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NPTEL ONLINE CERTIFICATION COURSE

Indian Poetry in English

Lecture 12: ARUN KOLATKAR

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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.

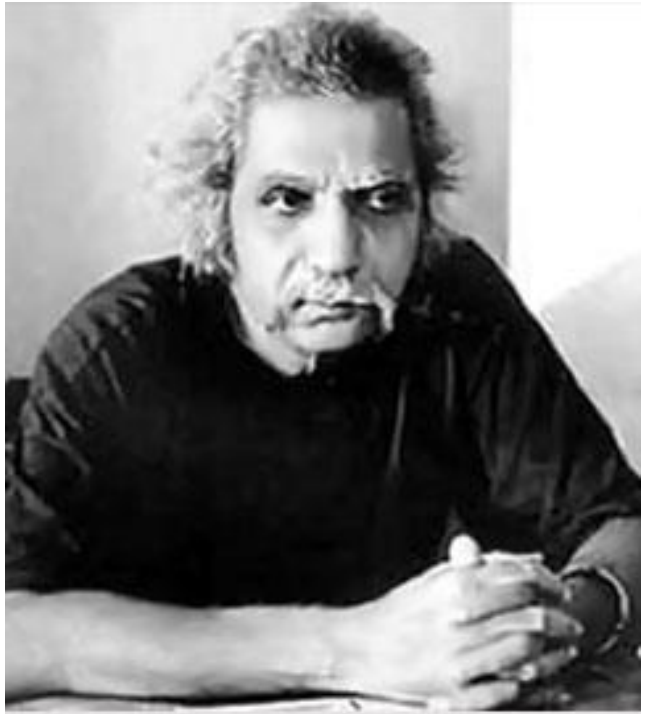
Experimental Poetry

- 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."

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



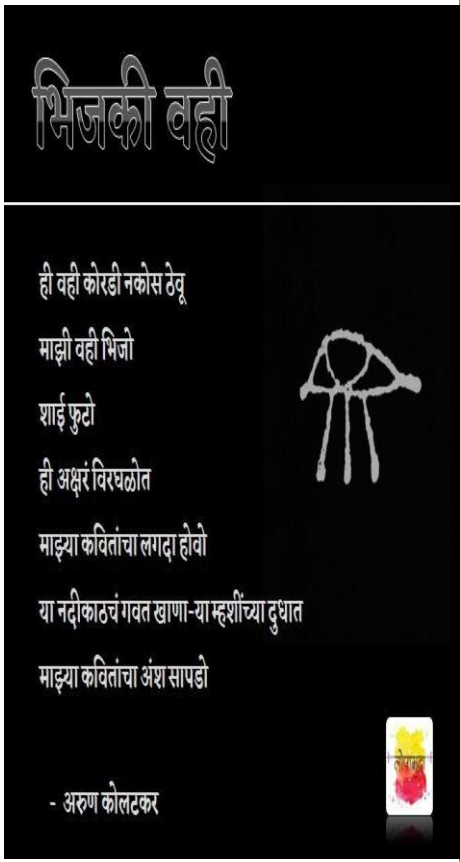
Works (Marathi)

Chirimiri (2003) , ***Bhijki Vahi*** (2003)

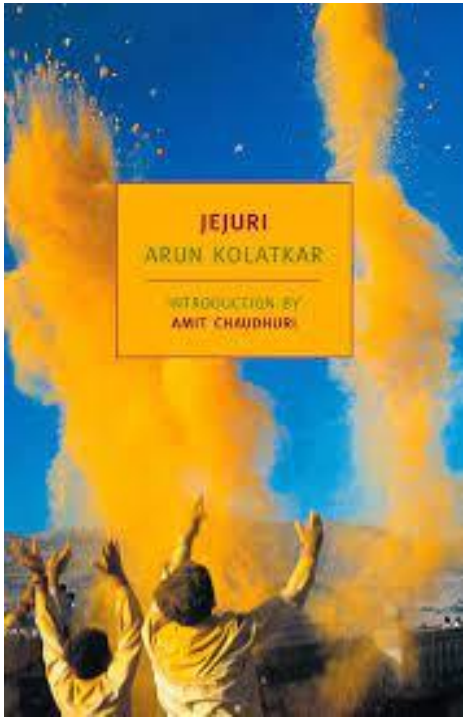
&

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.



Kolatkar's English Poetry Collections



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



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 :

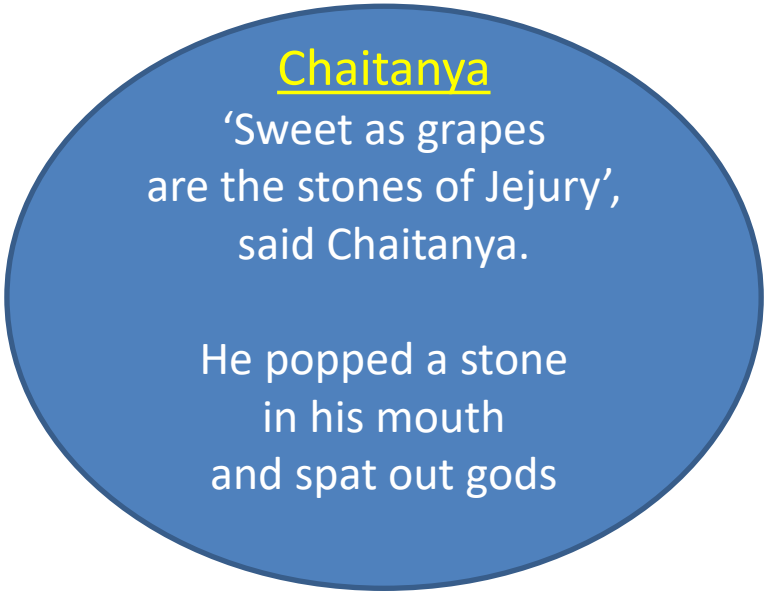


"there is no crop
other than god
and god is harvested here
around the year …" (A Scratch)

"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)

Characteristics of Kolatkar's Poetry

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



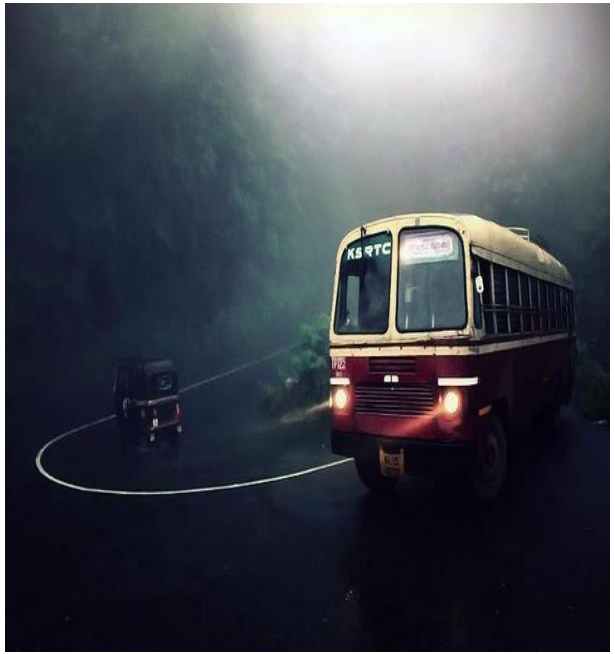
“The Bus”

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.

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



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.

“Heart of Ruin”

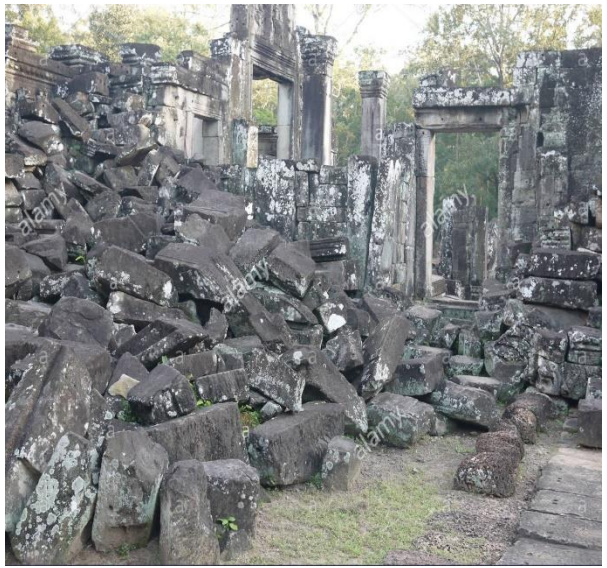
The roof comes down on Maruti's head.
Nobody seems to mind.

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.



Contd…

The black eared puppy has gone a little too far.
A tile clicks under its foot.

It's enough to strike terror in the heart
of a dung beetle

and send him running for cover
to the safety of the broken collection box

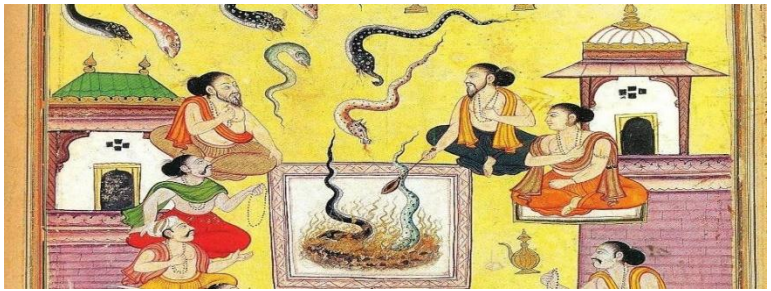
that never did get a chance to get out
from under the crushing weight of the roof beam.

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

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, Janmejaya'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)



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)

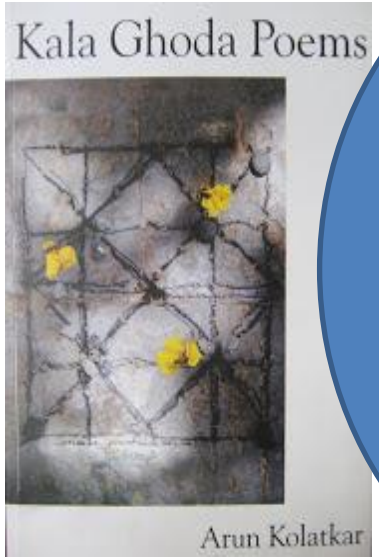


Kala Ghoda and Other Poems(2004)

- 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)



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 Boatride 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

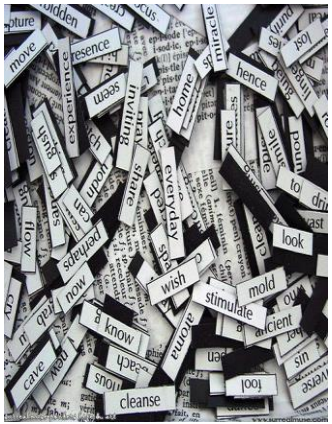
because a sailor waved
back
to a boy
another boy
waves to another sailor



in the clarity of air
the gesture 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.

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*)

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)

Kolatkar 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

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… (Scratch)

Thank You

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