

Popular Culture Embodying Modernity Treatment of Popular Culture in Kolatkar's "Chirimiri".

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ABSTRACT

The article investigates the treatment of popular culture in a slender collection of poems in Marathi by Arun Kolatkar titled 'Chirimiri' (meaning a small amount given in bribe) which was published in 2003, by Ashok Shahane's Prass Publication, Mumbai. Arun Kolatkar, an important bilingual poet composed poetry in Marathi and in English. Most his post 1970s poems in both the languages are an important document of contemporary social, cultural and literary happenings. In his own idiosyncratic, objective and ironic fashion, Kolatkar depicts with maximum subtlety, the people, places, events and happenings in the metropolis of Mumbai. This article is a modest attempt to see the reflection of popular culture with all its popular and political aspects. The basic argument of the article is that any civilization in its embodiment of modernity brings total metamorphosis in the forms of popular culture. Many times altogether new forms of popular culture emerged with advancement of technology and its socio-cultural impact on that society. A very few old forms of popular culture survive but they adopt many changes in all its aspects including the psychology of the audience. The book 'Chirimiri' records the contemporary state and status of the most powerful cultural and religious movement, the 'bhakti' movement of the 'warkari' sect in Hinduism. The forces of urbanization, industrialization and globalization have corrupted the ways and means of this important non-brahminic movement only besides 'Mahanubhav Movement' by Chakradhar. Despite its spiritual deterioration the 'wari' (pilgrimage to Pandharpur on foot) can still be viewed as an as an important religious-cultural phenomenon with maximum public participation. But embodying modernity of urban pilgrims has changed their attitude towards this pilgrimage.

Key Words: Culture, Popular, Bhakti Movement, Wari, Poems, Bhajan (a devotional song)

Among the different movements that took place during post colonial phase of time and have left tremendous impact over the worldview of Indian Society, the most important are the cooperative movement in agrarian rural India, the Dalit Movement on political, social and literary grounds and the feminist movement in urban and semi urban parts of India. From the Middle ages through pre and post British to contemporary phase, rural part of Maharashtra is uniquely known for its *bhakti* tradition of 'Warkari' sect. Most of the rural people make a visit to *Pandharpur*, the temple of *Vithoba*, the deity of the masses at 'Ashadhi' and 'Kartiki' (the months in Marathi Calendar). The tradition of visiting a place on foot is called as 'wari'. Bhalchandra Nemade (1998) regards 'warkari movement' as the first anti-Brahmin movement of masses in Maharashtra. It is a religious movement in which the masses with all castes and creeds participate. The dress-code, lifestyle and other disciplinary aspects are willingly followed by all the participants. The movement has its own history with the discourse and poetry produced by saint poets like *Tukaram*, *Namdev*, *Jnaneshwar*, *Eknath* and *Janabai*, all of them belonging to different castes. The 'Vithoba' of 'Pandharpur' is the dearest deity of all the followers. But the corrupt ways and means of city life have polluted the temperament and attitudes of the contemporary followers of the movement. The article examines how the

religious and reformatory in its orientation how the modern phase of the movement has acquired and assimilated the ways and means of popular culture at its core and there by changed its nature completely and comprehensively in last few decades. Kolatkar's slender collections of poems titled 'Chirimiri' takes a slice of the a contemporary society whose socio-psychic being is influenced partly by the metropolitan living in Mumbai and partly by its roots in rural India which anyhow makes its existence known in the postmodern. It is a detailed account of the changing cultural semiotics of the religious-reformatory movement like Wari which undergoes a complete metamorphosis due to influence of popular culture

These are the decades that provided an altogether fresh perspective on popular culture. During these decades different politically engaged interdisciplinary practices developed in culture studies. In most studies until recently the focus had been on popular culture presented in mass media. During these decades the scholars have engaged themselves in interrogating the 'popular' in popular culture. The dialectical conception of the popular has taken backseat and understanding of elements, of participation and supervision by the audiences has marked the 1980s. The political aspects outside of the cultural practice and political society beyond the particularities of cultural differences came to be overlooked. Hence the study of popular became a visible discipline and it lost its significance as a left political enterprise. The study of popular became the 'cultural populism'. The experience of common people came to be viewed as analytically and politically more important than culture with capital 'C'.

Study of the word popular was discovered in Germany during the time when industrial capitalism was being forged and related to the idea of nationhood. The term was used to designate the uneducated and undifferentiated sections of European Society and the popular forms of entertainment. (Lewis1978, as quoted by Rege 2003.) The term Mass Culture came around 1950^s to describe the culture associated with the lonely crowd- now it has become the culture transmitted through Mass Media and became 'ideological state apparatus'. The term popular is also equated to the folk ways and moves. Hence, the term, 'Mass culture' depicts the tension between the cultures of popular and elite. The decades of 1980^s and 1990^s has created an unprecedented academic interest in study of popular culture. As Sharmila Rege complains, "The institutional reproduction of the distinction between elite and popular has been overlooked by many scholars. The notion of popular in William's conception never existed outside the relations of domination and imperatives of commoditization and yet in these relations the masses are never only passive."

The postmodern turn in the study of popular culture studies had arrived as the critical tension between popular and mass culture was lost in a celebration of popular culture consumption and the spheres of production and consumption came to be conceived as if autonomous. Though popular as a category persists, the focus is on the ways in which the everyday lives, labor and struggles of different castes, classes, commodities and gender alter the content of this category. Hence, the 'popular' becomes the ground on which cultural and political struggles come to be worked out.

Starting in the mid-1980s the study of popular culture began to witness a shift away from the strict interest in the expressive practices of specific sub-cultural groups and to recognize that popular culture expressions are inevitably tied to contests over power, value and meaning. This period coincides with a waning interest in the study of caste as a technical subject and a related decline in studies of kinship rank and stratification among younger anthropologists working in India. According to Arjun Appadurai, "It is possible to make two observations of this period, with the benefit of hindsight. First the intense nationalization and commoditization of popular culture by the Indian state accompanies an aggressive effort by the same regime of

Rajiv Gandhi to advance the cause of economic liberalization, privatization, mass media and high technology, thus radically opening Indian markets, consumers and audiences to global forces and resources. Second, the efforts to nationalize Indian culture in the second half of the 1980s provided the facade beneath which another drama was taking shape, the mobilization of new forms of Hindutwa." It became increasingly apparent that many popular forms, especially the tele-visual propagation of the epics, were part and parcel of the explosive growth in the power of the Bharatiya Janata Party, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the many organizations of the Sangh Pariwar, particularly in the Hindi belt. More recent impact of the destruction of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya on 6 December 1992, and have sought to account for the relationship between Hindu popular cultural practices and massive victories of the BJP in state and national elections, of cultures of violence unleashed during this period

Both these seemingly paradoxical developments in public sphere are starkly reflected in Kolatkar's poetry after 1975. He has consistently and masterfully dealt with extremely problematic dialectic of nation and culture, religion and politics, marginal and mainstream, tradition and modernity, indigenous and exotic in his collections like 'Kala Ghoda Poems' in English and 'Bhijaki Wahi' and 'Chirimiri' in Marathi. It is interesting that the characters that populate most his poetic sphere are supposedly marginalized people. No middle-class folk, no professors and students, no writers or professionals. Kolatkar is often fascinated by perverse or rather his descriptions of intimate activities can be vulgar. In his collections like 'Kala Ghoda Poems' and 'Chirimiri', Kolatkar quite unambiguously, engages with quotidian, the unnoticeable, the marginal and the banal. The prostitutes, *Balwantbua* a *bhajan* singer, 107 prostitutes whom he takes to *Pandharpur*, their professional rivalries, the annual *Ashadhi* fair, temples of *Vitthal* and *Rukmai*, games like *fugadi*, make their archetypal presence felt on the reader's sensibility. There is no dearth of the fisher woman, the hash seller, the rat poison man, the tart, the goose lover, the one-eyed baby-bather, the rat poison man in *Kala Ghoda*. Kolatkar's treatment of the social out-castes and left-outs in their impoverished and beleaguered world is wry colloquial unsentimental and of course full of compassion that borders empathy rather than sympathy.

Poems in 'Chirimiri' are the poems of and about apparently illiterate fellows. *Balwantbua*, a *bhijan* singer and a fun-loving, witty, way-world character appears as a protagonist in most of these compositions. Other characters, like him display the touch of rural background. Most of these characters are residents of the metropolis of Mumbai but they all have spent some time of their past in the rural India. Most of them have been born and brought up at countryside. Residues of their rustic background are found everywhere in their formal and linguistic makeup. Their personalities, lifestyles, ways of thinking, their perspectives and even physical features are very much closer to rustic figures. At some part of their life, they had kept their villages back and came to Mumbai to find out some livelihood. They have come from all parts of rural India mostly the drought affected and under-developed parts of rural Maharashtra, ranging from *Marathwada* to West Maharashtra. These characters form a cultural collage representing each and every subculture that Maharashtra is made of. They came to cities and have learned all fair and fowl ways of getting survived in the metropolis like Mumbai.

Balwantbua and 107 women, whom he takes to *Pandharpur*, are representatives of this corruption. The modern city life and the struggle to survive have made the members of movement way- world and corrupt. They have forgotten the metaphysical dimensions that the movement has and view each and everything in physical terms. Physical means of comfort, greed for money overpower the mind modern *warkari*. Spiritual aspects of life keep no importance for them. They even drag the deity of *Vithoba* to physicality of the contemporary world and reduce him to behave like any ordinary human beings with all virtues and vices. In a

poem like 'Wamangi' (A Left Half), his wife *Rukmini* interrogates her husband, suspects his loyalty to his wife just like any ordinary woman and interrogates what her husband does in her absence. The imprints of rural life in the personalities of these characters get mixed with the way- world approach of the city man which produces a funny blend of a person who is not nihilistic like a modern city fellow but exploits religion for his vested private interests. The character of *Balwantbua*, a *bhajan* singer, who is the chief of the mischief of the whole collection, has a strong biographical reference in Kolatkar's real life. A real figure of *Balwantbua* a *bhajan* singer actually existed among the acquaintance of Kolatkar. The subtle aspects of rustic fellows that Kolatkar depict throughout are largely based on the character of *Balwantbua* whom Kolatkar visited several times along with the Pakhwaj maestro *Arjunbua Shejwal*.

In the first issue (2005) of *Anaghrat*, a Marathi bi-monthly, *Ashok Shahane* and *Raghu Dandwate* give a full account of a live meeting between *Arun Kolatkar* and *Balwantbua* a *bhajan* singer. Throughout the collection Kolatkar uses the traditional verse forms of Marathi called 'Abhang' and 'Ovi' with renewed freshness and with new possibilities. While using these forms he meticulously studied and retained all the potentials of them as has been found in Saint Poetry. He observed all the experiments of these poets with these forms and used them with new and fresh content, themes and devices.

The saint poetry of the middle ages is a powerful document of the cultural, religious, economic, political aspects of contemporary life, the mode of behaviors, their beliefs and assumptions, the conventions and rituals, droughts and famines, invasions and invaders etc. It is also powerful means to understand the functions, workings of caste ridden Maharashtrian society of the middle ages. Having digested the subtleties of the cultural semiotics of the time, Kolatkar records the changes the society underwent over the years. The poetry of Kolatkar provides a graphic picture of contemporary lifestyle, how the innocent common man had been polluted and made corrupt by the selfish ways and means of city life. He portrays how religion and religious practices that have been reduced to saleable commodities. He carefully chooses his characters so that they represent the values and morals of changing lifestyle in contemporary India. His characters aptly belong to the time and place they share.

Though in most of the poems we come across the adventures and misadventures of *Balwantbua* under the age of twenty, there are few other poems like 'Johar' (Greetings), *Nageli* (one who did not go), *Wamangi* (Left half), *Ghongdi* (blanket), *Garhane* (Complaint), *Shnatipranap* and, *Chirimiri* (a small sum as bribe), which belong to world of *Balwantbua's wari* but he does not occur as a protagonist in them. If these poems be drawn apart from the sequence, in other context they express their idiosyncratic meaning potential. The theme of most of the poems is secular though the paraphernalia used for the same is of religious. Even the form of *abhang* that he uses is borrowed from the poetry of devotion that is 'saint poetry' of the middle ages which provides these poems a mock-religious dimension. He wipes out the religious, spiritual and emotional feelings out of the minds of the characters and grafts a secular interrogation in their minds. The poems like 'Johar', 'Wamangi', 'Shnatipranapa' etc. are subtle examples of such interrogation. All the ethics and morals of rural Indian Society are associated with physical aspects of sex. Despite the apparently rigid norms regarding sex some people enjoy lot of liberty. Kolatkar underlines this irony and hierocracy of situation and with a touch of humor makes fun of all such deceptive value systems. Poems like 'Anghol' (A Bath), 'Nandacha Wadha' (A waterstream of Nand), and 'Anaji Fadales Vinanti' (Request to Anaji Fadale) can be viewed in this perspective.

The order in which the poems have been placed in the collection has its own significance. The first poem '*Rupawarcha Abhanga*' (An Abhanga/verse on Looks) provides a parody of all those *abhanga*s that have been composed by saint poets delineating the personality of Lord *Vithoba*. The resemblance between the physical appearance of '*Vithoba*' the almighty and *Balwantbua* himself provokes humor and belly laughter. The physical features that make the personality of *Balwantbua* are more of a caricature than of a normal human being. In spite of sharing certain physical features with Lord *Vithoba*, his internal make up remains typical to a contemporary way- world fellow. It contains all the vices and worldly wisdom, matter of fact approach towards everything which places him exactly on the opposite pole of the '*bhakti*' tradition. The poem comes as a prelude to anti-religious secular tone that the poet intends to set throughout the collection.

In the second poem *Balwantbua* makes an announcement of his visit to *Pandharpur*. He asks to send a message to *Vithoba* regarding the visit. He explains his plan, time-table, and his company with whom he intends to visit. He expects all the systems in *Pandharpur* to be ready for his arrival. He gives a list of the services that he and his team will require and asks *Vithoba* to make provision of them by legal or illegal means. He expects all the services be given free of cost to him and his team for they are his specially favored people. The narrator (*Balwanbua*) wants to give this message to *Vithoba* secretly so that '*Rukhmai*' will not listen to it. If in case she does, she will try hard to oppose in using any unfair means to provide expected services. But unfortunately though the message had been told in the ear of *Vithoba*, *Rukhmai* listens to it clearly. Thus, irony and paradox like most modernist poets are the devices that Kolatkar uses frequently, mostly to cause humor.

Soon we meet '*Nageli*'. (one who did not go) She is a woman who often thinks of going to *Pandharpur*. Once she makes her mind and decides but at the very sight of the hugely populated station loses her confidence and she drops the idea. Instead she appeals Lord *Vithoba* to come to her place to visit her because she is unable to carry out the troubles of journey to *Pandharpur*.

The ones who finally decide to go to *Pandharpur*, *Balwantbua* and the hundred and seven women (prostitutes) come to 'station'. All the ladies make themselves comfortable in the ladies compartment while *Balwantbua* stands in the door to tell other passengers that it is a compartment reserved for ladies. After getting fulfilled all the irrational demands from the guard the journey begins.

Six poems that follow, '*Lolanfugdi*' (A Game of Fugadi), '*Tambu*' (A camphouse), '*Anghol*', '*Nandacha Wadha*', '*Tanga*' (Tonga), and '*Saglyajanicha gana*' (A Song of All Women) depict the chain of events and happenings on the way to *Pandharpur*. They play fugdi, make a tent to spend a night, fight with the neighbors for the reservation of place for tent, have bath at some farm etc. Someone like *Ambu* stops in midway and expects *Vithoba* to send a Tonga for her or else, she will not visit him at *Pandharpur*. Finally, all the women (prostitutes) for they have received a common customer named *Vithoba* dance around him and sing a song for him. The poem titled '*Bhet*' is an account of the extreme happiness that *Vithoba* expresses at the arrival of *Balwantbua* and hundred and seven prostitutes. He starts dancing but soon gets a sprain in his foot. *Ambu* and *Gajara* come forward to help him. But at their advent *Rakhmai* feels jealous and asks them to live him alone.

Like most other *warkaries*, (visitors of *Pandharpur*) *Balwantbua* and a hundred and seven prostitutes celebrate their own arrival in *Pandharpur* and their meeting with Lord *Vithoba*. They include *Vithoba* in the sports and games they play. They draw him to the level of human

beings and treat him as if he is one among them and forget his status as the almighty. The poems 'Fugdi', 'Vitewarchi Fugdi' (A game of Fugadi on Brick) and 'Photo' are examples of such oneness.

Warkaries, after they meet dear Lord *Vithoba*, take a stroll over the city and shops. The shops in the fair include, photographers to domestic objects like blankets and even some fun sports like 'well of Death' intended for the entertainment of *warkaries*. Three consequent poems, 'Photo', 'Ghongdi (blanket)' and 'Maut ka kuwan' (The well of Death) depict the picture of the fair at *Pandharpur*. While reading these poems what strikes us most is the attitude of the *warkaries* which is not religious or one that of a pilgrim but of a person who enjoys all domestic bliss of life. The prostitutes view each and every object from the typical eye. For e.g. the couplet:

"Yok tangdi bari ubela don ghongdyanpeksha
Tarunpanachy gurmit asa mhantat saglyach veshya" [5-27]
(A leg is better for warmth than a blanket
Believe all the prostitutes while in their youth)

The 'wari' or visit to *Pandharpur* ends with shopping and funfair. The group includes four more poems: 'Sthatipranpra', 'Johar' (Greetings), 'Wamangi', and 'Prashna' (A Question). These poems are not only the poems of the journey but the poet's own interrogative reflection over the complete tradition of religion. It reminds us of the social movements that took place in *Pandharpur* for the entry of Dalits the lower caste people among Hindu, in the temple of *Vithoba*. Keshav Sadashiv Sane, popularly known as *Sane Guruji*, a known social reformer and patriot, fought for the cause and did fast till his demand was fulfilled. He died as a result of the fast. The Dalits in principle were allowed to enter in the temple but the attitude of the upper caste priests towards them did not change. What stand did the God have on a stubborn attitude of the priests? Did he want to keep Dalits away from the temple? Whose God is he really, of the upper castes or of everybody? Did he himself divide the people in castes so that few will enjoy all the advantage while masses will die in slavery? All such questions in poems like 'Sthatipranpra', 'Johar,' 'Prashna' reflect Kolatkar's attitude towards God and religion.

The second last poem in the group titled 'Wamangi' is a challenge to feminist thinkers. Throughout his poetic career Kolatkar did not take any stand like socialist, leftist, Dalit, feminist, religious or atheist. His poetry encompasses all these ideological disciplines but remains beyond. In this poem 'Rukhmini' the wife of *Vithoba*, who always stands by the left side of *Vithoba*. One of the visitors/ devotees brings it to her notice that 'Vithoba' is not there by her side. *Rukhmini* reflects on the issue, repents over her own innocence and shrewdness of *Vithoba*. The poem depicts the picture as if the seeds of inequality among sexes, patriarchal privilege to men and the exploitation of female by male are sown in the relationships of Gods and Goddesses as well. *Rukhmini's* anger and interrogation is close to Feminists interrogation to male dominated system.

The second group of twenty one poems has a miscellaneous content. It includes the happenings in the life of *Balwantbua* as well as the character sketches and happening in the lives of selected prostitutes like *Yallu*, *Gajara*, and *Babu*. The tone of most poems is extremely light hearted and extrovert. They avoid abstract philosophizing about life. The dialectic of the poems avoid all middle class values and depict the lives of the people for whom such values may prove luxury. As these characters throw away the veil of contemporary value system, they acquire a relentless ease in their expression. They keep no scope for euphemism. In this regard, the persistent narrative voice supports these characters. The abstract values prove useless in leading life hence the characters become extremely way world and learn the lessons of life in the school of experience. In a poem 'Wagh' (Tiger) we read:

. . . . <i>welchy weli jo layanibaher</i>	One who comes out of line in time
<i>padla to sher</i>	be called
<i>samjawa</i>	a tiger
<i>janmata mahit sagla bajarbhav</i>	by birth he knows the market
<i>wagh tyache nav</i>	tiger his name
<i>tiger</i>	tiger
.
.
<i>wagh ahes he sidha kar adhi</i>	first prove that you are a tiger
<i>mag chattel ti</i>	then she will lick
<i>tuze anga</i>	your body
<i>shahanyane whawe wegle</i>	wise- be away
<i>bakiche sagle</i>	else all
<i>dink ladu.</i>	gum balls [5-60,61]

The personal lives of the prostitutes, the problems of their day to day life, their miseries, worries, troubles in profession, their relationship with *Balwantbua* as one who solves their problems and such like less frequented content appears in these poems with unconventional causal tone. In his relationship with prostitutes, he occurs as a helping hand in their problems regarding the profession and customers. His mischievous, cunning, way-world solutions to the problems he face make the reader laugh. But the laughter throughout is harmless. It doesn't hurt or deride anybody.

In the third group of poems once again *Balwantbua* appears as a protagonist. But here a visit to *Pandharpur*, *Vithoba*, prostitutes etc. are not in his company. *Balwantbua* appears as a domestic guy. The group begins with '*Gitabaiche Abhanga*' under which we have twelve small poems in form of *abhanga*. *Gitabai*, wife of *Balwantbua* is the narrator in these poems. She complains to *Vithoba* about the mischievous, troublesome behavior of *Balwantbua*. He causes numberless problems in the life of straightforward simple woman like *Gitabai*. Throughout the sequence, we perceive the nature and personality of *Balwantbua* through the eyes of *Gitabai*, where he looks very different than usual. An altogether different character of *Balwantbua* comes forth with '*Gitabaiche Abhanga*'. As a husband he comes forth as a cruel, ruthless person. The sequence of twelve cantos is placed in the last group. In one of the *abhanga* *Gitabai*, his wife says:

*'gavbhar jyache ahet chahate
ani mi pahate roj jyala
tyo bua waila ani hyo waila'*[5-84]

(The *Balwantbua* who has many fans in the village, and the one whom I see daily are completely different persons)

and again :

*'Yachya wagnyat ale sarva prani
wagh, sinha ani sap vinchu,
udi manjar, aswal, kolha, randukkar
pahave prakar titke thode'*[[5-86]

(In his behavior whom I see daily I see all the animals like tiger lion, snake, scorpion, cat, bear, fox, pig enough with his madness)

Gitabai is so tired of the torture of *Balwantbua* that she cannot even complain to *Vithoba* for he has no time to listen to such subdued voices.

Hence:

*'Buamandalini par gherla Vitthal
tyo mala bhetal kasa kay
Vinesathi tyala kuthahet kan
Tal shekdyane wajtahet'[5-87]*

(how do I see and complain vitoba? He is too much under influence of Buas i. e. priests. He has no ears for veena (musical instrument, here metaphor of female voice) when there are many tal (musical instrument, here metaphor of male voice) are making noise)

Balwantbua and the prostitutes at list follow the ritual of visiting *Pandharpur* and singing his bhajans but *Gitabai* questions the practical utility of such practices:

*'Nam smarnana papa jaltat
pan mela bhat karapto
hari mukhe mhana hari mukhe mhana
sangto shahana Jnyandev
borobar ahe sangna parantu
dudh utu jata tyacha kay'[5-88]*

(may your sins purge due to singing bhajans of Vithoba but my rise goes spoiled on fire. May jandev advises you to chant name of vithoba, he may be right but the milk on fire spills in between)

To deal with life, as it comes before her, face its problems, to subdue before the whims of *Balwantbua* as a husband are the more important responsibilities than going to '*wari*' for her. Beyond fulfilling the conjugal demands of a husband, life does not mean anything else for her. Along with mischievous, whimsical, cruel aspects, *Balwantbua*'s personality also has touches of human kindness. After a death of Babu, one of the prostitutes, he comes forward to give her last rituals for there is none else to do so:

*Zali hoti tila mazi athwan
Pan mala kon kalawato
Ani weswechi kon sawadto hada....[5-77]*

(She remembered me at the time of her death, but who will convey me the message? And who after all gives last rites to a prostitute?)

As he does not get the ashes and bones of *Babu*'s body to provide her the last rituals, he takes a photograph which he has and comes to a holy place of *Alandi*. At the conclusion of the poem he appeals to river *Indrayani* :

*Ghe ge Indrayani Babula potashi
De ge tuza ashirwad tila
Mitun ghe tuzi nital papni
Zak indrayani hicha dola
Kuthun mi anu ata hichi hada
Manun ghe god photo ata.[5-78]*

(Oh river Indrayani, Please hug the photo of Ambu with love, wish your best for her and let her sour rest in peace forever...for I cannot bring her bones to give her last rituals.. please excuse me and bless her..)

In all the remaining poems of group except '*Yamacha Gana*', (*Song of Yama the God of Death*), *Khurchi*, (*chair*), *Bramhacharya*, (*celibacy*), *Ball ball ball*, *Rog* (*Disease*) and *Chirimiri*) the poet appears as a narrator. The poem '*Khurchi*' has an explicit biographical reference with the poet's name woven in the last line. In these poems we come across few more features of *Balwantbua*'s

personality. Even the subject of death of *Balwantbua* gets a sportive, lite- hearted and humorous expression, in last two poems titled '*Yamacha Gana*' and '*Chirimiri*'. In '*Yamacha Gana*', *Yama* the God of death comes to receive *Balwantbua* and appeals him to seat on an ox and convince him that if he had told before, he could have brought a young buffalo for him. But since he didn't *Yama* allows *Balwantbua* freedom to take as much luggage as he wants along with. He gives examples from *Shahajahan* the Mughal Emperor to *Mahatma Gandhi* that they requested him to take their belongings with them but he denied. It is only for *Balwantbua* he provides such a special permission. He being a way-world, in his attitude, *Balwantbua* interrogates the ways of God to man.

The last poem of all that bears the title of the collection is like the three preceding ones that depicts the theme of death. The word '*Chirimiri*' means a bribe. Giving bribe for every small thing is a current practice in the society. The narrator suggests that even god is not exception for the same. You can prolong your life giving him bribe in form of his praise, regular practice of *Yoga* or other exercises. *Balwantbua's* attitude towards death is completely opportunistic and non-committal. He questions *Yama* that what crime did he commit except getting birth. He finally comes to conclusive decision:

*'Balwantbua mhane kashala parat parat
bhale tyachyapeksha mi nahich marat.'*[5-100]

(Says *Balwantbua*, why again and again... Okay then I cancels to die.)

In fact, the intrinsic metaphysical value in *warkari* movement is mocked at in a poem like '*Ball ball ball*'. The poem underlines the philosophical confusion regarding death among the masses. The poet seems not to accept the traditional conception of life after death. The existence has no value beyond 'here' and 'now'. The characters do not believe in religious belief of poetic justice that the virtuous deeds of the present time will be rewarded in the next incarnation. The existence of God as the almighty, the center, the controller of the universe is subverted by showing the will of *Balwantbua* dominates the decisions of Lord *Vithoba*. His authority and even his behavior are challenged firstly by his wife *Rukmini* in a poem '*Wamangi*' and secondly by the prostitutes on the way to *Pandharpur* who say:

*'Amhi chalun yayacha
pannas panchyahattar kos
tu matra halu nakos
jagacha agdi.'*[5-35]

(We only travel fifty to seventy five miles but you, O *Vitthala*, never make even a slightest move..)

Such a non- committal, matter of fact attitude towards life and death is a very characteristic of modern man and modern poetry.

The order in which the poems occur in a collection has a semantic value. The first group of poems depicts a journey to *Pandharpur* which introduces the nature and personality of *Balwantbua* among prostitutes and in public. As he reaches to *Pandharpur* we see him in connection with *Vithoba* and other Saints. The second group shows his cunning, mischievous being in the society with poems like '*Kulabyachi Feri*' (*A Ride to Kulaba*), '*Madmechya zagyat Ghusayachi Gosta*' (*A story of entering in the frock of Madam*) and '*Patrik kelichya offisatil bhajanacha Vrittant*' (*A Report of Official Bhajan Singing in the Office of Sir Patric Kelly*)

The poems like '*Amba*' (*mango*) and '*Tomato*' are completely metaphorical. They do not occur as vegetables or fruits. Apparently they appear to be one, but for the immediate purpose they

appear as an object or a means to hide the money or theft for the narrator- protagonist Balwantbua who works at the vegetable shop.

His stanzas range from couplet through triplet, quartet, five line to six lines stanzas as in 'Babu', 'Wagh' (tiger) within couplet we observe internal rhyme in poems like 'Ghoda' (horse) :

*Kon jane kutha gela coachman
Rastyan sodun ghodagadi....[5-58]*

(who knows where the coachman is out ? Living the coach on the street)

Throughout the poem, in each couplet, the last syllable of first line rhymes with last syllable of second last word of second line. The rhyme/ rhythm/ music/ prosody that appear in poems are highly unconventional and a-typical of poetic uses. The features are closer to and meticulously chosen from the colloquial, dialect of rustic fellows. It is this natural music of the colloquial dialect that he exploits for his poetic purpose. In a language, there is nothing a-poetic for him. No area of human experience, however important or trivial is kept beyond the circumference of poetic content. No subject is avoided for whatever reasons. So called obscene topics are handled with sport and just that they do not appear obscene. Nothing ugly is hidden or beautiful highlighted. Life as it appears before him is accepted as a content of poetry. Highly sensitive to each aspects of the life the poet never falls prey to sentimentality. As a poet, as a narrator he maintains a complete objective tone.

The culture studies during 1980^s observed three trends namely:

1. Rejection of modernity
2. Interrogation of modernity
3. Consumption of modernity.

The characters in Kolatkar's poetic universe follow all these three trends as per the requirements of time and space. Hence in Kolatkar's poetic world the pre-modern becomes the only possible means of resistance and the popular is assumed to be a homogeneous mass always resisting. The popular is thus appropriated by modernity and appropriates modernity.

All translations and paraphrases of Marathi poems by Kolatkar in English are by the author

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