

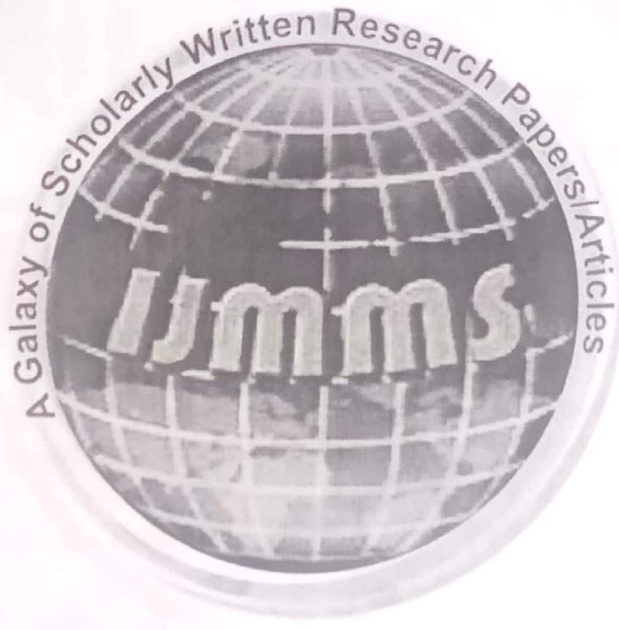
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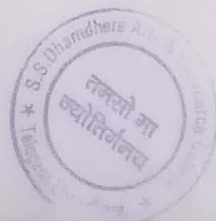
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Literary Theory in Practice: A Case of Arun Kolatkar's *Jejuri* in light of Intentional Fallacy

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Abstract

Teaching and Learning of literary theory very often remains rather a very formal, technical exercise. This paper aims to contextualizing of literary theory by applying it with poetry. The Theory of 'Intentional fallacy' has been attempted here to be understood in light of Arun Kolatkar's poems in his anthology 'Jejuri'. The 'Jejuri' poems are interpreted on the basis of 'text' and 'intention of the author'.
 Key Words: Intentional fallacy – textual criticism – new critics – Interpretation -- W.K. Wimsatt – M.C. Beardsley -- author and the text -- literary theory -- Jejuri -- theism – atheism --

To call this attempt a research paper in the strict sense of the term is indeed a question before me. Rather, this is an attempt to spell out the classroom experiences while teaching Literary Criticism and Theory. Understanding as well as teaching literary theory is very demanding task for teachers. No doubt, it remains, rather, mystic and unappealing for undergraduate students. The students do not follow literary theory when it is taught in isolation but they do follow it when it is taught in association with any literary work. To understand, to appreciate or to interpret any poem can be called a very primary activity of literary criticism. Correlating literary theory to a literary work enhances the degree of comprehension of both literary work and the theory. 'Intentional fallacy' is one such term which has paved the way for textual criticism. W.K. Wimsatt, Jr. and M.C. Beardsley used the term in order to question the tendency to understand poet's intention to understand his poem. Wimsatt and Beardsley argued that, "the design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art." The authors express their concern regarding trend to interpret contemporary poetry especially its allusiveness with regard to poet's intention. It is quite acceptable that a poem does not come into existence by accident but rather it comes from the head and heart of the poet. It's also agreeable that poems by and large come out of poet's personal experiences and observations. But, the poets use 'language' as a medium to express that ultimately belongs to society. The consequent question arises that how far the poets succeed in translating their intention in their poems if they really have any. Most of the poets, argue the authors, admit that they did not set out to create what they have created. Besides, probing into poet's intention does not necessarily lead to complete understanding of the poem. The understanding and interpretation of poem therefore is independent of its poetic intention.

The authors cite John Donne's poem, 'The Valediction: the forbidding Mourning' to elaborate their point. Donne's use of metaphors like "moving of the earth" and "trepidation of the spheres" attracts attention of the critics. But, it is worthless to study Donne's inclination towards old and new astronomy since the text itself and the metaphors are self-explanatory. The moving of the earth i.e. an earthquake brings sudden and larger destruction. On the other hand, trepidation of the earth suggests moving of the earth causing no harm. The lover bidding farewell to his beloved wants her to remain as calm as the trepidation of the earth. Wimsatt and Beardsley further explain their point with the reference to T. S. Eliot's poem like 'The Waste Land' and its allusiveness. Here, they argue that notes provided by Eliot tend to seem to justify themselves as external indexes to the author's intention, yet they ought to be judged like any other parts of composition.



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This term can be understood if studied in association. Any Indian English poem can be useful for better comprehension of the term and the poem as well. For the present purpose some lines and some poems of Arun Kolatkar have been selected; Arun Kolatkar is a bilingual poet operating in Marathi and English. Rajeev Patke in his essay 'Poetry Since Independence' (included in 'An Illustrated History of Indian Literature in English' edited by A.K. Mehrotra) describes Arun Kolatkar as the true modernist of Indian poetry in English along with A.K. Mehrotra. Kolatkar's name was internationally recognized with the publication of 'Jejuri' (1976). It won Commonwealth Prize for Poetry in 1977. 'Jejuri' follows a loose narrative sequence visualizing a trip to the shrine temple of 'Khandoba', situated near Pune in Western Maharashtra. The picture of Lord 'Khandoba', a form of Shiva worshipped by Maharashtra's Dhanger community, on the cover tempted many critics to confuse the poem with the place. To follow the work to understand the poet's attitude towards God proved futile indeed. To question the poet's intention behind choosing the images of 'Khandoba' and other deities from Jejuri is a sort of intentional fallacy. This fallacy might lead us to personal beliefs and disbeliefs of the poet. The poems in the anthology are self-explanatory but the interpretation requires common minimum knowledge of myths and legends associated with Lord 'Khandoba'.

The poem 'Heart of Ruin' describes the shrine of Maruti in these words:

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.

'Maruti' is a monkey-god in Ramayana who once held aloft a mountain. Here, the same 'Maruti' cannot hold the roof of his own temple. The next line 'nobody seems to mind' speaks about the shift of traditional faith into mere objectification of the shrine. Neither the priest nor the devotees mind such a ruinous condition of the temple. But the ritual of worshipping keeps generating 'dakshana' (donation) for priests and 'punya' (the good deeds) for the devotees. In first three lines the narrator tends to seem atheist mocking at deity but with the fourth line he adopts a neutral stance. The poem goes ahead with the lines;

A mongrel bitch has found a place

For herself and her puppies

In the heart of ruin.

May be she likes a temple better this way

The bitch looks out at you guardedly

past a doorway cluttered with broken tiles.

In these lines, the narrator brings everybody on equal footing; whether it is God 'Maruti', the bitch, or the devotees. Nobody is bothered about this ruinous condition of the temple. The heart of ruin, here, is not only the broken and shabby temple but ruins of our beliefs and cultural sanctity also. The poem ends with the same sarcasm;

No more a place of worship this place



is nothing less than the house of god.

The poet refuses to call this place a place worthy of worship. The poet calls the temple 'nothing less than the house of god' as the house if neglected can turn into ruins. The poem 'A Scratch' describes how easy it is in Jejuri to create gods and their associated legends:

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

The poem describes, with the same dry and sarcastic outlook, Lord Khandoba's wife as 'that giant hunk of rock, the size of a bedroom'. He further describes the crack on the rock and explains the legend associated with it. It is said that the crack in fact is a scar, a mark of wound when 'Khandoba' in a fit of rage struck his wife down with his sword. The intention of the poet, whatever it may be, is worthless to probe into. The description hitherto might lead us to assume that its, nonetheless, a glorification of myths and legends of Jejuri. But, the last two lines come as a shock and break the assumption;

scratch a rock
and a legend springs

A.K.Mehrotra cites answer given by Arun Kolatkar when an interviewer asked him whether he believed in God. Kolatkar's answer, in fact, closes all the gates of inferences based on biographical investigation and possibility of 'intended meaning'. He replied, "I leave the question alone. I don't think I have to take a position about God one way or the other" (Page no. 54, *Twelve Modern Indian Poets*). Similarly, his lesser known poem 'Suicide of Rama' describes the death of Rama, the hero of 'Ramayana'. 'Rama' is a mythical figure very commonly known or worshipped across India. He epitomizes the perfect manhood and is often cited as an ideal to be followed by society. The word 'suicide' in the title might again stir us. The Sanskrit word used to refer to willing death of godly figures is 'dehtyag' (submission of body) and not suicide. The word suicide is commonly used to refer to willing death of a common person. The 'text' itself explains the reason of choice of this word.

winding verses stir him up
the turreted epic shrugs him off
the river resumes him
from legend's ledge the hero falls

The poet does not speak about the 'legendary' hero Rama but the common man fallen from the legend. The common devotee of Rama would never imagine what would have happened when



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Rama at the end of 'Ramayana' offered himself to the river 'Sarayu'. Kolatkar, with his usual dryness, describes the dead body of Rama:

his flesh of myth saponified
 his arse turned up toward the moon
 Rama drifts like a gourd
 far from sap or shore

The objective textual analysis of the poem leads us to an interpretation that does not depend upon 'the intention' of the poet nor upon the biographical investigation. After the close analysis of the poems in 'Jejuri', we can come to the conclusion that the presiding deity of 'Jejuri' is not 'Khandoba', but the 'human eye' looking at everything with objectivity. The term 'intentional fallacy' denotes the problem inherent in trying to judge a work of art by assuming the intent or purpose of the artist who created it. The term, simultaneously, narrowed the scope of 'biographical approach' to criticism and it also directed 'new critics' to proclaim even 'the death of the author'.

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