

Pastoral Elements in 5 Arun Kolatkar's 'Jejuri'

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Arun Kolatkar was born in 1932 in Kolhapur. He worked as graphic artist in Bombay. He was a brilliant bilingual poet, who wrote in English and Marathi. His major works in English are *the boatride* (1968) as spelled by the poet, *Jejuri* (1976), *Sarpa Satra* (2003) *Kala Ghoda Poems* (2004), and *The Boatride and Other Poems* (2009). His major works in Marathi are such as *Arun Kolatkar's Kavita* (1976), *Chirimiri* (2003), *Bhijki Vahi* (2003) and *Droan* (2004).

Kolatkar was awarded the prestigious award called *Commonwealth Poetry Prize* for his first volume of poems called *Jejuri* in 1977. No single book of poetry has received such continuous and serious critical appreciation and attention as *Jejuri*. Certainly, it is an important literary document containing profoundly 'socio-cultural' and 'pastoral' elements.

Keywords: Kolatkar, Jejuri, pastoral myths, legends, Khandoba, Banai, Mhalasa, bhandara (yellow turmeric powder), Lord Shiva, Nandi (holy bull), bagad (hook, a self-torture instrument), blue horse, Ghode-Uddan (horse flight), Gondhal Jagran (the night-long musical and dramatic recitation).

Myths means a story, usually of unknown origin and at least partially traditional that relates actual events to explain some practice, belief, institution, or natural phenomenon and that is essentially associated with religious rites and beliefs. The word mythology denotes both the study of study of myths and total corpus of myths in particular culture or religious tradition

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(*Encyclopedia Britannica: 2006: VIII-p - 470*). Pastoral Myths mean the stories of the countryside, portraying country life, especially in a sentimental or romantic way. Pastoral myths are related to country life or farming, especially the keeping of animals and the life style of pastoral nomads.

The present paper intends to present some pastoral myths in Arun Kolatkar's *Jejuri*.

The history of the holy pilgrimage to Jejuri and the folk-god Khandoba forms the background of the poem *Jejuri*. Jejuri is a village situated about 48 kms from the city of Pune, in the state of Maharashtra.

At Jejuri there is holy shrine of Khandoba to which millions of pilgrims from all sections of the Hindu community, particularly from Maharashtra and north Karnataka visit throughout the year. The god that is worshipped here is 'Khandoba'. Khandoba is the god of nomadic and pastoral tribes. It is gradually evolved from his status of a folk hero and has been accepted as family god (Kul-daivat or protector) by Brahmins as well as non-Brahmins in Maharashtra since long. Khandoba is worshipped in Maharashtra and also in Karnataka, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Tamilnadu. Khandoba is accepted as a protector god. It is believed that Khandoba can bestow wealth, health and children on his devotees. Like all protector gods Khandoba must be pleased by suitable offerings to him in his shrine at Jejuri. Throughout days in the year devotees from all over Maharashtra visit Jejuri. At least about thousands of devotees are found to be making their offering to Khandoba. The nomadic origin of Khandoba is seen from the fact that the offerings are goats and fowls that are sacrificed near the shrine. The vegetarian devotees offer sweets made of lentil and jaggery ('*Puran Poli*' mentioned in the poem *The Priest in Jejuri*, p-14). Just as it is believed that Khandoba protects his devotees

and grants their demands for wealth, health and children, he can also be angry with them, if the devotees fail to propitiate him or worship according to an age old code of worship. If they fail to visit Jejuri or are unable to make sacrifice after an important event like marriage or the birth of a child in the family, it is believed that they have to face the wrath of their beloved deity. This pleasure-displeasure trait has much to do with the pastoral set-up from which the deity has sprung up.

In the Indian tradition this mode of worship is called 'sakam bhakti' (devotion to god with expectations as regards the fulfillment of these worldly demands). Some scholars have traced the origin of Khandoba to the southern states of India such as Karnataka or Tamilnadu could well have formed a cultural region with strikingly similar folk deities and the modes of worship.

Khandoba emergence as a folk deity can be traced back to 08th century A.D. There are a number of Khandoba shrines or temples in Maharashtra and Karnataka. This deity is worshipped in a number of places out of which eleven are from Karnataka and Maharashtra. These are: 1) Kade- Karhe Pathar, Jejuri 2) Nimgaon, Pune District 3) Shengud, Ahmednagar 4) Satare, Aurangabad 5) Naldurg Dharashive, Osmanabad 6) Pali-Pembur, NorthSatara 7) Mangsuli, Belgaon 8) Dharwad 9) Mailar- Dewargadh, Dharwad 10) Mailar or Man-Mailar, Ballari 11) Milapur, Bidar (Khare Ganesh Hari: (1958) *Maharashtrachi Char Daiwat*, p-80). This deity is known by a variety of names. His and his wife's names show that they are derived from Sanskrit words, but almost all the technical words in the sectarian rites are of non Sanskrit origin No other deity as this one has so many proverbial sayings about him in Marathi and Dravidian languages. Some of his names have become personal names and Maharashtrian surnames. His names also point out that he is the

combination of Shiva, Bhairav and Surya. Three types of his images and vehicles (vahanas) namely a formless stone, a linga, a four handed icon with the attributes, a sword, trident, a damaru and a drinking bowl as well as a horse and a bull as vehicles corroborate the above inference. Though not much worshipped in the North; in the South he has incredibly many followers right from Brahmins to untouchables. As Banai and Hegadi, belonging to the paster shepherd castes like Dhangar or Kurubar are looked upon as his mistress and minister respectively. The Dhangars or Kurubars have a special devotion for this deity. Of course, Jejuri is the holiest and one of the important shrines of Khandoba for his devotees. There are two shrines at Jejuri, one located on a hill some four miles South-West of Jejuri village is called 'Kade-Karhe Pathar'. It is regarded as the oldest and the more 'potent' place for the devotees. This shrine faces east, in it there is linga representing Khandoba and also a man-made idol of Khandoba. In the Indian tradition the idol in the shrine may be 'swayambhu' (self formed). These usually are stones or rocks in the shape of phallus. These are believed to have 'emerged' where the god made his descent on the earth. They may be man-made. At Karhe Pathar, there are some other temples of deities connected with Khandoba or deities such as Maruti, Ram associated with a holy place (Raykar Shubhangi: 1995: *Jejuri: A Commentary and Critical Perspective*, p-3).

The other shrine of Khandoba at Jejuri is situated on another spur of the same hill, popularly known as Jejuri Gad (Jejuri Fort). It is much lower in the height than Karhe Pathar. This shrine also faces east. In the sanctum there are swayambhu lingas representing Khandoba his consort Mhalasa. There are in addition silver and gold idols of Khandoba and Mhalasa. The area around the temple is well protected by erecting an impressive rampart around it. A little lower down there is a shrine dedicated

to Banai, the daughter of a nomad chieftain. Banai's parents were living in the village, Chandanpuri in Malegaon Tehasil and Nasik District (Dhere R.C.:2007: *Dakshinecha Lokdev Shri Khandoba*, p-55). Today also Banai at Chandanpuri is worshipped as family goddess (Kul-Daiwat) by many people. According to the popular legend Khandoba was in love with Banai and married her.

Khandoba was the folk god of nomadic tribes, regarded by lower castes among the Hindus. However gradually many other sections of the society came to accept Khandoba as their family or clan god (Kul-Daiwat). However many of the practices to propitiate Khandoba continued by the devotees to be somewhat repulsive to people of finer sensibility. One of the more repulsive practices is to offer one's own child, male or female to the god. This has led to the rise of a new class of devotees namely 'Vaghya' and 'Murlis'. 'Vaghya', the male child, leads his whole life in the service of Khandoba. 'Murli', the female child dedicated to Khandoba and turns to be a Devdasi, a female servant to God or the keeper of the temple. Khandoba's career as a deity has passed through various stages. Initially he was a folk hero, protector of cattle and sheep. He was then raised to the status of protector god. He was being worshipped in the form of linga. Thus Khandoba is a living presence for a very large section of Maharashtrians and the place Jejuri reverberates throughout the year and particularly on certain auspicious days with ecstatic loud cries of his devotees— '*Yelkot Yelkot Jai Malhar*' '*Sadanandacha Yelkot*—' with yellow turmeric powder i.e. '*bhandara*' (Raykar Shubhangi:1995: *Jejuri: A Commentary and Critical Perspective*, p-5& 6).

All the thirty one sections of Arun Kolatkar's *Jejuri* abound in references to the locations, landscapes and experiences in and around Jejuri and to the events and characters related to

the Khandoba legends. Some of the poems have taken as specimen to highlight pastoral myths.

The poem *The Horseshoe shrine* is deals with deep faith of the priest and devotees of Khandoba. It is based on the pastoral myth and the fantastic legend of Khandoba and his horse. According to the legend Khandoba carried Banai from her father's house on a blue horse (Dhere R.C. p-55). The horse, in a big leap, jumped across the hill. The horse hit the hill so hard that the mark of the horseshoe dug into side of the hill. The poem is about the story of love between Khandoba and Banai. As if it is a romantic and sentiment love story of lovers from the country side. It is beautifully expressed by the poet as:

*1. like thunderbolt
when Khandoba
with the bride sidesaddle behind him on the blue
horse*

*2. jumped across the valley
and three
went on from there like one spark
(Kolatkar: 2006:23)*

The poem *The Butterfly* evokes such a response. The devotees of Khandoba smear turmeric powder on their body and forehead i.e. 'bhandara'. The butterfly is a very small creature of a yellow colour, noticed by the narrator. Therefore, it looks like a pinch of yellow colour i.e. 'bhandara'. The butterfly has a symbolic significance in the poem. It symbolizes yellow turmeric powder at religious level, and also symbolizes life, joy at the literal or physical level. Therefore the poet describes as:

*1. It's a little yellow butterfly.
It has taken these wretched hills*

Under its wings.

2. *just a pinch of yellow,*

it opens before it closes

and closes before it o

(Kolatkar: 2006:31)

The butterfly is co-related with the turmeric powder associated with the folk god.

The poem *Ajamil And Tigers* is the longest poem in *Jejuri*. The poem is a poetic rendering of folk tale. The story of *Ajamil and His Dogs* appears in *Jayadri Mahatmya*. The first chapter of the seventh Book of '*Bhagvata Puran*' too contains the same story.

Dharmaraj asked Shankar, "How is it that the sheep offered by a shepherd without any ritual was accepted by the god and eaten?" Shankar said, "I will tell you the story in brief. There was a shepherd devotee of Martand called Ajamil. He always remembered god. He grazed his sheep in a forest which had many tigers in it. So he prayed to god, "O God, you are my only protector. I am a small, sinful man. Please protect my sheep from the tigers." The people know that Ajamil's sheep were safe. So many people would give their sheep to Ajamil for grazing.

One day the tigers roamed from wood to wood to eat sheep. This went on for fifteen days but they did not get a single sheep. So they went to their king and said, "What shall we do now?" All the people have asked Ajamil to look after their sheep. Ajamil, who sits under the sandalwood tree, has a fearful dog. The tiger king said, "Come on, let's all go there". So they went near the sandal tree where all the sheep had gathered. It was midday, when the tiger king saw the huge dog, he said, "This is very strange, actually, dogs are our food but today we are afraid of them" When Ajamil saw the tigers, he saluted them

reverentially. The tiger king said, 'Oh! This shepherd is scared for us. That is why he is saluting us. Now I will prove my power by killing all the sheep along with Ajamil. Thus, he proceeded further to attack a sheep. The dog attacked the tiger king. The tiger king was so frightened that he dropped the sheep and ran away. The dog defeated all the tigers. He tied them to a rope and took them to Naldurg (to the temple of Bhairav). Bhairav was angry with the tigers. Then the tiger king ventured "Now I have seen you (taken your darshan). I remember who I was in my previous birth? I was the king of Champanager and the tigers were my companions. We used to usurp the poor and weak. We imprisoned them without giving anything. This went on for many years till a more powerful king killed me in a war. Because of the previous deeds we are the tigers in this birth. All our sins have been now washed away. Please, tell us "What we should do in order to be born in good Yoni (next birth)". After listening to this, Martand Bhairav said, "Now listen. You will always stay at my feet and your sins of killing sheep will be washed away in this very birth. You need not be afraid of dogs any more. Take this turmeric power (bhandara) and sprinkle on the bodies of all".

As soon as the tiger king did it, they were transformed in to human beings. They all worshipped Martand Bhairav. Bhairav asked them. Make a pouch of tiger's skin and always tie it round your neck by string. Put some bhandara in it and apply it to your body from time to time. You will be known as Vaghya (Raykar Shubhangi: 1995 *Jejuri: A Commentary and Perspective*, p-127). The words 'tiger people', 'tiger king', 'queen', 'sheep dog', 'shepherd', 'lamb', and 'flute' in the poem show the pastoral setting of the poem.

The poem *A Song For Vaghya*, is related with the legend of *Ajamil And The Tigers*. It has the similar source from

mythology. According to the mythological story, Vaghya must kill a tiger, his mother, to make a pouch in which he has to carry turmeric powder i.e. 'bhandara'. So the poet says:

killed my mother

For her skin

(Kolatkhar: 2006:37)

The Vaghyas beg oil from door to door for their torch. Vaghyas demand for oil is considered to be a form of begging. It is in fact a part of religious practice peculiar in Khandoba cult. The torch that Vaghya carries in his hand must always be kept burning. The oil for the torch is to be obtained from the devotees only. The Vaghya is offered in sacrifice by parents to become a life-long male devotee of Khandoba.

The poem *The Reservoir*, presents a myth related with Khandoba worship. Khandoba is originally a folk god, a protector god of the shepherds (dhangars) a, nomadic community. The shepherds strongly believe in Khandoba. The poet, while visiting the temple on the hills, comes across a water reservoir built by the Peshwas. It is said that Aurangzeb, the Mughal emperor, offered a diamond wasp to Khandoba. The Peshwas, whose family god was Ganesha, built a water reservoir partly out of respect for the folk god and partly because it was the ruler's responsibility to provide such facilities at places of pilgrimage. Thus, Khandoba has symbolic significance as the god of shepherds and also as the god of all communities and religions. The lines show the century's span as:

There is nothing in it.

Except a hundred years of silt. (Kolatkhar: 2006: 40)

It means the myths had a long history and have been continued years and years tougher still today.

The poem *A Kind of Cross* describes the nandi (a bull). In the traditional mythology, the bull is the vehicle of Lord Shiva.

It occupies a significant place in front of the temple of Shiva. The poet presents both the nandi and the cross. He offers us a very detailed picture of the cross, the 'bagad' (hook, a self torture instrument) an instrument of self torture. This instrument has a religious significance because Lord Shiva used it for killing the demons or for abolishing evils on the earth. For the rational narrator poet, it is simply a type of cross. The nandi and cross are the symbols of pastoral background.

The poem *The Blue Horse* is about the night-long musical and dramatic recitation of the legends of the deity 'Gondhal Jagran'. The people believe in these rituals to be performed immediately after a marriage in order to get the blessings of Khandoba. The priest in the poem has limited knowledge but pretends to become expert. The songs in the 'Gondhal' are mostly invocations to Khandoba and gods at Jejuri. The narrator being a non believer is struck by the hoarse and harsh music. He also notices that the singers in their songs mention 'a blue horse'. The picture of Khandoba that is hung on the wall of the priest's house shows the horse to be 'white'. The narrator is moved by the discrepancy while the priest is not. The poet describes it as:

The singers sang of a blue horse.

How is it then, that the picture on your wall

Show white one?'

Looks blue to me.

(Kolatkar: 2006:52)

The priest is ignorant about the two kind of horses referred to the legends. The horse that Khandoba normally used was a white one, but the horse that he used while fighting with the demons Mani and Mala and kidnapping Banai was blue. It doesn't make any difference to the devotees, because they blindly believe and faithfully follow the information provided by the priest to them.

The poem also shows how the moon was ordered to become a horse for Khandoba at the time of his war with the demons -Mani and Malla. The moon arrived on the hills and grazed there in the form of 'a blue horse' till the time was ripe for the attack. 'Ghode Uddan' (horse flight) is a place on Jejuri fort. The horse that Khandoba normally used was white but while fighting with the demons Mani and Malla and kidnapping Banai he used the 'blue horse', the disguised moon. The horse is one of the animals used by rural people living in the jungles for their various purposes or in rural life.

Pastoral myths as very important aspect of the culture of Maharashtra and some of these are reflected in some of the poems in *Jejuri*. The stories and the reference of the animals and persons in the poems built the background as the pastoral elements and myths in the volume *Jejuri*.

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