchal structures that are quite antithetical to the Brahminical discourse. The normative need for regularity, rationality and preservation are replaced by irregular shapes (of Gods and Mountains), irrational belief and decay. The ‘Horseshoe shrine’ for example records the formation of the horseshoe shrine: Khandoba’s blue horse – rationally impossible being possible only through fantasy, jumps across a valley from such a height as would take a collective strength of a creature as large as at least five horses, leaving the trace of a hoof on the stone underneath. The element of irrationality and irregularity is again traced in poems like ‘Hills’ which provides a succinct description of the mutilated geography of the place considered to be the metamorphosed corpses of demons, ‘A Little pile of stones’ which points out the absurdity of the myth that balancing pebbles in piles can be the harbinger of female fertility, ‘The Temple Rat’ with the ubiquitous rat perched on the statue of a deity and ‘The Cupboard’. The obliviousness to decay, rationality and order that pervades Jejuri is an inversion of normative values, and thereof is the first element in the construction of its religious association that in itself relies on transgression from conformity.

Jejuri can be conceived of as a ‘space’ transformed by specific practices of subculture from a ‘place’. I am relying on the distinction between ‘space’ and ‘place’ as envisioned by Michel De Certeau who distinguishes the two as part of evolving a semiotics of resistance against the ‘panoptic’ gaze of city. Certeau argues that a place is marked by an adherence to discipline and hierarchy, and thus a stable “configuration of positions.” A space on the other hand is an unstable configuration formed by “intersections of mobile elements.... vectors of

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direction, velocities, and time variables. Space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities.” (De Certeau, 1984: 117).

However such a superficial analysis of the construction of Jejuri as a religious place is not sufficient to claim the existence of a subculture there. An analysis of subculture must also examine in detail the power relations inherent in a social network and observe the alterations and infections executed in it as prevalent discourses mediate transfer of power. In this context the poem “Ajamil and the Tigers” emerges as an important poem. The poem narrates the tale of Ajamil – a sheep shepherd whose new powerful sheep dog ensures that the tigers which preyed upon this flock are forced to go hungry for fifteen days and sixteen nights. The Tiger king takes the threat lightly at first but is forced to call for a collective effort after receiving a thrashing from the sheep dog. The tigers plan a collective assault but their intentions are thwarted by the sheep dog who appears in ‘fifty-one places all at once’ and takes them as “prisoners of war” stringing them “all out in a daisy chain/ and flung them in front of his boss in one big heap.” The Tiger King in order to save face cooks up a story of having intended to visit Ajamil and his sheep as friends. The sheep dog being rather “built upon simple lines” – a type “who had never told a lie in his life” is simply disgusted and keeps on making frantic signs to dissuade Ajamil from falling for the lie. However, “Ajamil, the good shepherd/refused to meet his eyes/ and pretended to believe every single word/ of what the tiger king said/ And seemed to be taken in by all the lies.” Ajamil offers the tigers a feast over dinner and showers lavish gifts of sheep, leather jackets and balls of wool” upon them before signing a pact of friendship with the tigers. The poem further comments:

Ajamil wasn't a fool  
Like all good shepherds he knew  
that even tigers have got to eat some time.  
A good shepherd sees to it they do  
He is free to play a flute all day  
As well fed tigers and fat sheep drink from the same pond  
With a full stomach for a common bond.

A simplistic reading of the poem would entail that the subaltern sheep who were placed under his care were traded by the shepherd Ajamil to ensure that his leisure is not interrupted by the assault of tigers. A more nuanced reading would explain that Ajamil betrayed the sheep in order to protect his own skin since the sheep dog might not be an adequate protection against ravenous tigers. The reading would then correspond with the notion that the priestly class exploits the poor shepherd believers who visit Jejuri out of devotion by offering them lies like the brahminical class. It must be remembered that Jejuri is not a brahminical shrine and the priests belong to Gurav community or other like stunted communities. The God Khandoba (Ajamil) allows these priests (Tigers) to imitate the

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Brahmins by exploiting (devour) the naïve pilgrims (the sheep). Religion therefore appears as a repressive apparatus that impedes the liberty of the subaltern class by keeping them imprisoned within the shackles of superstition and hypothetical mercenary religion.

Such a reading however is a simplistic account of the actual complex power relations at Jejuri that have been represented in the poem. The reading fails to take into consideration the displacement and transfer of power from the predators – the tigers to the victims – the sheep. The Tigers earlier constituted an autonomous body who in the discourse of existence occupy a privileged center on account of their power and therefore feed upon the weak powerless sheep who represent no threat to them and feed on grass. However, by virtue of the treaty the tigers are required no longer to hunt as the friendship treaty ensures a regular supply of sheep food and therefore the common proprietorship of the meadow – the tigers and sheep drink together. It follows then the tigers lose the privileged position of power as they are relegated to mere mendicants and their prestige and identity is erased as the sheep who once would not even think of facing the tigers consciously even in their wildest dreams, now drink unconcerned and unruffled alongside them. The Tigers are forced to part with their aggressiveness and by extension their hostility and the fear it caused, lured by the prospect of effortless food. The loss of power for the tigers is immense and the corresponding gain for the sheep is immense as at the expense of a few sheep they acquire a much powerful and expensive liberty. Ajamil appears not as a betrayer but a clever mediator who recognizes the best way to ensure the safety of his flock is to make the tigers impotent as they are taken in by the delusion of grandeur and friendship.

This reordering certainly does not correspond to the simple utopian binary of eliminating the tigers altogether such that the benign sheep can be secured completely from their assault. However, such a reordering which ostensibly lacks any ordering or external end since apparently the current status quo is maintained (the tigers still feed on the sheep). However, this reordering is certainly in consonance with power as productive, creative and with no ordering or external end. Such an idea of power relies upon realizing how desire is manifested into an unequivocal power constructed from affects. Deleuze and Guattari in their seminar analysis of power propose that desire is positive and productive commencing from connection. They postulate that life aims at preservation and enhancement of itself: it manages so by connecting to other desires and the ensuing connections and productions lead to production of social wholes. These social wholes or bodies then associate and corroborate with other bodies to expand and enhance their power by crystallizing into communities. The communities of bodies create interests that are codified, “regular, collective and organized forms of desire” which create social specifics through affects like poor, rich, civilized, gestures, dialects and physical attributes. It follows then an application of such a methodology to Jejuri must reveal the ‘micro-politics’ or the production of persons and



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interests from desires. The analysis must undertake an examination of the “composition of generalities from singular investments.”

Such an analysis will reveal for example that the image of Jejuri is created simultaneously through the affects of indigenous orientalism as well as sympathetic identification. The image of God, worship, places of worship as essentially doubtful and exploitative instruments follow directly from colonial politics where messianic imperialism necessitated the creation and propagation of such stereotypes. As pointed out earlier also the urbane skepticism of Kolatkar follows from an Anglicized grounding and thence his ideas of “delicacy, good breeding and charitable humanism”. However Kolatkar also presents a post-colonial identification also in poems like ‘A song for a Vaghya’, ‘A song for a Murli’, ‘Yeshwant Rao’, ‘The Blue Horse’ and more importantly ‘An Old Woman.’ A Song for a Murli presents an attempt at the seduction of a prospective devotee customer by the Murli – a temple prostitute as the evening wears on. A traditional reading of the poem would only reveal it as symptomatic of exploitation focusing on the heinous ritual of earmarking and pushing girls into selling their bodies. However, a transcendental reading would reveal that the Murli is crafted again from an impersonal political effect – the inextricable connection of religion and commerce. Jejuri consists only of a set of ‘wretched hills’ where,

There is no crop  
Other than god  
And god is harvested here  
Around the year  
And round the clock  
Out of the bad earth  
And the hard rock

Such being the nature of the place the populace that occupies the town of Jejuri must look for ways to survive and flourish. With Jejuri having no distinction of a higher God like Krishna – a yadhav caste deity who is quite popular throughout India or Shirdi – that attracts wealthy customers the populace needs to evolve ingenious ways to survive. Thus the deprived subaltern – the old beggar woman, the vaghya, the murli, the turmeric seller corroborate with the priests together to create an interest – the religious interest, cutting across caste and status privileges. However, since the very nature of the God excludes a large section of the wealthy clientele, Jejuri is created from other political affects such as greater productivity, class mobility and lifestyle improvement.

Jejuri as the poems show is quite mundane as far as places of worship go, so it must incorporate something more and offer more prospective choices to lure the devotee and thereby sustain the local. To that extent Jejuri must be constructed as a site for multiple desire fulfillments including the sexual, musical and national and thence the presence of the murli,

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the vaghiya and the legend of the demon slaying along with the totems of an erstwhile glorious history; the sword claimed to be a present to Khandoba from Sardar Pansay in a century ago or the creation of a new temple by Ahliya Bhai Holkar—spouse of an important local chieftain. The statues of Shivaji commemorating his meeting at the temple with his father Shahji after establishing his own Hindu kingdom in fulfillment of a vow, cater to the trans-nationalist sentiment that is created to bolster its economics. Kolatkar recognizes this subtle corroboration for example in lines like:

Keep your hands off khandoba's woman  
You old lecher  
Let's see the colour of your money first-

The line lends realization to the underlying monetary interest – a generality invested in earmarked persons to facilitate the production of the subjecthood of Murli and Vaghya. Religion as I point out later is only a legitimizing cover for conducting economic transactions. This is both the bane of Jejuri yet also its defining characteristic as the subaltern subject i.e. the prostitute Murli has mediated her way towards a symbiotic relationship with the devotee: the devotee fulfills a religious duty by visiting Jejuri while satisfying his sexual urges without guilt (since Murli is Khandoba's woman and thereof commanded to please the devotees - a framing of the sexual act in terms of the sufi communion with the Lord). In return the Murli earns her livelihood from the proceeds while retaining the hierarchal structure determined by religion. It could be argued, no doubt, that this constitutes an exploitation of woman. This can't be doubted but the argument I am trying to convey across is that acquiring some benefit out of exploitation is better than getting exploited and acquiring no benefit from it- a realization that is out of sync with colonial morality. Similarly in the poem *An Old Woman* the speaker acting to his ingrained sense of colonial propriety and sense of labour tries to shake off the beggar woman:

You turn around and face her  
With an air of finality.  
You want to end the farce.

However soon the identification of the underlying subaltern desire system takes place when he hears her say:

What else can an old woman do  
On hills as wretched as these?

The apparently innocuous remarks sets off a chain of psychical consequences that involve shattering of the oriental bias and recognizing that the circumstances don't permit operation of such liberal capitalist values as diligence, civility and honesty. He realizes that such a transparent representation of the populace as parasitical and irrational ignores the absence of any other skill set in the populace. Similarly, the poem '*Yashwant Rao*' for example displays a unique awareness of the subaltern sensitivity towards the working class

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understanding the potential of physical decapitation and the subsequent catastrophic results it would entail. The construction of Yashwant Rao is a classic case of the mythology reflecting the concerns of the community; in this case the agrarian and labour community rely largely on their body for earning through physical tasks such as mining, farming and rearing cattle. Any physical damage thereof would act as a severe detriment and hence the creation of Yashwant Rao as the God who is the healer of bones. It is also interesting to see that Kolatkar notices that Yashwant Rao is not placed on the same level as other Gods say Khandoba or MarlariMaratand:

Of course he's only a second class god  
And his place is just outside the main temple.  
Outside even of the outer wall.  
As if he belonged  
Among the tradesmen and the lepers.

The second class status of Yashwant Rao is in keeping with the low economic and hence social status of the devotee class who seek remedy of bones injured during the physical labour they are wont to perform. This property has been succinctly summarized in the following lines:

Gods who tell you how to live your life,  
Double your money  
Or triple your land holdings.  
Gods who can barely suppress a smile  
As you crawl a mile for them.  
Gods who will see you drown  
If you won't buy them a new crown

It is also interesting to note that Kolatkar traces his affiliation to the lepers who if I am member Foucault's assertion constituted the main site for subaltern identification and powerlessness in the Middle Ages before the insane took over. Both leprosy and insanity are associated with deformity and thus the focus on concreteness in rationality. So while other Gods have a definite shape: Shiva is represented with a trishul, and a domineering physique to go with it that permits him to live in the Himalayas wearing only a lion cloth, Vishnu is represented often reclining on a lotus with his multiple arms bearing various instruments, Krishna is frequently represented as a young urchin playing a flute or a somber crowned man with a kind smile; Yashwant Rao is accorded no definite shape but a fluid dynamic shape – "the shape of a protoplasm". This is a definite transgression from the Brahminical imagination and represents a validation of subaltern psyche that appropriated such a shape as the divine shape to validate its distinctiveness from the brahminical empowered class. And thus the stanza ends:

And although I'm sure they are all to be praised,

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They are either too symmetrical

Or too theatrical for my taste.

This distinctiveness is reflected in the poem “The Blue Horse” where the realization of the subaltern subjectivity as lacking in skills and economic competence hits him fully after the earlier encounter with the old woman:

A shower of sparks

Flies off her half burnt tongue.

His pockmarked half brother

Twiddles, tweaks and twangs

On the one string thing.

God’s own children

Making music.

Kolatar recognizes the limitations of dispossessed in full relief as he recognizes that the one stringed instrument Khotma constrains the musician’s ability to produce diverse music. The one stringed instrument is a historical legacy of caste exploitation as learning music and playing instruments were considered intellectual acts and therefore out of bounds for the subaltern lower classes. The one stringed instrument is therefore as much a substitute for traditional multi stringed instruments like the Veena, as much a symbol of deprivation both in terms of economy as well as skill. A one stringed instrument severely limits the capacity to engage the audience and thereby the musician has to bank on tradition and ritual to seek audiences and hence his reinvention as *vaghya* - the musician who derives his allegiance and skill directly to the Lord himself and circumvents his original status as a glorified beggar.

The reviling of beggary which constituted a large chunk of Orientalized colonial discourse emerges as a key concern of the Jejuri poems. Beggary is one of the key markers of a subaltern identity and Kolatar’s reception of them marks a gradual change as the narrative progresses. While in the beginning the priest has been identified in a parasitical if not a predatory relationship with the pilgrim, defined as:

A catgrin on his face

And a live, ready to eat pilgrim

Held between its teeth

By the time of “The Old Woman” Kolatar has recognized that beggary is not a despicable thing but another facet of the phenomenon of survival and the religious identity of the place. The old woman is a manifestation of the subaltern politics that validate the priestly class who in turn regulate the business of the shrine. A case study might be a useful tool in understanding this assertion. Babu Bhai Bandelkar who looks much older than her 50 years, has spent half a century at Jejuri. She was born there and married to a husband who was also an inhabitant of the place and carved out a living from odd musical performances. She gave

***Jejuri and the Poetics of Subcultural Resistance***

**By  
Huzaifa Pandit**

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birth to a son who succumbed in his youth to alcoholism following the footsteps of his father who met his death the same way. Since Babu Bhai is illiterate and possesses no skills, beggary is her only guard against starvation. But what complicates the simple narrative so far is that she doubles as a chronicle of the praises of Khandoba and blesses passing pilgrims. The simple reason for such behaviour is that the priestly class at the temple supply her with frequent meals and thus she is able to keep her body and soul together. In return she invests an unflinching belief in the priestly capability to act as mediators between Khandoba and the pilgrims, refusing to see anyone except a priest in case of an illness. This relationship is an appropriate example of the way power transfer between subaltern subcultures take place where unlike the brahminical parent culture, the priestly class refuses to have anything to do with the beggar class which is more often than not from the lower caste. In return the subaltern class, unlike the parent culture, accords a legitimacy to the priestly class as the regulators of the religious discourse unlike in the parent culture where legitimacy is exerted on the basis of historicity.

Faced therein with a barren landscape and a harsh geography, such that only donkeys can transport material up the shrine in this age of quick mobility, and thereof a daunting trek from the new temple to the older shrine, the populace reinvents Jejuri and themselves as a transgressive subculture that is tuned to the temperaments and desires of the lower classes that constitute the devotee base.

The thematic movement that is incorporated in the poem “between Jejuri and the Railway Station” offer a concealed defense of this sub culture dwelling on the failure of modernity to usher in any tangible change in the lives of the people especially at Jejuri. The networks of transgressive power are a substitute for the ‘legitimate’ egalitarian power relations that was the prerogative of modernist technological reform to initiate. The six poems of “The Railway Station” bring out in full relief the extent of absence of any modernist reform in Jejuri. The significance of railways derives also from its transcendental significance of being closely bound with the politics of social mobility and associated modernity. The railways therefore relies on order, discipline and human intervention to ensure its preservation and functioning. At Jejuri, Kolatkar finds all of that missing. For example the railway indicator which would display or indicate the arrival of trains is long out of order as the following lines indicate:

If it knows when  
The next train's due  
It gives no clue

Similarly “the station dog” points out the uncanny similarity of the place with the temple complex as a dog has made it his home amidst all the squalor and chaos:

The spirit of the place  
Lives inside the mangy body

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Of the station dog

The association of the mangy dog with the station in a relation of possession sufficiently indicates that the colonial attributes are absent from the place, for the English signboards would often read: Indians and Dogs not allowed. The easy languor of the dog and his unruffled attitude are sufficient clues to conclude the dog is pretty familiar with the place.

In a similar vein the lack of discipline, punctuality and dedication towards duty – all glorious colonial ideals are completely and frustratingly so missing from “the station master” whose callousness and complete disregard for passenger comfort is dealt in the following lines:

But interprets the first timetable  
With a freedom that allows him to read  
Every subsequent timetable between  
The lines of its text.

The surreal parody of the lines brings out in full force the absence of any relief ushered by modernity. Modernity is a mere illusion as it works on the same model as the Jejuri one, but the Jejuri one has a higher claim on customer comfort since it offers psychological relief even if illusory in return of money, while the railways offers none. Kolatkar’s frustration with the system is couched in identification with the ritualistic discourse of the temple complex, as the edifice of his skepticism crashes:

And the hills crack.  
And the temples crack.  
And the sky falls

With a plateglass clatter  
Around the shatterproof crone  
Who stands alone.

He is forced to identify with the subaltern subculture in ‘vows’ to express his angst at modernity which he had cherished with such high hopes in the morning and hence the ritualistic description, even though it is intended to convey an impression of parody. The end result is encapsulated well in the final poem of the book: “The setting sun”:

The setting sun  
Touches upon the horizon  
At a point where the rails  
Like the parallel  
Of a prophecy  
Appear to meet  
The setting sun  
Large as a wheel.



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The poem is profound since the realization dawns on Kolatkar that every reality is textual depending upon which discourse one has been conditioned in. the illusory fusing of the railway tracks and the horizon achieves a symbolic significance then as everything therefore, in a philosophic realm, is an elaborate struggle between reality and illusion – a deconstruction of the binary of spirit/letter. He is able therefore to juxtapose the colonial modernity with the spiritual antiquity such that the impression received is that Kolatkar becomes partially forgiving of the absurdity of the ritualistic day since he becomes aware of how the ritualistic subculture is not very different from modern culture.

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