

ALIENATED HEROES: A STUDY OF *KOSLA* AND *BHARATHIPURA*

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Abstract:

*Bhalchandra Nemade and U. R. Ananthamurthy are considered to be the trend - setting writers in Indian literary world. Both the writers were influenced by the intricate changes that India was witnessing during the 1960s and 70s. The anxieties and complexities of this era get well depicted in their literary works. In this context, the present paper revisits the two powerful narratives *Kosla* by Nemade and *Bharathipura* by U. R. Ananthamurthy to show the manner in which these two texts actually voice out the concerns of India in its transition and the reaction of the young generation towards the new changes. In a way, both the texts can be seen as intellectual and literary responses to the disillusionment of post independent India. The paper juxtaposes the two texts to show how the theme of alienation emerges as dominant theme as the main protagonists Pandurang Sangvikar of *Kosla* and Jagannatha of *Bharathipura* remain alienated from their surroundings. The paper also tries to probe the similarities in their attitude towards the way people have organised their lives in the society. Rather than making an existential study of the characters, the paper is aimed at making a comparative analysis of both the characters along with their surroundings.*

Key Words: *Kosla, Bharathipura, Bhalachandra Nemade, U.R. Ananthamurthy, disillusionment, alienation.*

A very few writers can exert their influence upon society with their insights and works on human situation and the world around. Bhalachandra Nemade and U.R. Ananthamurthy are among those writers who have been influential in the sense that they shaped and moulded the thinking of their respective societies. Both are Jnanpith awardees and have left behind a rich oeuvre of literary legacy. The works of these authors are debated and discussed both in academia and in public forums, and their texts are being taught in the universities across the country. The manner in which they reflected upon the dynamism of Indian society and constructed the narratives to depict the world around indeed remains unparallel even to this day.

Situating the texts within the context

The novels, *Kosla* by Bhalachandra Nemade and *Bharathipura* by U. R. Ananthamurthy are considered to be the texts that reflect the anxieties and complexities of the age in which they were written. These texts are seen as literary and intellectual responses to the transition period in Indian society during the 1950s and 1960s. The complex changes that were taking place in India during these decades ushered the growth of literary modernism. The period witnessed, as Meenakshi Mukherjee highlights, “high noon of modernism in several Indian languages” (91). Mukherjee rightly observes that the important novels that were written during this period in different Indian languages could be compared with each other. She recognises that these novels are characterised by one common aspect

“The central character in each novel was inevitably alienated from his immediate social context. Alienation used to be one of the buzzwords in that decade” (Mukherjee 91).

The novels written in this period exhibit certain similar features especially in the creation of central characters who are the products of transition period. They are mostly influenced by their milieu which is

governed by pessimism, caused by political disillusionment associated with Nehruvian age during post independent India. The practical problems associated with administration and the general problems like unemployment and poverty that became conspicuous in post independent India brought them out of the romantic idea about independence. This disillusionment gets reflected in the heroes of the novels written during this modern period which is aptly called 'navya' period in Kannada literature. The heroes of this period are a complete contrast to the heroes of the renaissance period. The former suffers from insecurity about everything and brood about their inability to change the world and thus become alienated, while the latter are robust optimists. *Kosla* and *Bharathipura* are the texts that are situated in the context of this transition period in Indian history. *Kosla* deals with the theme of alienation which is the result of sociological and historical changes in Maharashtra. These changes are reflected through the depiction of the condition of youth in Maharashtra in the latter half of the 19th century as Chandrashekhra Jahagirdar in his introduction to Sudhakar Marathe's English translation of the novel puts it,

Alienation in *Kosla* is the product of a grassroots crisis; and this crisis can be examined in both sociological and historical terms. In Maharashtra, in the latter half of the Nineteenth Century, the impact of British liberalism created a generation which seriously believed that it had a responsible role to play in society. Gradually, however the Maharashtrian middle-class lost this social conscience and instead cultivated values of material success, careerism, social status and prestige. *Kosla* captures this historical impasse and the contradiction of the colonial legacy in the Post-Independence period. (Introduction, X) *Kosla* is thus a comprehensive statement on Indian alienation for which there is hardly any parallel in Indian fiction. This is because Nemade's metaphor of the cocoon stands for the agony and crisis of a whole generation caught in the process of transformation from the rural to the urban, from the traditional to the modern in the post colonial India (Jahagirdar Introduction xiv).

Similar to *Kosla*, the novel *Bharathipura* too illustrates the changes that India was witnessing post Nehruvian era,

The novel offers an incisive narrative of the social and political tensions of the nation during the 70s marked by disillusionment with radical ideologies. It is also an attempt to rethink the values associated with the national modern (V.S Sreedhara, *The Hindu*).

Both the texts, thus, deal with the crucial stage of post independent Indian society. If U.R. Ananthamurthy makes *Bharathipura* the microcosm of India, *Kosla* or cocoon is the metaphor that Nemade employs to capture the mindset of a whole generation of young Indians.

In the backdrop of the above context, the present paper makes an effort to revisit the two novels *Kosla* and *Bharathipura*. The two texts are explored in this paper to show the similarities between them. The striking similarity, however, lies in the fact that both the texts have created alienated heroes. Both Pandurang Sangvikar of *Kosla* and Jagannatha of *Bharathipura* are navya heroes and by employing the complex central characters and making them alienated from their own surroundings, *Kosla* and *Bharathipura* actually comment upon the political crisis and socio-economic changes in the latter half of the nineteenth century India.

Alienated Heroes: Pandurang Sangvikar and Jagannatha

Written in 1963 in Marathi, Bhalachandra Nemade's novel, *Kosla*, has been translated into English as *Cocoon*. This remarkable novel in Marathi literature, narrates the story of Pandurang Sangvikar who hails from a well to do farmer's family of a small village called Sangvi in Khandesh region. Pandurang feels that his father is "wicked and cruel, etc" (Nemade 2) as he thinks that his father does not pay any heed to his emotions. He cites many examples to illustrate it. We come to know that, once the father ripped off the flower bed that Pandurang and his friends had planted in childhood, twisted Pandurang's ear and rebuked that he would have planted ten banana stumps which would have fetched twenty-five rupees; the father

broke Pandurang's flute and asked him to hold books instead of flute in hands; he criticised Pandurang when he played a role in school play; once Pandurang was plied the switch when he reached home late after having lost his way in the hills (Nemade 3). Pandurang feels that he is trapped in his home and his village. He has an urge to escape from his authoritative father and do something great,

Must do something great. There has to be something that is great. Or it may be great to accomplish it. So I must do something like that. At least I must clear the matriculation well and escape from here. Otherwise father is bound to say there is such and such a six - month course in agricultural college, you take that, that would do for you. ...Somehow outside this village somewhere I must do something for years and years. There might be meaning in that- otherwise why bother to exist here uselessly (17).

Pandurang finds this opportunity to escape from his home when he gets admission in a college in Poona. College life in Poona offers him a different world. He tries to get involved in the life around by being the mess secretary, cultural secretary etc. However, he fails to achieve anything substantial. Next year, he tries to be studious. Meanwhile his sister Mani's death disturbs him (151). Even in Poona, he starts to feel alienated. He tries to escape from Poona too by seeking a job in Mumbai. But his efforts to get a job go in vain because of the interference of his parents. He feels depressed as he thinks, "I'm not going to be able to do anything out of the way. Go where I might, my home gets in the way. My feet are pretty thoroughly stuck in our home. I'm the only son" (245).

After having experimented with his time and money thus, and having failed in his examinations, Pandurang decides to put "an end to this saturnine spell" that had "dogged" him for years (253), and leaves Poona "forever" to return home. It is ironical to note that he makes a circular movement by leaving the village and coming back to the same village again. Once back, he has nothing to do in particular in village and he again starts feeling bored and alienated gradually,

During the past year, my father has tried all sorts of stuff, wanting to teach me the affairs of the world a little and also to acquire some paramartha, some higher merit for himself. The tasks assigned to me I carried out properly at least at first. But all the same, I really cannot perform meticulously and continuously any old chore given to me (276).

The novel concludes with Pandurang trying in vain to find solutions to his problems. The open endedness of the novel makes the readers ponder over Pandurang's situation. He cannot belong to any place - neither to Poona or to his own village. Pandurang's alienation becomes symbolic representation of disillusionment of younger generation during the 60s. The same is the case with Jagannatha from *Bharathipura* (1973) too. Initially, we see Jagannatha introspecting his life in England that sums up his aimlessness in a new culture,

What did I do during those six years in England? By being a subtle fraud, I got along well with both whites and the blacks; ... I argued that a selfish, materialistic life was the only worthwhile way of living, and enjoyed the glamour of passing off as an existentialist. ... That way, I could easily justify my aimless, drifting lifestyle (Ananthamurthy 32).

Once back in his hometown, similar to Pandurang, Jagannatha too gets alienated soon. He thinks that Bharathipura is stuck in the "embryo of Manjunatha" (11) who is the powerful deity of the town. The traditional practices of his town that have been passed on from generation to generation appear oppressive and unscientific to him. He decides to act and liberate Bharathipura from the clutches of Manjunatha. In this regard, he is suddenly driven by an idea to break Manjunatha by taking a group of Holeyaru (dalits) of his town into Manjunatha's temple. Throughout the novel, he goes on giving a series of justifications in favor of his action but he is disappointed to realize that the people around him both his and Holeyaru

remain unconvinced of his massive plans. He even wonders why they do not think like him. In the process, he realizes that he cannot be one with the Holeyas or with anyone in the town. His alienation and his crisis get highlighted in his thinking that he “would become too much an insider and lose identity if he believed in God and without becoming an outsider with things of God, he can't begin to do things that he wanted to do in this place”. (45)

Jagannatha comes to the conclusion that the only probable way to create an impact on the people of Bharathipura is by rejecting Manjunatha first (44). He feels that life in such a society is “pointless because there is no scope for any action here except, eating, mating, dying” (63). He wonders why the people around him are unable to connect to his ideas about temple entry to break Manjunatha and he “feared that his life would become desiccated with such artificiality” (167). Despite his efforts, Jagannatha's temple entry project remains incomplete. However, though Jagannatha is disturbed by the failure of his project, the novel concludes with Jagannatha thinking of coming up with new initiatives for Bharathipura. But throughout, the feeling of alienation continues to exist in him.

Thus, both Pandurang and Jagannatha remain alienated not only in the places outside their milieu but also in their own societies.

Kosla and Bharathipura: Similarities and beyond

The texts have created the protagonists who hail from rich feudal families. We come to know that Pandurang's father had many farmhands working for him and he himself states in the beginning of the text that his father was an “established sort of bod” (1). Jagannatha too belongs to the rich and well-respected family of Bharathipura. Jagannatha is sent to England for higher studies while Pandurang goes to Poona to join a college. Both feel alienated in the new societies. Both the heroes return to their homes. Once back, they both feel alienated even amidst their own people as illustrated in the previous section.

What is striking is that both Pandurang and Jagannatha share similar attitudes towards the way people have organised their lives in the society around them. Jagannatha feels that Bharathipura is caught in the “embryo of Manjunatha” while Pandurang feels that living in his village is living like a “beast”. The conspicuous aspect in *Bharathipura* is Jagannatha's observations about his town. To him, this temple town is uncreative as he ponders that “Life has ceased to be creative here. Manjunathaswamy is the cancer of our lifestyle” and therefore “he must be destroyed” (10). According to him, “There were never anything beautiful in the town of Bharathipura” (Ibid). He thinks, that the town and the streets of Bharathipura “cannot create anything, at any time” (Ibid). Because of Manjunatha, “No wonder nothing ever happens here, nothing new; God has made life sterile...” (11). Therefore, unless and until God is destroyed, “we will never be creative” (Ibid). He goes on blaming Manjunatha for all the backwardness that he sees in the town and therefore, decides to destroy him. While walking down the temple street, he notices,

But the men who wiled their time on the benches lining the shop front were old familiar faces. They sat watching pilgrims, digesting their breakfast of seasoned beaten rice or doses, while their woman sat in smoky wood- fire kitchen throughout the day.... Here they sat until it was time for lunch; then they would wend their way home. (5)

His observation continues,

Somehow the belly was filled; someone gave birth, someone died. In a year there were at least a few deaths, a few births, ten or more weddings. Somehow time moved on, hair greyed, teeth dropped out(5)

It is interesting to note that Jagannatha's description of Bharathipura sounds similar to Pandurang's description of Sangvi. The very social behaviour of the villagers irritates Pandurang. The way the villagers, including his father have organised their lives irks him even more. Pandurang finds the villagers selfish and money minded. According to him, the villagers are an “easy going lot” (279). He is convinced that

“living in village is by and large just... living like a beast” (296). Narrating his observations, he states that the villagers don't care for anything and they have this attitude that, “Whatever happens, happens for the best” (ibid). Further, he feels bothered with this idea that nothing happens in the village that is related to knowledge and there is “no conformity here between things that merely help to pass the time and art etc” (Ibid). He is also disappointed that people in the village do not read and is surprised to realise “How their time goes by in utter contentment, month after month” (Ibid). He thinks that,

“with the exception of the threshing machine it was impossible for anything new to enter the world of our village. Instead, the youth from here go away to the city. ... (306).

Pandurang finally concludes that the manner in which villagers have organised their life thus is beyond his comprehension (297).

However, if we observe the novels closely, we come to know that both Sangvi and Bharathipura have an active social life. People are busy in their activities and everything looks normal to all except for the characters like Pandurang and Jagannatha. It is interesting to note that the descriptions in the novel suggest that Bharathipura, being a temple town is buzzing with activities throughout the year. Despite amidst so much action, Jagannatha feels alienated. Their activities look dull and meaningless for him. So is also the case with Pandurang. However, beyond these similarities, there lies one significant difference between these two protagonists. If Pandurang is a detached melancholic observer, Jagannatha is basically restless. Unlike Pandurang, Jagannatha is not passive. There is an urge in him to act. If Pandurang pays attention towards larger issues about life and death, and his existence, especially after his younger sister's death, Jagannatha too is obsessed with the idea of doing something. The difference is that Jagannatha becomes agitated and immediately decides to act. Whether he plans these actions for himself or for the people of his town, is a different nature of question. But fundamentally both Pandurang and Jagannatha are disturbed to the core. Pandurang with his keen sense of observation goes on narrating his observations on people around him. He never tries to be one with his society. Jagannatha, on the other hand, tries to be one among the people even though he soon realises that he cannot enter the world of the people of Bharathipura and be one with them. So, even amidst their own people, both the protagonists remain alienated and separated. Both the novels have created men who observe and think about larger issues pertaining to human situation and the society in which they dwell. Further, both the novels have open ending thus leaving the readers with the images of two sensitive individuals pondering about their situations.

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