

## The Poet as an Observer and the Motif of Eternal Quest: An Archetypal Study of Arun Kolatkar's *Kala Ghoda Poems* and "the boatride"

**Abhishek Kumar**

Research Scholar

Department of English

Banaras Hindu University, &

**Assistant Professor**

Department of English

Rajkiya Mahila Snatakottar Mahavidyalaya

Ghazipur

### Abstract

*Kala Ghoda Poems* was first published in 2004 and "the boatride" was written in 1963 and published in 1968. Thematically, both poems are similar and deal with the motif of Eternal Quest and Eternal Return symbolically represented in cosmogonic myths all around the world. The *Kala Ghoda Poems* deals with the observation made by Arun Kolatkar from the window of a restaurant named Wayside Inn looking outside at the activities of humans and non-humans at Kala Ghoda, where he used to sit and spend his time with his friends for nearly three decades. The poem "the boatride" deals with the poet's observation at a seaside near the Gateway Of India where he used to watch and observe the arrival and departures of boats and ships at the harbour and deep into the vast sea and the activities of people who came there with their families for enjoyment and entertainment. In both poems, the poet contemplates the existential nature of human life and correspondingly refers to the universal archetypal patterns and themes through the means of his poetic consciousness. Borrowing the Bakhtinian concept of "Chronotope," this paper shows how in both poems the poet plays the role of an observer, and through the chronotopic mode of his poetic transmission, he incites and responds to the human happenings and surroundings at an Arabian shore and routine and usual activities at Kala Ghoda. This paper describes how these two poems are thematically close and associated with *Jejuri* and how the medieval and folk elements of *Jejuri* which have been carried from the symbols and images of the voyage in "the boatride" are transformed into the discarded and downtrodden creatures and objects of Kala Ghoda. The efforts of the poet to locate the divine and the essential life force in the common and discarded characters of Kala Ghoda, the medieval, folk, and natural objects of *Jejuri*, and the symbols and images of the voyage in "the boatride" have been also discussed in this paper.

**Keywords:** Eternal Quest, Eternal Return, cosmogonic myths, archetypal, chronotope, folk, voyage, divine, life force.

## Introduction

*Kala Ghoda Poems* was first published in the year 2004 by Pras Prakashan, twenty-eight years after the publication of *Jejuri*. It was again included in *Arun Kolatkar: Collected Poems in English (CPE)* edited by Arvind Krishna Mehrotra and published in 2010. The poems are based on the Kala Ghoda Square located in the popular Fort area in South Bombay. The area of Kala Ghoda stretches from the Regal Circle at the Southern end of Mahatma Gandhi Road to the Mumbai University at the northern end, the Oval Maidan situated on its Western side, and the Lion Gate in the east. The name of Kala Ghoda has been taken from the old equestrian statue of King Edward VII, which was placed at the centre of the old Esplanade Road. The statue of Edward VII though has been removed from the site, but the name as it was in the British era persists even today as a sign of colonial vestige. The area is famous as it acts as a hub for numerous cultural activities. It also has some major historical and cultural institutions such as Jehangir Art Gallery, Max Mueller Bhavan, Bombay University, Prince of Wales Museum, National Gallery of Modern Art, Institute of Science, Bombay Natural History Society, Elphinstone College, and David Sasson Library, all located at a close distance from each other. There is also a popular arts festival known as ‘Kala Ghoda Arts Festival’ celebrated every year in the name of this square. Kolatkar, mostly on all days at breakfast time and in late afternoons, when the lunch crowd had left the restaurant used to sit at Wayside Inn in Rampart Row at Kala Ghoda square. He usually used to be alone there except on Thursdays when he used to be occupied by his close friends around his table. Mehrotra in “Death of a Poet” discusses the origin and idea of *Kala Ghoda Poems* and points out:

The view from a restaurant rather than a restaurant interior is the subject of *Kala Ghoda Poems*. . . . Sometime in the early 1980s, the idea of writing a sequence of poems on the street life of Kala Ghoda, encompassing its varied population (the lavatory attendant, the municipal sweeper, the kerosene vendor, the beggar-cum-tambourine player, the drug pusher, the shoeshine, the ‘ogress’ who bathes the baby boy, the idli lady, the rat-poison man, cellist, the lawyer), its animals (pi-dog, crow), its statuary (David Sassoon), its commercial establishments (Lund & Blockley) and its buildings (St Andrew’s Church, Max Mueller Bhavan, Prince of Wales Museum, Jehangir Art Gallery), began to take shape in his head. . . . By the time he finished the sequence in 2004, to quote Joyce’s famous remark to Frank Budgen about *Ulysses*, it gave a picture of Kala Ghoda ‘so complete that if it one day suddenly disappeared from the earth it could be reconstructed out of [his] book’. (*CPE* 27-28)

Nerlekar discussing about the *Kala Ghoda Poems* writes:

All the books by Kolatkar exhibit the desire to cross-breed the intellectual with the material. Another example is in *Kala Ghoda Poems* (2004), where Kolatkar employs multiple material ways of encoding the poetic world into the book. The book comprises discrete poetic sequences, unequal in length, some single, others made of multiple poems, with the largest comprising thirty-one poems. The poems are all located in the space of Kala Ghoda, the triangular “square” near the popular Fort area in South Bombay and the place where the homeless and the poor congregate, pass through, or ply their dubious trades in the heart of the upper-middle-class neighborhood. Kolatkar used to sit in a now

defunct eatery, Wayside Inn, and watch the crowds of the homeless live their lives in public: the janitor at the nearby Jehangir Art Gallery, the grandmother who takes care of her grandson and bathes him in full view of all, the drug pusher, the prostitute, and the street sweeper. They all live in the book of poems as distinct characters and they, and the poems that house them, have discrete lives in the book. Therefore, the book is arranged chronologically and spatially so that the space of these pages reflects the varied activity of the space of these pages reflects the varied activity of the space of the Kala Ghoda area in Bombay where the poems open with early dawn and end past midnight. (179)

“the boatripe” on the other hand is a long poem based on the poet’s observation of the seashore at Gateway of India with boats coming, docking, and going away indicating the eternal quest of human life which has been continuously going on since the dawn of human civilization. It was first written in 1963 and was first published in *damn you*, issue number six in 1968 (CPE 382 un). It was also published in the collection *The Boatripe and Other Poems* in 2009 by Pras Prakashan and also included in *Arun Kolatkar: Collected Poems in English*.

### The Poet as an Observer in the *Kala Ghoda Poems* and “the boatripe”

The word archetype refers to the idea of psychic residue or primordial common patterns which exist in human unconsciousness. Carl Jung defines ‘archetype’ as:

The concept of the archetype, which is an indispensable correlate of the idea of the collective unconscious, indicates the existence of definite forms in the psyche which seem to be present always and everywhere. Mythological research calls them “motifs”; in the psychology of primitives they correspond to Lévy-Bruhl’s concept of “representations collectives,” and in the field of comparative religion they have been defined by Hubert and Mauss as “categories of the imagination.” Adolf Bastian long ago called them “elementary” or “primordial thoughts.” From these references it should be clear enough that my idea of the archetype—literally a pre-existent form—does not stand alone but is something that is recognized and named in other fields of knowledge. (42-43)

Mikhail Bakhtin in his essay “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel” in *The Dialogic Imagination* defines chronotope as:

We will give the name chronotope (literally, “time space”) to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature. This term [space-time] is employed in mathematics, and was introduced as part of Einstein’s Theory of Relativity. The special meaning it has in relativity theory is not important for our purposes; we are borrowing it for literary criticism almost as a metaphor (almost, but not entirely). What counts for us is the fact that it expresses the inseparability of space and time (time as the fourth dimension of space). We understand the chronotope as a formally constitutive category of literature; we will not deal with the chronotope in other areas of culture.

In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of

time, plot and history. This intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope.

The chronotope in literature has an intrinsic generic significance. It can even be said that it is precisely the chronotope that defines genre and generic distinctions, for in literature the primary category in the chronotope is time. The chronotope as a formally constitutive category determines to a significant degree the image of man in literature as well. The image of man is always intrinsically chronotopic. (44)

Borrowing the Jungian idea of ‘archetype’ and Bakhtinian concept of ‘chronotope’ for the archetypal analysis of these two poems, it can be asserted that the poet plays the role of an observer in *Kala Ghoda Poems* and “the boatride” and the experience of the observer (the poet himself) matters in these two poems. In *Kala Ghoda Poems* it is the outer world of Kala Ghoda which the poet observes from a window of a restaurant named Wayside Inn situated at Kala Ghoda, where Kolatkar used to sit for three decades with his friends until it was closed in 2002. The subject matter of these poems is the poetic consciousness formed by the intervention of human and non-human objects of Kala Ghoda. This consciousness of the poet appears to be at the outer sphere while at the inner core lies the poetic vision that converts the consciousness of these external material objects into an all-pervading universal consciousness. The theme of “the boatride” is the arrival and departure of boats and ships at a dockyard near the Gateway of India where people come for sightseeing and entertainment. The poet as a visitor to this place observes his surroundings but in a detached and disinterested manner. There is a certain tone of coolness and nonchalance in this poem. Both poems deal with the activities of casual routine life at Kala Ghoda and the seaside at Gateway of India. These activities are in turn equated by the poet with universal motifs of quest in the form of archetypes of arrival and departure which can be further associated with the eternal rituals of birth—death—rebirth. The journey of the poet as an observer is juxtaposed with the journey of Kala Ghoda as a living area involving the activities of both humans and non-humans in *Kala Ghoda Poems*. In “the boatride” the arrival and departure of boats at the harbour can be related to the ritual and continuous process of birth and death and the eternal process of universal journey or quest.

In the context of repetition of universal archetypes and rituals, Mircea Eliade in *Images and Symbols* points out:

The myth of cyclic Time, of the cosmic cycles repeating themselves *ad infinitum*, is not an invention of Indian speculation. As we have seen elsewhere, the traditional societies—whose representations of Time are so difficult to grasp just because they are conveyed in symbols and rituals whose deeper meaning sometimes remains inaccessible to us—these traditional societies conceive man’s temporal existence not only as an infinite repetition of certain archetypes and exemplary gestures, but also as an *eternal recommencement*. Indeed, symbolically and ritually, the world is periodically re-created: the cosmogony is repeated at least once a year—and the cosmogonic myth serves also as the model for a great many actions—marriage, for instance and healing.

What is the meaning of all these myths and all these rites? That the world is born, disintegrates, perishes and is reborn in a very rapid rhythm. Chaos and the cosmogonic act that puts an end to chaos by a new creation are periodically re-enacted. The year—or

what we understand by that term—is equivalent to the creation, duration and destruction of a world, although it may have been confirmed by the spectacle of the periodical death and resurrection of vegetation is, for all that, not a creation of the agricultural societies. It is also found in the mythologies of pre-agricultural societies, and is very likely a lunar conception. (71-72)

As mentioned above, the primordial myth of creation—destruction—recreation is transformed into arrival—departure—re-arrival or birth—death—rebirth in “the boatripe” and repetitiveness of daily chores and ordinary activities in *Kala Ghoda Poems*. “the boatripe” was written before *Jejuri* and was followed by *Kala Ghoda Poems*. Thematically, “the boatripe,” *Jejuri* and *Kala Ghoda Poems* are well connected and they follow each other in the same chronology. The images and symbols used in *Jejuri* have been carried over in *Kala Ghoda Poems* by Kolatkar. The dog, the butterfly, the railway station indicator turned into the traffic signal, and the mongrel bitch and her pups turned into the pi-dog have all been transmuted from the medieval age of *Jejuri* and straight away dropped in the Kala Ghoda Square of the modern age in *Kala Ghoda Poems*. Nerlekar regarding the connection between *Jejuri* and *Kala Ghoda Poems* observes:

Kolatkar’s butterfly in *Jejuri* works in a similar fashion; he contrasts its delicate ephemerality with the rigid stone pillars of the temples and the institutionalized religious practices within. The fulcrum on which Kolatkar’s poetics pivots is the representation of the ordinary reality of the workaday world and the connection between the mongrel bitch (from *Jejuri*) and the pi-dog (from *Kala Ghoda Poems*), or the dancing fowl and the butterfly (from *Jejuri*) and the barefoot queen, the ogress, the idli vendor, and the drunk giving the “shit sermon” (from *Kala Ghoda Poems*)—the connecting link is that visual band of yellow that binds all of them as representations of the unfussy, unglamorous real and the “now” of life in Bombay. The pages of *Kala Ghoda Poems* create a visual and textual bridge across Kolatkar’s English and Marathi poetry, as well as across the works of Kolatkar and others, like Durga Bhagwat, of his generation. The cross-identification of yellow (between the two books of poems by Kolatkar, and backwards into Durga Bhagwat’s folklore study) constructs a textual synchrony that tries to capture that elusive *sathottari* contemporaneity through such material pointers on the page. (182)

Mehrotra in *Translating the Indian Past* points out the interconnectedness of themes of “the boatripe,” *Jejuri* and *Kala Ghoda Poems* and observes “He [Kolatkar] kept returning to the form for the next fifty years: in “the boatripe”, *Jejuri*, and *Kala Ghoda Poems*, that are like three sides of a poetic triangle” (59-60). Kolatkar has with dexterity fabricated the elementary themes of these interconnected poems. For Nerlekar these poems are interconnected with the band of yellow colour present on their cover pages and which is also the colour of the butterfly present in *Jejuri*. This study will reveal how these poems are interconnected through their elementary and archetypal patterns which the poet has extracted from the collective consciousness of mankind.



### ***Kala Ghoda Poems***

The *Kala Ghoda Poems* consists of twenty-eight poems. It starts with “Pi-dog” and this poem consists of nine sections. The poem is narrated from the perspective of a street dog and starts at early dawn. It is to be noted that the poem “The Bus” in *Jejuri* also starts with sunrise. Symbolically the beginning and the ending of both *Jejuri* and *Kala Ghoda Poems* are the same in theme as they represent the creative and destructive aspects of the universal life force that is the archetypal pattern of Creation—Destruction—Recreation in the cosmogonic myths which the poet has incorporated in these poems.

Patke in his article “The Experience of Urban Space” relates the *Kala Ghoda Poems* to the poet’s poetic concept of urban space and remarks:

Kolatkar’s twenty-eight *Kala Ghoda Poems*, which take up slightly over a hundred pages of text and were published in 2004, constitute an implicit poetics of urbanism that has much to startle and distract, especially those among us who are more comfortable with a conventional or academic approach to urban studies. What, you might ask, are the chief features of Kolatkar’s urban poetics?

Let us begin by looking at the title phrase in Hindi: *Kala Ghoda Poems* (‘Black Horse’ in English): it is a double allusion, which foregrounds a horse, and refers to a specific area of South Bombay associated with that horse, while also reminding us, in more general terms, that a city is as much a home to animals and other living creatures as to humans. The horse in question is a bronze statue, blackened over time since its installation in 1879 during the heyday of British imperialism. It was part of a large public monument, a thirteen-foot equestrian statue of King Edward VII, which stood in the vicinity of Bombay University, the Prince of Wales Museum, the Sassoon Hospital, and the Jahangir Art Gallery (opened in 1952 and chiefly instrumental in giving the neighbourhood its contemporary character of a thriving urban arts scene). (184-85)

The first part of the poem discusses how the street dog feels at home at Kala Ghoda early in the morning lying “at the exact centre / of this traffic island” (*CPE* 75). The second part starts with the dog comparing his shaded body with the seventeenth-century map of Bombay when it was just a group of seven islands namely— Isle of Bombay, Colaba, Old Woman’s Island, Mahim, Mazagaon, Parel, Worli which were all once part of the Arabian sea (367 un). In the third part of the poem, the dog tries to trace his matrilineal familial tradition back to the group of thirty foxhounds that came from England to Bombay on the insistence of “Sir Bartle Frere” (76). Out of those foxhounds that died of the harsh weather and long journey, only the dog’s mother survived. In the fourth part, the narrator traces his patrilineal lineage to the dog who accompanied Yudhishtira and his brothers with their wife Draupadi on their *Swargrohini Yatra*. During the *yatra* or journey, it was Draupadi who fell first, followed by Sahadeva, Nakul, Arjuna, and Bhima. Yudhishtira was the only person left with his black dog who went with Dharmraj to heaven. The narrator thus speaks “And my ancestor became the only dog / to have made it to heaven / in recorded history” (77). The reference here comes from “Mahaprasthanika Parva” of *Mahabharata* where the five Pandavas after the death of Krishna embrace *sanyasa* and decide to go for their last journey of penance. The dog’s dedication to Yudhishtira is an exemplar of an animal’s dedication and Yudhishtira’s commitment to his dog that is to go with

him to heaven when all his brothers and wife have left him alone is an epitome and ideal of Dharma. This ancient motif has been carried by Kolatkar in this poem from the ancient epic *Mahabharata*. A similar occurrence is to be found in *Sarpa Satra* where the motif of revenge has been incorporated from *Mahabharata*.

Wilkins summarizes this episode as:

As Yudhishtira was entering the capital in triumph, an incident occurred to lessen his joy in victory. A Rākshas named Chārvāka, disguised as a Brāhman, met him and reproached him for the slaughter he had caused; but the Brāhman, discovering the imposture, consumed the Rākshas to ashes with fire from their eyes. Yet even now the spirit of the king is not at rest. After a little time, he resigns his kingdom, and, together with his brothers and Draupadi, starts on his journey towards Indra's heaven on Mount Meru. (404)

He further states the reasons for the fall of each Pandavas and Draupadi and observes:

These went, "bent on abandonment of wordly things; their hearts yearning for union with the Infinite." In their journey they reach the sea, and there Arjuna cast away his bow and quiver. At last they came in sight of Mount Meru, and Draupadi "lost hold of her high hope, and faltering fell upon the earth." One by one the others fall, until only Yudhishtira, Bhīma, and the dog are left. Bhīma cannot understand why such pure beings should die: his brother informs him that Draupadi's fall was the result of her excessive affection for Arjuna; that Sahadeva's death was the result of pride in his own knowledge; that Nakula's personal vanity was his ruin, and that Arjuna's fault was a boastful confidence in his power to destroy his foes. Bhīma now falls, and is told that the reason of his death is his selfishness, pride, and too great love of enjoyment. Yudhishtira, left alone with the dog, is walking on. . . . (405)

Yudhishtira is then tested and questioned by Indra about his insistence on his dog's entry into the heaven and this episode is narrated as:

Indra informs him [Yudhishtira] that the spirits of Draupadi and his brothers are already in heaven, but that he alone is permitted to enter in bodily form. The king asks that the dog may accompany him. But as this is refused, he declines to go alone. Indra says, "You have abandoned your brothers; why not forsake the dog?" Yudhishtira replies, "I had no power to bring them back to life; how can there be abandonment of those who no longer live?" it now appears that the dog was no other than his father Dharma in disguise; who, assuming his proper form, enters with him. (405-06)

The fifth section of the poem discusses the man's dedication to an animal. The historical reference given is from Harlan Ellison's *A Boy and His Dog*, which according to the narrator has become "a cultbook among the pi-dogs" (*CPE* 79). The novella involves the three major characters of Vic (the boy), Quilla June (Vic's Girlfriend), and Blood (Vic's Dog) where Vic kills Quilla to feed his starving and dying dog (Russ 153-55). The sixth section of the poem refers to the ancient legend through which the dog has been named and here the narrator gives the credit for his name to "Ughekalikadu, Siddharamayya's famous dog" who was the "guru of

Kallidevayya's dog" (CPE 78). Next, the narrator informs that he has only knowledge of *Gayatri Mantra* among all the Vedic hymns. The *Gayatri Mantra* is the tenth *mantra* in the section of the sixty-second hymn taken from the third *mandala* of *Rig Veda*. The *mantra* is dedicated to Vedic god Savitṛ also known as Savitur, who is an Aditya and descended from primeval mother goddess Aditi.

Macdonell gives his observation on the Vedic deity Savitṛ as:

Savitṛ is celebrated in eleven whole hymns of the RV [*Rig Veda*] and in parts of others, his name being mentioned about 170 times. Eight or nine of these are in the family books, while all but three of those to Sūrya are in the first and tenth. Savitṛ is preeminently a golden deity, nearly all his members and his equipment being described by that epithet. He is golden-eyed, golden-handed, golden-tongued, all these epithets being peculiar to him. He has golden arms, and is broad-handed or beautiful-handed. He is also pleasant-tongued or beautiful-tongued and is once called iron-jawed. He is yellow haired, an attribute of Agni and Indra also. He puts on a tawny garment. He has a golden car with a golden pole, which is omniform, just as he himself assumes all forms. His car is drawn by two radiant steeds or by two or more brown, white footed horses. (32)

Dandekar in his observation of the nature of Vedic god Savitr remarks:

A very prominent feature of the nature of Savitṛ is that the concept of the world- order-ṛta- is often predominantly associated with his personality. Savitṛ is the god who supports and sustains the whole world—*yathā viśvam bhuvanam dhārayisyati*. He is said to be mainly responsible for maintaining the world-order and the ethical laws, so much so that he is regarded as setting the standard in that connection: *tripancāśah krīlati vrāta eśām deva iva savitā satyadharmā or deva iva savitā satyadharmendro na tasthau samara dhanānām*. Waters are subject to the ordinance of Savitṛ: *āpaś cid asya vrata ā nimgrā*; that achievement of Savitṛ is, indeed, inestimable; the wind stops in his obedience to Savitṛ *vrata: ayam cid vāto ramate parijman*; Savitṛ has fixed the erstwhile flying mountains; all great gods have to act up according to his law: *na yasyendro varuno na mitro vratamaryamā na minanti rudrah*; Savitṛ assigns to Indra and other gods their abodes in mountains; other gods follow Savitṛ's lead; no god dare resist his ordinance; various gods carry out their distinctive functions only under the stimulation given by Savitṛ. Whatever Savitṛ, the god of beautiful hands, orders cannot be contravened or transgressed; his law stands as eternal truth:

*Na pramiye savitur daivyasya tad  
yathā viśvam bhuvanam dhārayisyati /  
yat prthivyā varimannā svangurir  
varsman divah suvati satyam asya tat //.* (16-17)

The narrator of the poem with his knowledge of the Vedic god Savitr and *Gayatri Mantra* dedicated to that god indicates that he is well aware of the ancient Vedic as well as the present global traditions of the world. The archetype of the narrator here can be straight away traced to that of the Vedic gods like the *Adityas*. Like Tiresias, the pi-dog is a clairvoyant protagonist of



this poem, and his plea to the “sun-god” refers to the ancient Vedic ritual of offering and dedicating hymns to Vedic god Savitr (*CPE* 79). This section of the poem in fact can be regarded as a hymn by the poet dedicated to Savitr or the sun god. The seventh section of the poem reveals that the narrator is going

to work in peace on my magnum opus:  
a triple sonata for a circumpiano  
based on three distinct themes—

one suggested by a magpie robin,  
another by the wail of an ambulance,  
and the third by a rockdrill;

a piebald pianist, caressing and tickling  
the concrete keys with his eyes,  
undeterred by digital deprivation. (79-80)

The eighth section of the poem gives a detailed description of the city dwellers starting their daily routine in the process of getting engaged in what they usually do. The ninth or the last section is where the pi-dog “surrender[s] the city / to its so-called masters” or the humans who own the city (81).

The next poem in the sequence is “Parmeshwari” which refers to the *Mahishasura Mardini roopam* of Lordess Durga, who slew *daitya* Sumbha and Mahishasur (Wilkins 293). In “Meera” the narrator refers to the female worker Meera of the municipal corporation cleaning team. This poem consists of seven parts and describes in detail the cleaning activities of the area of Kala Ghoda early in the morning before the city resumes its work. In the sixth section of “Meera” there is a historical reference to the saint-poet Meerabai as “like a Meera before her Lord, / a Meera / with a broomstick for a lute;” (*CPE* 87). Perhaps, it appears that an ardent devotee of Krishna, Meerabai has been replaced by street cleaner Meera and her attachment to the broomstick and her dedication to the cleanliness of the city clean has been contrasted with Meerabai’s attachment to her lute and her supreme devotion to Lord Krishna. Poems like “Song of Rubbish” and “A Note on the Reproductive Cycle of Rubbish” depicts the futility of material existence profoundly found in the life of a city like Bombay. It appears that the eternal cycle of birth—death—rebirth of the mortals is replaced by the chain of use—throw—recycle of rubbish waste and garbage in the city life of Bombay. “To a Crow” is again an animal poem like “Pi-dog” where a crow’s activities in the morning time at the Kala Ghoda Square have been discussed. “An Ogress” deals with an old lady who is like “an auxiliary mother” and “semi-official nanny” who cleans and bathes a baby at the side of the street road (94). “Silver Triangle” has a reference to Urvashi who is an *Apsara* and the episode has been taken from *Satapatha Brahmana*. The legend points out:

In the Satapatha Brāhmana is a story, which has been copied into the Purānas, concerning Purūravas and the Apsaras [sic] Urvasi which will give some idea of the character of these beings. Owing to the imprecation of Indra and Varuna, Urvasi was compelled to leave heaven. Purūravas, son of Budha and a daughter of Manu, fell deeply in love with

her; and she agreed, on certain conditions, to live with him. She said, “I have two rams which must always remain with me, both by day and night; you must never be seen by me undressed; and I must eat only *ghī*, or clarified butter.” The inhabitants of heaven being anxious for her return, the Gandharvas came at night and carried off her rams. Purūravas, in order to rescue them, rushed into her room hurriedly, without being dressed, trusting to the darkness to hide him. Unfortunately a flash of lightning revealed him to her gaze, and, the condition of her remaining with him broken, she returned to her celestial home. Purūravas was distracted at his loss, and wandered from place to place searching for her. At length he was successful in his quest, and obtained a promise that she would meet him yearly and present him with a son. After five visits, she assured that if he offered a sacrifice with the express object of gaining her, he would succeed. He followed her advice, became a Ghandharva, and so obtained eternal possession of his strange bride. (Wilkins 458-59)

In “Pinwheel” the butterfly from *Jejuri* gets metamorphosed into a dragonfly and in “Lice” the louse has been derived from the dung beetle of “Heart of Ruin” in *Jejuri*. In “An Old Bicycle Tyre” the narrator in the lines “a wobbly zero / a spastic shunya— / but that doesn’t mean / I’m ready” refers to the cosmic void and spherical cycle of creation through the wobbling figure of the old bicycle tyre (*CPE* 104). In the fourth section of “Knucklebones” the poet writes:

Time unpuckers when you smooth your behind.  
The earth resumes its normal rate of spin.  
No harm done.

Ten lost seconds may not leave  
a permanent scar on eternity.  
But these things tend to add up, you know,

and postpone the apocalypse  
or bypass it altogether. Well!  
Don’t do it again’s all I can say. (116)

In the above lines, the eternal functioning of ever-flowing time or *kalā* has been discussed. The poet points out that small or big incidents are not going to affect eternal time and its ever-continuous flow. The term ‘apocalypse’ has Biblical references. It refers to the second coming of Christ on Judgment Day or Doomsday which has been revealed in the “The Book of Revelation.” Tracing the history of the word ‘apocalypse’ to the days of Messiah, Campbell observes:

In the earlier Jewish writings of the Day of the Messiah, the underlying notion had been simply of the restoration of the Jewish state under a king of the line of David, and the willing recognition, then, by all nations, of the truly Chosen People of God. However, in the Hellenistic period, notably from c. 200 B. C. to c. 100 A. D., there burst upon certain Jewish minds the highly thrilling idea that their own national Messiah would be, in fact, the cosmic Messiah at the end of time (like Saoshyant)—upon whose appearance there would follow gloriously, amid thunderous phenomena, the resurrection of the dead, liquidation of time, and all the rest. Moreover, that day was at hand. An abundant,

imaginative Apocalyptic literature burst into bloom, first among Jews, but then also among Christians: the Book of Enoch, Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, Apocalypse of Baruch, Assumption of Moses, et cetera; and, above all, in the Christian series, the words attributed to Christ himself, touching the end of days and his own return in glory. It is well worth repeating these here in full; for, in direct contrast to the initiatory symbolism of the mystery cult just studied, they bring out very clearly the typical point of view of an Apocalypse—besides revealing fully the cosmology of bounded time of the early Christian church and (apparently) of Christ himself. (269)

The poem “A Game of Tigers and Sheep” is thematically associated with “Ajamil and the Tigers” of *Jejuri*. The legend of Ajamil, his sheep and the dog has been carried in *Kala Ghoda Poems* with the motif of Creative Force dished with modern fervor and taste. The poet observes the justice provided by the Supreme Power in the following lines:

Who has the tigers and who the sheep  
never seems to make any difference.  
The result is always the same:  
she wins,  
I lose.

But sometimes when her tigers  
are on the rampage,  
and I've lost half my herd of sheep,  
help comes from unexpected quarters:  
above. (*CPE* 118)

The game of sheep and tigers taken from the legend is then contrasted with the game of checkerboard in the poem indicating as if the legend has transformed itself into a wild game of checkerboard. Next is “Breakfast Time at Kala Ghoda” the longest poem consisting of thirty-one sections. This poem is based on the poet’s observation during the morning time at the hour of breakfast in the restaurants of Kala Ghoda. It appears in this poem as if the cross-cultural literary vantage points and dimensions have been turned into the pan-Indian culinary festival of Bombay. Zecchini emphasizes that the culinary varieties and different eating habits of Bombay are one of the main running strands of this poem. She points out:

Food, or rather the appetite for it, is considered a defining element of Bombay culture and spirit. It is also fundamental to *Kala Ghoda Poems*, which is constructed around a coral communion-like breakfast on a traffic island in Kala Ghoda (see the long ‘Breakfast Time at Kala Ghoda’ sequence) and to Kolatkar himself, who was particularly fond of trying out various restaurants, and could detail menus for hours on end. In Bombay, the diversity of restaurants and cuisines (Maharashtrian, Parsi, Mughlai, Punjabi, Bengali, European, Indian-Chinese, etc.) reflects the influx of migrants, the cosmopolitan fabric of the city and its complete history. That is what the seventh poem of ‘Breakfast Time at Kala Ghoda’ illustrates. The poetic voice hovers over the different street corners, cuisines and eateries of Bombay before settling in Kala Ghoda. . . . It is precisely from the Kala Ghoda Wayside Inn café, Kolatkar’s favourite hangout for years, which offered him an

extraordinary vantage point on the Kala Ghoda traffic island like a stage where India and the world converged, that part of the collection was at least mentally composed, if not written. The culinary-literary cosmopolitanism and reading-eating metaphor actually run through Kolatkar's work. (57)

In "The Rat-poison Man's Lunch Hour" the poet describes the lunch hour of a man who sells rat poison and his surroundings at the Wayside Inn at Kala Ghoda. The poem consists of six sections. The first three sections deal with the sufferings and painful narratives of the rats present in the poster of the rat-poison man. Section four of this poem discusses "a society undivided by caste and creed" as dreamed by Babasaheb Ambedkar (*CPE* 164). Next, Bal Sitaram Mardhekar has been referred to as "an obscure poet" in this section who was far from being an obscure modernist poet, and his well-known Marathi poem "Pipat mele oloyo undir" translated as "Mice died in the wet barrel" has been referred to in the next line (369-70 un). "David Sassoon" is a long poem that consists of twelve sections. It describes a Jewish man who left Baghdad for Persia and then shifted to India. He became one of the leading leaders and merchants in his community. He is also associated with the area of Kala Ghoda. A library named David Sassoon Library has been built in his name in Kala Ghoda for which he gave a contribution of sixty thousand rupees for its construction and it is the oldest library in the city of Bombay. The Sassoon family also donated to the construction of the equestrian statue of King Edward VII—this statue gave the area its name of Kala Ghoda (370 un). Hence David Sassoon association with Kala Ghoda is historical and that's the reason Kolatkar has dedicated a long poem to Sassoon, as this entire poetic collection is based on Kala Ghoda. "Man of the Year" refers to the ritual where a stuffed effigy is burned on the night of the thirty-first of December to welcome the new year (370 un). This somehow symbolically represents the rites or ritual of burial where a tribal or native god is buried or drowned in water so that it can again be reborn next year for the welfare of its people. The *Kala Ghoda Poems* ends with the poem "Traffic Lights" at midnight. The last poem of *Jejuri* "the setting sun" also ends with the setting sun symbolizing the end of the Eternal Quest followed by the event of Eternal Departure and the ritual of Rebirth as is the case with *Kala Ghoda Poems*. Regarding the theme of *Kala Ghoda Poems* which is essentially based on the ordinary, downtrodden, and discarded living creatures and objects, Dharwadker points out:

In contrast to Kolatkar's symbolism of garbage, his treatment of poverty as a theme is more indirect and discursive than overt and poetic. One inescapable conclusion of *Kala Ghoda Poems* is that poverty in various aspects—which are economic, political, historical, social, and cultural in their origins as well as manifestations—is the most fundamental problem confronting modernity and post-colonialism. Kolatkar's sardonic references to globalization and the cosmo-politics of the new millennium, especially in the long thirty-one-part sequence entitled "Breakfast at Kala Ghoda", suggest that, in his view, the "new world order" that emerged after the fall of the Berlin Wall has only increased the disparity between the poor and the wealthy, and multiplied the reach of poverty in urban India. His portrayal of the discarded, dispossessed, derelict, deranged, and dysfunctional inhabitants of Kala Ghoda also implies that, in his eyes, the impoverishment of so many has left a vast, merciless rip across India's social fabric: we need to figure out afresh, from the bottom up, how we are going to deal with the dynamics of abandonment and rehabilitation, exploitation and restitution, deprivation and

restoration, addiction and detoxification, wilful neglect and conscientious care on such a massive scale. (179-80)

### “the boatripe”

The “the boatripe” is a poetic sequence consisting of eleven parts and in composition it prefigures *Jejuri*. The poet in this poem observes the daily routine of people who come to the seashore near Gateway of India to have a boatripe. The poem starts in the opening section:

the long hooked poles  
know the nooks and crannies  
find flaws in stonework  
or grappling with granite  
ignite a flutter  
of unexpected pigeons  
and the boat is jockeyed away from  
the landing

after a pair of knees  
has shot up and streaked  
down the mast after  
the confusion of hands about  
the rigging

an off white miracle

the sail  
spreads (*CPE* 329)

The opening section of the poem starts with the atmosphere of stillness when the boats are being prepared by the boatsmen for sail in the deep sea. The end section of the poem too ends in stillness when boats that have departed in the sea for their voyages and journeys return to the harbor to be docked in stillness. The disinterested and detached narrator who only plays the role of an observer contributes to creating an aura of stillness in the poem. R. Parthasarathy's observation about “the boatripe” is as follows:

‘the boatripe’ is characterized by a hypnotic stillness. Kolatkar’s poetics is original, and it is in keeping with the incantatory quality of his experience. The absence of punctuation throughout reinforces this quality. The poem evokes a surreal world in which imagination and reality are fused, in which contradictions in logic are acceptable to the imagination, ordinary concepts of time and space do not operate, and everything is seen with an innocent eye. (40)





over and above the waves  
a matter of course (330-31)

In the above lines, the poet is trying to emphasize the control that man with the help of science has acquired over machines but is still clueless before nature. Excessive anthropocentric activities have created an imbalance in nature and animals are also getting affected by human encroachments. The “white inflection” discovered by the seagull “over and above the waves” is surely a matter of concern (330-31).

In the fifth section of the poem, a speed boat seems to disturb the waves of water in the sea and now the other boats have to bear the brunt of the created havoc in the seawater. After a few moments, when the speed boat is gone “all things that float / resume / a normal vacillation” the sailing boats start sailing peacefully in the calm sea water (331). In the sixth section of the poem, “the mousy patriarch” seems to have come on a trip with his grandchildren and he tells them about the salty nature of seawater emphasizing the importance of wisdom which will come with age (331). In the next section, the wife ferrying in a boat seems to be disinterested in the waves and starts visualizing in her imagination how can she punish her husband and how can her husband be brought before in chains and thrown into the pack of wolves. In the eighth section, a two-year-old child becomes bored with the surrounding and starts demanding balloons from her mother. The ninth section involves the two sisters who come at last when the boat is about to move and after getting seated side by side, without speaking a single word to each other, they start staring at the boatman as if they are cross-examining his profile. In the tenth section, as the boats after ferrying in the sea start returning towards the seashore, the passengers get a clearer but sad view of Gateway of India. The sea waves are jostling against the walls of the seashore. The names of the boats carrying passengers can be seen as Islam, Mary, Dolphin, etc. Meanwhile, a man seems to be playing “bulbul tarang” who is alone on the boat and is facing the wall (335). In the last section of the poem, the poet writes:

the boat courses around  
to sidle up  
against the landing

the wall sweeps by  
magisterially  
superseding  
the music man

an expanse of  
unswerving stone  
encrusted coarsely  
with shells  
admonishes our sight (335)

In the above lines, the boats are returning from their ferrying journeys and are pitted against a big wall where they are docked when not in use. The arrival and departure of the boats in the vast sea can be compared to the archetype of Eternal Quest and Return—that is the primeval phenomena of birth—death—rebirth. Metaphorically, the sea stands for the infinite cosmos and the boats sailing in the vast sea are like souls. The passengers sailing in the boats can be compared to the sensory perception that a physical body or ego has over the soul.

In this context, Raghunandan remarks:

Back to the landing, and it is the wall that takes precedence, a broad expanse that supersedes all. Having travelled the vastness of the ocean and not having seen it due to individual mental blocks, it is only the wall that one sees and understands at the end, a wall that “admonishes our sight” for having been so short sighted. The poem thus draws a parallel to life, from birth to death. Though the concept of life as a journey is not unusual the exposure of life to the great unknown is ably brought out. The opportunity to apprehend the unknown is ignored by all except a few like the poet, the seer, whose meaning and function in the world is to communicate this larger vision. Apart from the glimpse into Indian philosophy, the poem remains skeletal in references, allusions, metaphor, and image. (207-08)

Prasad discussing the merits and thematic qualities of “the boatripe” points out:

“The Boatripe”, highly compact and evocative, arises from Kolatkar’s personal experience firmly grounded in feeling and thought and moulded aesthetically into commendable combinations of imagery and observation. The poem is laid in the locale of Bombay’s sea-front at the Gateway of India. The poet uses “the gateway of India” and “the arabic sea” to substantiate the locale. The poem, wrapped up in stillness related to the air of Kolatkar’s contemplativeness, unfolds certain familiar stills. The scene shifts from “a pair of knees” that streak up and down the mast to “the sail” that spreads like “an off white miracle”, “the speed boat”, “the newly weds”, “the seagull”, “the waves”, “the mousy patriarch overgrown/with grandchildren”, the stony-faced woman, her child and the “two sisters” “looking/past the boatman’s profile.” The poet obviously endeavours to explore the significance of the objective reality. (121)

## Conclusion

The poems “the boatripe” and *Kala Ghoda Poems* are directly associated with the motif of Eternal Quest and Eternal Return corresponding to the rituals of birth—death—rebirth. Thematically, *Kala Ghoda Poems* are attached to “the boatripe” and *Jejuri*. When Kolatkar started writing as a poet, he went on a trip to Western Maharashtra with his friend Bandu Waze. That trip inspired him to write the “journey poems.” The “journey poems” were followed by “the boatripe” which further expands the motif which Kolatkar has taken in the “journey poems.”

This poem deals with the continuous arrival of boats and ships at a harbor near the Gateway of India in Mumbai. The theme of “journey poems” was further carried and perfected by Kolatkar in *Jejuri*. The *Kala Ghoda Poems* deal with the search for the divine in the mundane activities of living and non-living creatures that spend their lives at Kala Ghoda. The thematic archetypes from the “journey poems” are transformed into the images of the arrival and departure of boats, ships, and people at an Arabian shore in “the boatripe” and medieval and folk elements such as idols, statues, horses, legends, tales, gods, temples in *Jejuri*. The same archetypal images are transformed into ordinary and marginalized elements and objects in *Kala Ghoda Poems* where the journey of the poet as an observer at the Kala Ghoda Square gains the utmost importance. In *Jejuri*, the poet experiences the all essential life force in the temple and surroundings of Jejuri, in “the boatripe” he tries to witness the same force in the eternal process of life and death transformed into the images of boats coming and going at the sea-side symbolically representing the quest motif and quintessential nature of existence in form of birth and death. The theme in the *Kala Ghoda Poems* gets attached to the discarded and downtrodden creatures and objects of nature and the material world. The poet’s excellence in *Kala Ghoda Poems* lies in witnessing the supreme source of existence in these living and non-living inhabitants of Kala Ghoda. In *Jejuri*, it is the experience of the poet which gets transformed into the poetic archetypes, while in *Kala Ghoda Poems* and “the boatripe” the observation of the poet which has certain tempo-spatial limitations becomes the poetic source of universal archetypes and motifs in these two poems. The observation of the poet in *Kala Ghoda Poems* and “the boatripe” is adjacent and contiguous to the experience of the poet in *Jejuri*. The archetypal motif in *Kala Ghoda Poems* and “the boatripe” is the archetype of Eternal Quest recreated and transformed into the quest of the poet as an observer in these two poems symbolically representing the process of Eternal Arrival and Eternal Departure in the cosmogonic myths of Eternal Quest.

### Works Cited

- Bakhtin, M. M. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Edited by Michael Holquist, translated by Caryl Emerson and Holquist, U of Texas P, 1981.
- Campbell, Joseph. *The Masks of God: Occidental Mythology*. Penguin Compass, 1976.
- Dandekar, R. N. *Vedic Mythological Tracts*. Ajanta Publications, 1979.
- Dharwadker, Vinay. “Arun Kolatkar’s Historical Imagination (1932-2004).” *Marginalized: Indian Poetry in English*, edited by Smita Agarwal, Rodopi, 2014, pp. 151-81.
- Eliade, Mircea. *Images and Symbols: Studies in Religious Symbolism*. Translated by Philip Mairet, Sheed & Ward, 1952.

- Jung, C. G. *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. Translated by R.F.C. Hull, Bollingen Series XX, 2nd ed., Princeton UP, 1980.
- King, Bruce. *Modern Indian Poetry in English*. rev. ed., Oxford India Paperbacks, 2004.
- Kolatkhar, Arun. *Arun Kolatkhar: Collected Poems in English*. Edited by Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, Reprint, Bloodaxe Books, 2017.
- Macdonell, A. A. *Vedic Mythology*. Reprint, Motilal Banarsidass, 1974.
- Mehrotra, Arvind Krishna. "Death of a Poet." *Arun Kolatkhar: Collected Poems in English*, edited by Mehrotra, Reprint, Bloodaxe Books, 2017, pp. 12-40.
- . *Translating the Indian Past and Other Literary Histories*. Permanent Black/Ashoka U, 2019.
- Nerlekar, Anjali. *Bombay Modern: Arun Kolatkhar and Bilingual Literary Culture*. Speaking Tiger, 2017.
- Parthasarathy, R., editor. *Ten Twentieth Century Indian Poets*. Oxford UP, 1997.
- Patke, Rajeev S. "The Experience of Urban Space in the Poetry of Arun Kolatkhar." *Re-Inventing the Postcolonial (in the) Metropolis*, edited by Cecile Sandten and Annika Bauer, Brill Rodopi, 2016, pp. 183-96.
- Prasad, Madhusudan. "Correspondence through Gestures: The Poetry of Arun Kolatkhar." *Living Indian English Poets: An Anthology of Critical Essays*, edited by Prasad, Sterling Publishers, 1989, pp.119-42.
- Raghunandan, Lakshmi. *Contemporary Indian Poetry in English*. Reliance Publishing, 1990.
- Russ, Joana. "'A Boy and His Dog': The Final Solution." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1975, pp.153-62. *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3346428>.
- Wilkins, W. J. *Hindu Mythology*. 3rd Impression, Rupa Publications, 2018.
- Zecchini, Laetitia. *Arun Kolatkhar and Literary Modernism in India: Moving Lines*. Bloomsbury, 2014.