In the preceding chapters a comparative analysis is undertaken along some chosen specific contexts to suggest the divergences of two poetic endeavours. The comparative analysis has been realized through a simultaneous study of the poets of two streams of poetry in terms of their philosophical urges and cultural commitments.

In order to present a composite picture of analysis a comparative study of two seminal texts of two leading poets, one from mainstream Hindi poetry and another from mainstream Indian English poetry is undertaken in this chapter. This study is aimed at confirming the piecemeal observations made earlier. Also the authors and their texts picked for comparison have not been touched upon in the preceding comparative analysis. This chapter then is in the form of case study. This study not only testifies the findings made earlier, it helps in generalizing them as well.

In the present chapter first *Atmajayee* a mile stone in new Hindi poetry is studied to bring forth the urges and impulses of the protagonist of new Hindi poetry. In the light of this study, another much-quoted Indian English text entitled *Jejuri* is evaluated to generate a comparative perspective on the nature and character of the protagonist of Indian English Poetry. In this comparative study, the focus is not as much on the writers (Kunwar Narain and Arun Kolatkar respectively) as it is on the texts.
the mythical episode of Nachiketa, a child of a learned father Vajshrava, arguing with Yama, the God of Death, on the eternal mystery of death. In this creative enterprise, the myth of Nachiketa is re-invented to probe into the psychological and mental condition(s) of modern man without any intention of dislocating or disrupting the original myth. However, it does not imply that all mythical details have been retained or that Atmajayee as a collection of poems is a plain and simple exercise of interpretation of the Kathopnishad, the original source of the myth of Nachiketa. In his introduction to Atmajayee, Kunwar Narain clarifies:

These poems are not interpretation of Kathopnishad. Only simple clues have been taken from different slokas of Kathopnishad — without retaining their exact meaning and order, and without accepting any type of their constrain on poems. Often a fundamental difference could be discerned in the intentions of slokas and poems, but despite this difference, the effort has been not to allow any conceptual incongruity in the whole work.

Obviously in the poet's mythopoetic vision there is no apparent clash or contradiction between the mythical reality and the historical experience. The poet discovers a striking relevance of the myth of Nachiketa, sans its rigid or fundamental religio-philosophic associations, in the contemporary context. He writes:

Without bothering much about the religious and philosophic aspects of Atmajayee, I have emphasised more on those human experiences which contemporary man is undergoing, and of which Nachiketa could be an important symbol.

Kunwar Narain's mythic concern centers on the image of (a cultured) man irrespective of his religion or caste. The myth of Nachiketa is a befitting cultural correlative of unfinished man's journey from life to death and then from death to beyond death. Significant aspect of Kunwar Narain's treatment of myth is that he does not disbelieve myth. He resuscitates myth not to debunk or dismiss it as some irrational fabulation of a primitive mind but to extend it by
way of its acceptance as a cultural paradigm relevant for all times. As explained already, contrary to general critical observation, in new Hindi poetry, myth is not dislocated in a radical manner, rather it is revived and restored positively as a narrative of the refulgent past. Myth is a reminder of tradition, a vestige of cultural legacy. Narain’s mythic perception is not ironic or agnostic because in his vision the mythical coincides with the real, rather it is co-extensive with the real.

Kunwar Narain, as a poet deeply anchored in his native cultural tradition, does not disown its mythology to conform to Western ideals of empiricism and rationalism. Myth in his poetry is not rationalized or re-structured with any modernist intention of sheer pragmatism or existentialism. Nor is it subverted with any post-modernist obsession of inverting the established, the pre-meant and the apriori. Mythical situations are of course lifted beyond their immediate religious contexts. The poet recognises the falsity of separating Indian myths from their immediate religious context:

... But today it is nearly impossible to separate Hinduism from Hindu mythological past, whereas Greek myths remained almost untouched from Christianity and European mysticism. The influence of later religious fervour on Indian myths is so deep that imparting a pure human import to them looks suddenly difficult.\(^3\)

Surely Kunwar Narain does not treat myth on the level of concept only. His aim no doubt is “not the postulation of certain specific philosophic, ethical or religious or social value” (Atmajayee, p.8) through myth. Myth, in the poet’s vision, is not simply a religious or social fable or a moral story or a divine saga, rather it is a cultural framework of eternal relevance.

A detailed textual analysis of Atmajayee reveals not only the poet’s creative approval of the myth of Nachiketa, but also its relevance as an archetypal framework of man’s search for truth in life. Nachiketa in this sense is an archetypal and cultural symbol of an unfinished consciousness that revolts against the conservative materialism that stifles growth and pegs life to petty and ordinary ends of mundane
existence. Nachiketa undergoes an inward journey symbolizing the unfinished man's fluid ego or his constant becoming.

To begin with Nachiketa has an intuition, a premonition that he is destined to fight endless battle against average living of material gains. Even the prospects of kingship do not entice him: "Not now any crown and medal./ Not now coronation and the burden of kingdom." (p.15). As an unfinished man Nachiketa desires to transcend the personal and the private. He prays:

Grant me
the strength to undergo eternal asceticism.
to possibly realise the desired end of
some immoratality
honouring which the humanity is honoured. (p.15)

The unfinished man in Hindi poetry is not a corrupt opportunist who seeks to grow in life through foul means. Nachiketa believes in the purity of means, As a man of conviction, he is uncompromising:

This much pride should I have

Never to bow before corrupt coronations
Nor should I give respect to them . . .

Better it is to be offered silently to
endless procrastinations . . . (p.17)

Growth demands inordinate patience and wait. The unfinished man does not leapfrog towards his desired ends. Nachiketa waits at the doorstep of Lord Yama for three days unattended and uncared. It is this exceptional wait that opens new vistas of life and death to Nachiketa.

Nachiketa questions the integrity of his father Vajshrava not to caricaturize or lampoon him as an eccentric being of unpredictable moods and whims but to expose the limited and parochial ends of patriarchy as such. Patriarchy seeks to extend itself by way of imposing its feudal and conservative value system on the male-successors of the family. Vajashrava is a downright materialist sans any
comprehensive vision or individual insight. He is just another "creature/ like all, made of time/ whom throne bestows one role,/ crown one title,/ army one duty,/ personal safety one dharma,/ members of assembly one responsibility . . . " (p. 19). Patriarchy perpetuates itself through the power and legitimacy it enjoys in the society, but Nachiketa refuses to bow down to this unreality of patriarchy thus:

Sometimes fighting midst a huge army,
Sometimes hunting
Sometimes honoured by the position of a judge,
Sometimes enjoying the harem
. . . Looking at all at once
I feel that you are exaggerated everywhere,
And therefore unreal too. (p. 19)

Eternal glory beckons Nachiketa; momentary power or glamour cannot dazzle him into any stagnating complacency. Repeatedly he reminds his powerful father the transience of glittering crown thus:

Everywhere you are an ordinary creature of thirst and hunger,
on whose crown and throne
the rays of sun fall in such a way
that you look divine . . . but all this glitter
would bewail just as the sun sets. (p. 19)

Father is no more valorised as a role model for the new generation. Rather he is constantly interrogated and even castigated for his complicity with the violent power brokers of history.

Nachiketa as an evolving ego, does not assert himself through violence or deception. Existential imperatives or the compulsions of survival do not determine his destiny. He disapproves his father's opportunistic handshake with forces of existence. On existence, he would say:

Existence could be a fatal logic.
And bestial sentiment too- so much so
that war and strife look essential
living with selfishness and deception might become a compulsion.
(p.21)

The existential compromises are forsaken unequivocally:

[I] don't crave for this promise of yours
which can prove itself through violence only.
Nor do I want this faith whose climax is murder only.

Nachiketa, cast in the role of an upanishadic explorer of self, does not believe in any violent hegemonic control over ever-evolving and ever-shifting truth(s) of life.

As an unfinished man, Nachiketa favours an untamed and untainted pluralistic vision of truth — a vision that cannot be contained in any monologic framework. He broods seriously:

Truth, which we easily believe to be
on our side, has always
remained rebel-like.(p.23)

As a representative of new thinking, he refuses to fall into any ritualistic paradigm of golden past:

New life-consciousness is no more satisfied
with such answers that are related
not with present but with past
not with logic but with ritual. (p.24)

Clearly in Nachiketa's individualistic vision, any readymade reference in from of dogmatic rituals is shunned to measure and predict the vagaries of human predicament. In fact, in the entire range of new Hindi poetry, the protagonist does not depend on divine boons. Even Nachiketa feels that seeking boons from gods is a kind of "give-and-take" business in which the ever-demanding gods erode the individuality of a worshipper in lieu of their boons. The urge, therefore, always is to devise new indigenous strategies to understand circumstances of life afresh without waiting for the promised boons that some heavenly oracle might pronounce.

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The unfinished man's credo of evolution is not straight and linear. It is constantly interrupted and even disrupted by conservative societal forces of systemic equilibrium, balance and maintenance. The interrogating character of Nachiketa is simply shunted out from the social-system itself. This clash of the individual with the system constitutes an inevitably important phase of the unfinished man's life-graph. Vajshrava, the patriarch of society, fails to withstand the interrogating onslaughts of Nachiketa, his teenaged son. In sheer retaliation, cursing the blasphemies of Nachiketa, he seeks his death to choke all notes of dissent. Vajshrava pronounces the sentence: "Death be granted to you." (p.28)

The unfinished man has an uncanny relationship with death. Death, even suicide are not remote to evolutionary enterprise of this man. The existential angst and anomie breed such acute levels of frustration that this man seems to succumb to the deadly and suicidal pressures of existence with almost an irrevocable sense of resignation. Nachiketa too undergoes this morbid phase of self-extinction as he doubts his own individualistic mission:

Punished by the stubborn truths of my own ones,
defeated by their senseless faiths
and their ignorance
I am somehow proved as though I were some criminal,
as though I were my own murderer.
What complex duality of life is this? (pp.30-31)

Nachiketa realizes the emptiness of his whole being thus:

But having spent my soul
and having accumulated just a perversion in return
I have emptied myself. (p.32)

The existential truth of his being alone in his fight against the monolithic society constantly bedevils his sense of resolution. Banished from age, exiled for life, excommunicated from religion Nachiketa in moments of self-doubt asks:

Am I just alive as a lost being
amidst public?
Not available to anyone
helplessly roaming
in the numberless labyrinths of dreams
through the ages? (p.33)

Outer fears and disruptions dislocate and overwhelm Nachiketa’s inner being to an extent that even in his dreams he is terrorized by apocalyptic events like that of a ever-burgeoning deluge or increasing life-consuming darkness. External turbulences generate an inner insecurity. To counter the external upheavals the unfinished man often retreats to his inner chambers only to return to the outer objective world with a new resolve. Nachiketa too internalizes the outer existential worries of loneliness and belonginglessness as he dreams that some “ignorant father/ has thrown a nascent baby into a sea” (p.35) of violent waves, only to be tossed and later on engulfed by them. In the wake of rising sea-level, Nachiketa’s spirit (to hang on) touches the nadir:

Rising from below is the ocean,
Standing on its shoulders of convictions is
life’s one dejected point,
centre-of-consciousness, worried man
hanging in the dreadful mid-air
partly safe and partly caught
in the lips of life and death . . . (p.38)

Like the protagonist of *akavita*, Nachiketa has hallucinations of utter despair and hopelessness; a helpless victim of worldly politics, he laments his state of mute inactivity thus:

One eyed and multi-armed clever *maya*
does not let him ask anything:
Like some luring creature, daily
it clamps him in its jaws
to be abandoned after sucking. (p.41)

Disillusioned Nachiketa is inevitable driven into self-interrogation. Stunned by the heinous dream(s) of turbulent sea and its criminal darkness, Nachiketa is besieged with the eternal worry of ‘what am I?’.
All around there is dome-like iron-silent darkness
on whose walls these striking voices
resonate only the stunning stillness all the more
All these echoes
travel back to me each time —
Where am I?
What am I?
What am I? (p.53)

The sensual pleasures no longer enchant the protagonist:

Music, colour, expression, tough,
beauty, fragrance, attachment, rasa, . . .
these visible desires are incomplete like a dream,
Rising from me and sinking in me
these are just my one-sleep. —
But what am I?
What am I?
What am I? (p.52)

Beleaguered by the forces of opportunism, Nachiketa discovers the
meaninglessness of life thus:

It seems that all around me
there are obstructions only -- no life,
there are people only -- no relations,
Voice there is that does not captivate,
intelligences there are that know not. (p.52)

Indifferent, inert and non-responsive environment tight-corner the sensitive and
hyper-active Nachiketa into self-annihilation. At this point Nachiketa's idiosyncratic,
non-conformist and rebellious subjectivity faces the dangers of liquidation.

Escape in form of suicide emerges as an easy option to relieve oneself
from the callous environment of choked voices and stifled consciences. Nachiketa,
as an ordinary mortal, almost succumbs to the lures of suicide. Dark shadows of
death chase him thus:
One dreadful shadow
threateningly pushing forward
the hesitant feet —
merciless signs of fatal motives.
I want to jump over to any side —
be it abyss, be it fire, be it water
because far more horrible
than all this is that deception/which is neither death nor life
but only one bewilderment/emanating from the two. (pp.55-56)

Of course there are moments of hesitation and conflict:

No,
Not like this — not like this — not like this.
Life is a dharma — not to be condemned vehemently,
not to be thrown into an abyss for the deadly dogs, (p. 58)

The evolutionary gusto of Nachiketa almost comes to standstill. As the circles of
conflict grow thicker, higher and insurmountable, Nachiketa falls flat on the plain
of reality like a bird of broken wings.

It is not that the unfinished man is perennially in a state of upward mobility.
As a man of flesh and blood, this man despite his incorrigible convictions of
revolt against the status quo, undergoes a period of acute depression. A nihilistic
feeling, it so appears, envelops his mental, emotional and psychological faculties.
This phase of insecurity and frustration only vindicates the humanistic credo of
the unfinished man. But such moments of reversal and set back do not full stop
his evolutionary zeal. A radical change exceeding the human in his outlook
becomes imminent.

In Indian philosophy, it is established beyond doubt that fear(s) of liquidation
and dispersal consolidate the identity and the intergrity of the individual all the
more. Here Kunwar Narain is quoted at length:

... the consequence of this 'fear' or 'unrest' would ultimately
be only pesimistic — such a thinking would mean a wrong
understanding of the delineation of one important situation
in Indian philosophy. Any thinking on death should generate
only pessimism towards life, this is not necessary — some
altogether original point of view mightcome forth. Buddha
contemplating on disease, old age and death, has given life such a philosophy which has been alive even hundreds of years after him. The subtle insight of Shankracharya, Kabir etc. was activated by their intense realisation of death.

(p.6-7)

In this context Nachiketa's serious contemplation on death does not mean his death as such, rather it is a productive enterprise that might yield an altogether a new vision — a vision that trusts life and its infinite creative potentialities with a greater vigour than ever before. Kunwar Narain further adds:

... the frustration of Buddha is not very different from that of Nachiketa. Similarly in Gita, when Arjuna lays down his arms saying, 'I shall not fight', at that moment becoming suddenly conscious of meaninglessness of life, Arjuna's agony is without any end.

Improvising upon the original fable of Nachiketa, Kunwar Narain holds Nachiketa in an intermediate phase of suspended animation namely, i.e., the phase of his lapsing into a state of unconsciousness that precedes his actual encounter with Lord Yama. During this phase Nachiketa once again seeks to transcend the cultural bankruptcy of civilization revealing his renewed concern towards life thus:

Where should I go?
In every direction
there are immeasurable distances
much beyond even death.
Which one should I follow
so as to overcome my despairs?
Where is that arm, that life-proven faith
which could accept me, the wandering one
and take me beyond
this thousand of layers deep
decrepit civilization? (p.64)

No longer does he seek to immortalize his death through poetic epitaphs or imperial memorials for:
These memorial
with their greater or (extended) lives
it so seems.
endure the agony of not one but many deaths. (p.67)

At this moment of reflection, Nachiketa feels that he is being chased by some
"ominous" (p.76) undefined "fragmented shadow":

Doubtful it is — whether of animal or of man?
Or is it only vemom brimming?
Is it death itself
or the dead? —
Or a deep experience of both? (p.77)

Undaunted by the frightening gestures of this shadow of Lord Yama, he
even refuses to accept the worldly boons granted to him. Instead of asking for
"material prosperity", "dynastic expansion", "fame", "glory" or "treasures of heaven"
(p.81), Nachiketa asks for "a vision" that "could save life from darkness" (p.84).
He, as a befitting prototype of the unfinished man, recognises that life is an
"incessant search", an "untiring effort" toward the realization of salvation (p.85).
"Not simply for this body/you will have to live inspite of this body"—this
metaphysical awareness of life after death empowers rejuvenated Nachiketa to
sustain his convictions right in the face of death itself (p.89). With a "Vision of
a Creator", he simmers with "a gratification of the immortal", "a new light", "an
agitation of a creator". He invokes his 'self' to dispel the dangers of outer
darkness thus:

Recognize that element of self-consciousness
that from of the ultimate being
which is pure knowledge: not remote from you
but somewhere very near to you. (p.95)

Even this is not enough as he continues to strive for the autonomy for his soul
or self.

The effort always is to rise above the contradictions of life, to
work for
such an autonomy of the soul
where not vanguished by the conflicts of desires
you vanquish the conflicts temselver
rendering life a convincing meaning. (p.97)

This unprecedented resolution of Nachiketa unsettles Lord Yama, the destroyer
of life, into granting this recalcitrant child life once again; he "launches him
back into the stream of life (p.98) as one who has imbibed death itself. With this
overwhelming vision Nachiketa re-enters life as a baptized soul which has
experienced "total realization" (0.104). Basking in the bliss of this ultimate
realization, he recognizes himself as "an elementary future being made and re-
made in countless moulds" (p.105).

Nachiketa undergoes a series of epiphanic revelations. First he sees himself
as "a self-proclaimed . . . presumptuous sprout/ of some impatient creativity,/ an
indefinite primary-event/ prepared for any eventuality" (p.110) An aesthetic
vision of "rays/pure like a swan,/ bright picturesque like nature/ filling wet colours/
on man's heart" besieges his consciousness; "on the rhythms of dance/ intellect/
searches some eternal couplets of life-truths" (p.113) The vision is followed by
a vision of peace that passeth understanding: "In this immeasurable/ [there is]
a realization of the immeasurable peace./ a feeling of imperishable love (p.115)."
Finally Nachiketa has an endless urge:

to live in the unfathomable time
absent like an artistic god —
only as soul
immortality
and wonder
banished in the great shunya
constructing-deconstructing his own dreams
in the midst of fatal faiths —
natural!
incomparable!
unequalled! (p.118)

This open-ended vision of making and re-making oneself continually towards a
vision of supreme life constitutes an inevitable part of the unfinished man's
Kunwar Narain's *Atmajyee* thus traces the graph of an evolving and expanding consciousness that forsakes the narrow material and political designs of patriarchy in favour of a grand deathless vision that defies death and mortality. This upward mobility in Nachiketa's ego is precisely the direction of growth of the unfinished man in new Hindi poetry of which *Atmajyee* could be considered as one of the most representative text. The textual analysis of the treatment of myth in Nachiketa amply reveals that even the so-presumed, West inspired new Hindi poets are not only simply aware of the cultural mythical past of their country, they are responsible too towards their cultural traditions. Nachiketa, Kunwar Narain's model of the unfinished being, undergoes a process of becoming whose dynamics, despite some unavoidable intermediate summersaults, work in a direction that inevitably gravitates towards the spiritual and the metaphysical but only through an intense and first-hand experience of the physical and the existential. Nachiketa's destiny thus is the destiny of a typically Indian unfinished man who cannot disown or disinherit or be simply dishonest to his Vedantic forbearings and who at the same time does not escape away from the immediate historical and existential components of living. Nachiketa does not straight away fall into the lap of the spiritual, his ego is constitutive in its character as it grows step by step with each quantum of experience till it liberates itself from the immediate physical sources of its birth.

II

If Kunwar Narain's *Atmajyee* records the inner journey of a searching soul, Arun Kolatkar's *Jejuri* too is a record of authors pilgrimage that he undertakes to travel through a temple town in Maharashtra named Jejuri. Except for this common leitmotif of journey (or quest) the two collections present striking contrasts revealing the different motives and intentions of the two pilgrims (or two unfinished egos), Nachiketa and the poet-pilgrim respectively. Whereas Kunwar Narain maps out the contours of his 'man' through a well-established mythical paradigm of Nachiketa, Kolatkar creates his own schema to articulate his concept of self.
Kolatker's collection as such is not strictly a remythicization of a myth, yet it is largely a creative outcome of the poet-pilgrim's encounter with the mythical. *Jejuri* therefore not only reveals the poet's attitude towards the myth or the mythical, it also brings forth the 'man' that emerges as a unstable product of the existential and the mythical, both.

Arun Kolatkar's protagonist, like Narain's Nachiketa too interrogates and questions the sanctity of institutionalized forms of authority with a slight shift in focus. If Nachiketa challenges the feudal imperatives of patriarchy, Kolatkar's poet-persona makes an ironic dig at modern commercialized practices of temple-worshipping and idolatry. Of course both temple and father in their traditional ritualistic forms are symbols of conservatism and irrefutable authority. But in terms of degree and quality the protest of Nachiketa has greater conviction and intensity than that of Kolatkar's protagonist who instead of articulating his anger in direct, firm terms, prefers understatement and subtle parody as his chosen strategies of interrogation. In fact despite all modernist hangovers and Western influences on new Hindi poetry, its protagonist does not underplay or soften the tone of his protest suggesting the inherent limitations of alien poetries or traditions on native vernacular creative effort. In modern Indian English poetry this protest is parliamentary and urbane revealing the extent to which Indian English poets have internalised the 'sophistication, and 'decency' of English language and culture too. Nachiketa has the conviction to flout his political, unscruplons father in rather bold and blunt terms; in Kolatkar's poetry this protest does not go beyond the level of doubt and empirical probe. Nachiketa is involved and deeply to his ethos; as a sincere and responsible cultural being he seeks answers of his queries by confronting headlong into the problematics of life. Kolatkar's persona under the garb of impersonality and objectivity, always distantiates himself from the actual scene of crisis in a calculated and measured way.9

Right from the beginning there is a pre-conceived air of scepticism signifying an unconventional attitude of hte protagonist towards the hitherto accepted icons of the divine and the reverent. Instead of indulging in an unqualified adoration of the god, the protagonist takes a typical modernist stance of doubting the
very sanctity of his pilgrimage. The pangs and pains of travelling in a "state transport bus" (p.9): also remind him the ordinariness of his mission thus: "With a thud and a bump/ the bus takes a pothole ... (p.11). If the pilgrimage turns out to be just another journey, the priest at Jejuri also turns out to be just an average human being with nothing priestly about him: "The bit of betel nut/ turning over and over on his tongue is a mantra." (p.10). In the objective consciousness of the persona the ruins of temple are nothing more than a sanctuary to the stray animals:

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. (p.12.)

This inverts the sublime status of the temple as "the house of the god" (p.12). The "heavy medieval door" of the decrepit temple " hangs on one hinge alone" just "for/ that pair of shorts/ left to dry upon its shoulders" (p.15). Clearly the door of the temple does not show any divine promise of its being a gateway to heaven.

The common sight of the worship of wayside stones as idols of the divine gives a rude jolt to the rationalistic inclinations of the poet-pilgrim thus:

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. (p.28)

The practice of stone-worshipping invites the wrath of the protagonist at many junctures during the pilgrimage. In his three "Chaitanya" poems this identification of stone with god is ridiculed with post-modern playfulness thus:

sweet as grapes
are the stones of jejuri
said chaitanya
he popped a stone
in his mouth
and spat out gods. (p.23)

What is all the more disturbing is that these stones are painted in various colours
to deify them as markers of the divine:

wipe the red paint off your face
i don’t think the colour suits you
i mean what’s wrong
with being just a plain stone
i’ll still bring you flowers
you like the flowers of zendu
don’t you
i like them too (p.16)

Various myths and legends are associated with these stray stones rarefying
them further in the popular orthodox perception. "A herd of legends/ on a hill
slope" returns to its grazing the moment Chaitnaya crosses over the hills.
Chaitnaya here is the cherished ideal of the poet-persona; he stands for an
informal, open and non-sectarian view of religion.

At every step the poet-persona is disillusioned not as much by the ignorance
of priests but more so by the falsehood they spread to perpetuate their regime
of blind faith. To his utter spiritual discomfort, he comes across "A low temple
(that) keeps its gods in the dark". As he steps inside this low temple, the encounter
with the ignorant (not innocent) priest shatters his belief in the temple all the
more. An eighteen arm goddess made visible by the light of the match-stick
remains "an eight arm goddess to the priest" amply revealing the hypocrisy of
the entire priestdom. The priest’s son has the social sanction to take over role
of his father after his death without any interruption. This dynastic perpetuation
of the priesthood frustrates the searching protagonist further. A priest’s son
recounts the old story of "five hills" as "five demons/ that khandoba killed" (p.26)
without believing it:
do you really believe that story
you ask him
he doesn’t reply
but merely looks uncomfortable
shrugs and looks away (p.26)

In the poem "The Blue Horse" corrupt and cunning practices of priestdom are held to ridicule thus:

You turn to the priest
who has been good enough to arrange
that bit of sacred cabaret act at his own house
and ask him,

'The singers sang of a blue horse.
How is it then, that the picture on your wall
shows a white one?'

'Looks blue to me,'
says the priest,
shifting a piece of betal nut
from the left to the right of his mouth. (p.48)

The poet-persona is shocked to see a rather lurid and ghastly dance being performed in the name of religion in the house of the priest himself.

Despite the fact that both Nachiketa and the protagonist of Jejuri look forward to a vision of pure knowledge; their approaches vary drastically. The former explores reality through a typical Indian way of personally undergoing and even internalizing the suffering of the outer world; the latter seeks resolution of his crises through cold impersonal Western reason and logic. The former risks his life to the point of total physical annihilation and liquidation; the latter does not commit himself to his problems with such self-denying convictions. At no point does the protagonist of Jejuri dive headlong into the muddle of religion and idolatry with some spiritual gusto or intensity. With the non-serious spirit of a peeping Tom,\textsuperscript{14} does he look inside the temple. The conspicuous tone of indifference in the poem 'Manohar' predicates the protagonist’s approach towards temples and temple-worshipping thus:

The door was open
Manohar thought
It was one more temple

He looked inside
Wondering
which god he was going to find.
He quickly turned away
when a wide eyed calf
looked back at him.
It isn't another temple.

he said,
it's just a cowshed. (p.20)

This confusion of a cowshed with a temple is deliberate and mischievous. It smacks of urbane arrogance of the protagonist. Such reversal and re-inscription are of course playful, but with a playfulness intend to be radically disruptive -- in a way, as if to institute a kind of non-sense.

It is this 'lack of involvement' that casts doubt on his vision which reduces the temple into just another utilitarian structure, the idol into a wayside stone, or legends into mere fanciful stories. Even the medieval bhakti poets (Kabir, Tukaram, Nanak etc.) ridiculed the extreme ritualization of religion; but they never subverted the religion the way Kolatkar's protagonist does it. The irreverence in Bhakti poetry stems from a deep understanding of the divine; the irreverence in Kolatkar's poetry stems from an equally acute understanding of the grossly human. Kolatkar overlooks this gap between these two levels of understanding (i.e., the understanding of the divine, and that of human) when he makes such statements to redeem his brand of irreverence: "As far as irreverence goes, there is irreverence found in Tukaram. Just because it is devotional poetry it is not wishy-washy. Irreverence as an attitude is to be found in the saint poetry. Sometimes they make fun of the poses of the God. Tukaram says he is willing to come down to gutter level if necessary in dealing with God." Rather these poet-seers dissolved themselves into the cesspool of life without any self-preserving interests. Kolatkar's protagonist does not evince this selflessness. The poem "Makarand" throws an instructive light on the rather
mundane and casual vision of the poet-persona thus:

Take my shirt off
and go in there to do pooja?
No thanks.
Not me.
But you go right ahead
if that's what you want to do.
Give me the matchbox
before you go,
will you?
I will be out in the courtyard
where no one will mind
if I smoke. (p.39)

Smoking outside the temple premises as an alternative to pooja inside the temple reveals the subversive character of the poet-pilgrim's religious mission. This is in sharp contradistinction to the reformatory character of the protest of bhakti poets.

Bruce King, a perceptible critic of modern Indian poetry in English defends Kolatkar's playful subversive poetry as modern equivalent of the medieval Bhakti poetry. He observes: "In Kolatkar's hand the tradition of saints' poetry takes the form, in our age of self-conscious disbelief, of an ironic parody of a pilgrimage which while mocking institutionalized religion affirms the free imagination and dynamism of life.20" While the first part of the observation confirms our reading Jejuri as an ironic parody of the saint poetry, it is difficult to accept latter part of King's observation (p.170). This latter part is a facile comparative observation for neither the Bhakti poetry is poetry of disbelief, nor Kolatkar's poetry is a vibrant affirmation of life. The act of smoking cigarettes outside the temple sanctum is an act of evasion and escape. Bhakti poetry does never deny the role and importance of the divine and the spiritual; it only debunks its excessive institutionalization. Kolatkar's protagonist does not give any space to the transcendental signifies. As a character of post-modernist leanings this protagonist deflates the established canons of belief and conviction without ever suggesting plausible cultural alternatives.
Of course, there are number of references to animals and other minor insects and organism revealing the poet-persona's liking for a pretension-free life of the animals. But this is again a non-human option underlining the persona's escapist tendencies. Moreover none of the animals represented in the collection comes up with a vitality and energy of life that is often associated with the animals. "A mongrel bitch" along with her "pariah puppies" do not present a picture of animated life. The butterfly that catches the fancy of the priest's son is nothing more than "a pun on the present". This butterfly has "no story behind it/It is split like a second./ It hinges around itself./ It has no future./ It is pinned down to no past." (p.27). The temple rat that "Oozes halfway down the trident" or "Stops on the mighty shoulder/ of the warrior god" does not have the courage to withstand the violence of ringing bells; it simply "disappears in a corner of the sanctum/ just behind the big temple drum./ Not a minute too soon./ Because just then the bell springs into action. (p.40-41). Obviously these animals caught in their most casual postures only join in the poet persona's mocking intentions; they do not present any consolation to the poet-persona's deep seated disbeliefs.

Moreover the bhakti-poets assign prime importance to karma, i.e., action or participation in life. It is through action that a man emancipates himself from the quagmire of ordinary living. Nachiketa is a karma-yogi who enters into life without succumbing to any of those pragmatic considerations which call upon an average man to withdraw from life in favour of certain compromises. Kolatkar's protagonist does enter into life; the very act of pilgrimage proves this; but he does not go beyond this. The pilgrimage only provides an outlet to the persona's penchant for "quirky humour and blasphemous banter". His trajectory of journey does not stretch beyond the human. His karma therefore is conditional, always checkmated by the compulsions of middle class human living. Ideologically Nachikets's forays into the unknown are not very different from the spiritual poetic speculations of the bhakti-poets; whereas the predilections of Kolatkar's persona are very much foregrounded in Western humanism. "In our time 'humanist' often connotes a person who bases truth on human experience and bases values on human nature and culture, as distinct from people who regard religious revelation as the guarantor of all truths and values". Using Aurobindo's terminology,
Nachiketa undergoes a longer journey starting from the infra-rational and culminating into the supra-rational through the intermediate phase of rational; Kolatkar’s persona seems to settle at the rational level of awareness albet with not an air of finality or certitude. His search for the divine also remains inconclusive; humanistic and rationalist considerations happen to be his compulsions rather than his aspirations.
Notes


4. “... whereas Sisyphus, Ulysses or characters of Beckett and Osborne in order to withstand the cruel destiny of unfruitful life, by adopting angry and rebellious postures and by waiting in vain hope, actually inflict injuries to themselves, Nachiketa of *Atmajayee* takes recourse to an essential human virtue of courage re-asserting his faith in himself” - Vijaya Sharma, *Atmajayee: Chetna aur Shilpa* (Delhi: MacMillan, 1979), p.37.


8. “Let us call this technique of Kolatkar’s ‘extrospection’. His primary concern in *Jejuri* is to present place as object, object as object, and to objectify the spirit of place, the spirit residing in an object in this sense the subjective self is also an ‘object’. This extrospection does not entail the elimination of subjectivity of a personal or first person protagonist consciousness, for the unifying factor in *Jejuri* is the poet’s

10. "The consciousness does not seem to have a history, nor an emotional dimension. It observes sharply and with uncanny concentration and the mediation is strictly centred around the things observes" — Ibid., p.50.

11. Naresh Mehta's persona has an altogether different perspective on the matter:

One day
your humility,
your devotion to Lord Vishnu
would turn each stone
into a god.
Think of that day only
and not of today.

("Din Kripa Hai", Utsava, p.38.)

12. "This is self-reflective post-modernist poetry which simultaneously seems to say 'I am recording reality and that reality is what the poem says it is a result of how I choose to perceive and describe it.' The mind plays with unlikely possibilities and wryly views behaviour." — Bruce Kling, MIPE, p.186.


14. "He is a kind of traveller all right, a tourist, one might say, interested in sight-seeing (the priest's son is his guide at some stage of his
15. B.V. Nemade thinks that Kolatkar’s stance of unfaith is “totally unIndian.” he even notices an attitude of characteristic of “philistinism” on the poet’s poet — “Arun Kolatkar and Bilingual Poetry” in India Readings in Commonwealth Literature, ed. G.S. Amur et al. (New Delhi: Sterling, 1985), pp.83-84.


17. A section of Bhavani’s poem entitled ‘Ektarpha Batchit Jeevan ke Prabhu se’ is quoted here to show the contrast between two approaches thus:

Neither did I perform namaz,  
nor trikaal sandhya,  
nor did I recite  
Gita  
like my father  
every morning at four;  
nor did I tell my beads  
of Vishnusahastranam,  
nor did I visit temple.

Even then  
I don’t accept  
doing all this is wrong  
or not doing all this is right.

Sometimes man  
is made by all this  
but it’s only when  
all this is born  
from within and not without,  
some unstoppable urge calls him  
from within  
and he nurtures  
the garden of traditional religion  
with the water of his very life

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then he realizes
a non-opposition and unity among
the old and the new and his own
the fact and the truth and the dream!

(Khooshbo ke Shilalekh, pp.94-95).


19. ‘While reading Kolatkar’s “Makarand”, . . . the reader is struck more by the banality of perception and the awkwardness of an undigested colloquial idiom than by the contrast apparent in the attitudes of the educated, westernised, and secular speaker and his religious companion. One is inclined to place a poem such as "Makarand" in a category of inferior and undoubtedly ephemeral art which, in terms of settings it evokes and the stances it projects, may be said to be produced out of a compulsive need to respond to the expectations of a foreign audience, making available not an authentic view but what to outsiders may appear as authentic” — Chirantan Kulshreshtha, “English Verse in India: Some Obstinate Questions” in Contemporary Indian English Verse: An Evaluation, ed. Chirantan Kulshreshtha (New Delhi: Aronold Heinemann, 1980), pp.13-14.


21. “. . ., it is essentially an evasion since the consciousness that it celebrates produces ultimately a complacency which could be compared to the station dog that the poet speaks of in the last section of Jejun:

the dog opens his right eye
just long enough to look at you and see
whether you're a man, a demon, a demigod.

In spite of all the reverent openness for life that it celebrates it simplifies and reduces life so drastically that what is left in the end is an
absurd static vision of life:

    the clock face adds
    its numerals
    the total is zero.

An absurd vision is a consoling vision, but do we need consolation?"