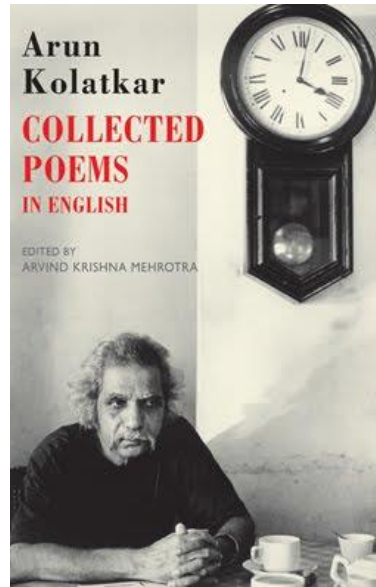


*Kala Ghoda Poems:*  
**Anguish Brought by Hypocrisy of Progress**  
**Dr. Mrs. Anisa G. Mujawar, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D.**



Courtesy: <http://www.cse.iitk.ac.in/users/amit/books/kolatkar-2011-collected-poems-in.html>

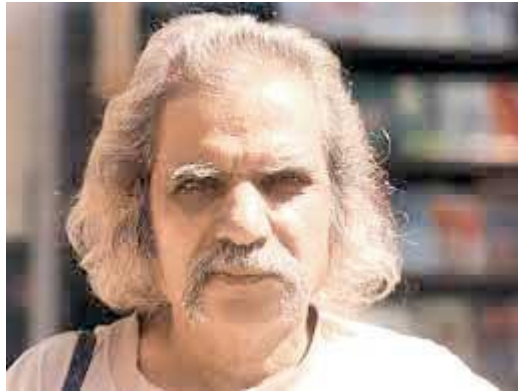
**Abstract**

Arjun Kolatkar's *Kala Ghoda* depicts postmodern socio-political India. It represents the life of the underprivileged and highlights its absolute disparity with the technological and material progress of India. It portrays the lives of people living on the streets - sweepers, lepers, prostitutes, beggars, drunkards, and others like them. It brings objects, animals, rubbish, and ecology together. Kolatkar observes the marginalized poor, against the overcrowded, advanced, capitalistic Mumbai, to pinpoint that their condition has not changed in post-colonial India. Their condition was neither good in the pre-British times, nor did it improve in the colonial period, and continues to go on in the same miserable drudgery even today! The features of postmodernism like irony, humour, minimalism, techno culture, writing of the long poem by dividing it into shorter pieces, consumerism, commodity glorification, identity crisis and so on, are all reflected in *Kala Ghoda*. Kolatkar does not indulge in the past traditions of India, but focuses on the wider, modern world and the people living in capitalist urbanization.

This paper attempts to highlight the life of Mumbai portrayed in “Breakfast Time at Kala Ghoda”. The scene of the underprivileged coming together for breakfast and enjoying life quite optimistically stands entirely in contrast to the lives of their masters. This poem emphasizes their pangs. It gives a call in a humorous and ironical tone to the entire humanity to think of the hypocrisy of progress affecting the lives of the poor of India.

**Keywords:** Kala Ghoda, Mumbai, the marginalized poor, postmodernism, hypocrisy of progress, commodity glorification

### **Arun Kolatkar’s Works**



**Arun Kolatkar (1932-2004)**

Arun Kolatkar wrote both in Marathi and English. His poetry reveals his passionate surveillance of the life around him. He used to observe the life of South Mumbai from his Café table at Kala Ghoda and it resulted in his *Kala Ghoda Poems*. The title ‘Kala Ghoda’ comes from a highly crowded area in South Bombay. The famous Jahangir Art Gallery is located at this place. This space includes colonial monuments like the Rajabhai tower and the Prince of Wales museum. The literal meaning of Hindi phrase ‘Kala Ghoda’ is ‘black horse’. It refers to a monument of King Edward VII in black granite. It is a statue donated by Sir Alfred Sassoon in commemoration of the King’s visit to India and to Bombay in 1876. This monument was damaged in 1965. This place now comprises the zoological gardens of the Jijamata Udyan in Byculla, Bombay. But the area continues to be called by this absent statue of colonial domination.

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

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*Kala Ghoda Poems* depict postmodern socio-political India. The poems represent the life of the underprivileged and highlight its absolute disparity with the technological and material progress of India. These poems portray the lives of the people living on the streets - sweepers, lepers, prostitutes, beggars, drunkards, etc. They put before the readers objects, animals, rubbish, and ecology together. Kolatkar observes the marginalized people against the overcrowded, advanced, capitalistic Mumbai to pinpoint that their condition has not changed in postcolonial India. Though India got its freedom and struggled to become modern, it has failed to bring happiness and solve the problem of hunger and poverty in the postmodern period. 'Kala Ghoda' reminds the Indians of the British colonial rule. It is substituted by the capitalist, neo-colonial India. Mumbai stands as a city occupied with the wretched and colonized by the neocolonial power structures.

### **Post-modernist Features of *Kala Ghoda Poems***

The features of postmodernism like irony, humour, minimalism, techno culture, writing the long poem by dividing it into shorter pieces, consumerism, commodity glorification, identity crisis and such, are reflected in *Kala Ghoda Poems*. Kolatkar has put a blank space before starting each poem. The gap prepares readers to read the truth about the Indian scenario in this postmodern period. The gap makes the readers stop and contemplate the development of India. The gap also stands as the symbol of the gap between the life of the white-collared upper class and upper middle-class and the life of the blue-collared, the poor, the down-trodden, and rootless people. The use of gaps is a postmodern style of writing. The poet does not indulge in the past traditions of India but focuses on the wider, modern world and the people living in capitalist urbanization.

## **Focus of This Paper**

This paper attempts to underline the life of Mumbai portrayed in “Breakfast Time at Kala Ghoda”. The scene of the underprivileged coming together for breakfast and enjoying life quite optimistically stands entirely in contrast to the lives of their masters. This poem emphasizes their pangs. It gives the call in a humorous and ironical tone to the entire humanity to think of the hypocrisy of progress, affecting the lives of the poor in India.

## **Breakfast Time at Kala Ghoda**

“Breakfast Time at Kala Ghoda” contains 31 poems. The first poem begins with the reference to the life at Tokyo and Seoul. The poet thinks of the time at these places. He puts into words the prosperous life of these places, because he prepares readers to see the actual life of the poor, underprivileged Indians. It begins with the reference to a clock ‘the big daddy of all clocks’.

In the second poem he refers to America, Peru, Alaska, and Russia. He describes the food taken by people as per their geographical and social culture. The time of the western countries stands in contrast to the time in the eastern countries. Besides the time, the poet contrasts the rich food of the west and the scanty food of the east taken by the poor.

## **The Lonesome Jew**

The poet brings readers to the east and then specially to Mumbai by referring to a 90-years-old Jew lady, Leja. He portrays the lonesome Jew in Mumbai. She is living all by herself in the one-room apartment in Baniocha, near Warsaw. She remembers her father and his bread factory. Probably she has lost all her dear ones and is living a lonely life in Mumbai. Mumbai gives shelter to such lives.

## **Nameless People**

In the fourth poem the poet begins to give the picture of the nameless people living at Kala Ghoda. He highlights postmodern India striving for food and survival without any medical facilities. It gives the picture of a 15 year old, Nagamma, a Gola woman’s struggle to feed her baby. She has brought her baby into the world, by:

-cutting the birthstring  
with a flintknife,

cleaning up afterwards –  
doing it all by herself  
like any other Gola Woman. (7-12)

Nagamma's delivery highlights the situation of poor mothers delivering their babies without nurse, doctor, medicines, and sanitation. She comes out of her hut for breakfast and crawls in the direction of two idlis which she intends to convert into milk for her child:

- a miracle  
she alone  
can perform. (37-39)

The poverty and helplessness of Nagamma at Kala Ghoda is compared in the fifth poem to the four Dalits, the downtrodden in Andhra Pradesh. The poet focuses on the discrimination based on caste system in India. The Dalits are forced by the high-caste Hindus to eat human excreta because they had let their cattle graze in the jowar field of an upper-caste landlord. The capitalistic system has maintained the difference between the privileged and the underprivileged. Postmodern India cannot stand on social equality. It is very remarkable to note how the element of colonialism can be found in postmodern and postcolonial India. About colonial period Jasbir Jain says:

The colonial period not only created a sense of alienation from the native cultural tradition, but also ingrained an attitude of subjection. There is a division at several different levels: a division between the world of ideas and one of reality and a division in the self. By placing the norm, the measuring stick outside the native society, it has taken away its centre from it; a kind of hatred for the self has been allowed to grow. (3)

### **Post-colonial Modern India**

This view can truly be part of the neo-colonial postmodern India which has forced an attitude of subjection at different levels upon the downtrodden and homeless. The reforms to educate and civilize Indians have alienated these poor natives.

### **Prisoners' Lives**

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The poet highlights in the sixth poem prisoners' lives by describing the suspects in Byculla jail. These suspects come from the economically and socially backward classes. Postmodern India cannot improve the situation of the suspects. These suspects are the products of a society that indulges in all kinds of addictions. They are not familiar with education and elite culture. Hence, they are not interested in obligatory education given to them in jail. They are:

Interested more in horseplay,  
fisticuffs, insider trading  
in cigarettes and charas pills. (13-15)

The suspects do not want education obligatory to them in the jail.

### **Rich Variety of Food in Hotels in Mumbai**

In the seventh poem the poet turns to various hotels in Mumbai where food is served in its rich variety. He very effectively brings the postmodern Mumbai based on high modification of food habits for those who can afford them. This time he prepares readers to know the contrast between the lives of the people at Kala Ghoda with the lives of people who can enjoy a variety of food.

### **The Homeless**

In the eighth poem the poet describes the homeless and deserted Indians surviving in postmodern Mumbai, a city with technological advancement and material prosperity. The poet depicts a woman at Kala Ghoda carrying:

a jumbo aluminium box full of idlis  
- lying  
like an infant Krishna. (7-9)

### **The Lady of Idlis**

In the ninth poem the poet calls the Lady of Idlis 'Annapoorna'. When she brings idlis, life of the people living on the street at Kala Ghoda gets some sense as it promotes movement.

## Other Poems

In poem number ten and twelve he describes the blind man, his kitten and the yellow dog at his feet, his grandma, little vamp all rush for the idlis and the breakfast time at Kala Ghoda begins.

In the fifteenth poem, these persons are followed by the ogress, the rate poison boy, the pinwheel boy, the 'hipster queen of the crossroads', 'the Demosthenes of Kala Ghoda', 'the pregnant queen of tarts', 'the laughing Buddha', 'the knucklebones champ' and so on. In the sixteenth poem the poet refers to each and every soul:

within a mile of the little island  
is soon gravitating towards it  
to receive the sacrament of idli. (2-4)

They came 'walking, running, dancing, limping, stumbling, rolling'. The homeless and hungry woman eating idli is called 'the laughing (and sometimes giggling) Buddha' in the seventeenth poem. She has wrapped her body in something like a bed sheet. The picture of this woman confirms that India has succeeded in enhancing the technological progress, has successfully tested the atomic power, but has failed to abolish the hunger of the poor. India has failed to provide space to the persons like the shoeshine boy, toiling and earning a pittance on the streets in the nineteenth poem. The progress of India cannot give food, shelter, and clothing to the poor and the marginalized. The technological progress has generated a rift between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'.

## Focus on Haves and Have-nots

About the negative side of such progress, Nirmal Selvamony rightly says:

Considering the negative development of the colonies, we might say that the unity of the families is imperiled, their histories and memories are obliterated by forces such as urbanization, employment abroad, expatriation and dislocation. Economic development is negative when man is isolated from his communitarian bonding with other men, nature and supernatural powers and seen as an individual with infinite potential and wants. (62)

The rich hotels serve a variety of high quality food to those who are able to pay for it. The rich Indians can also afford highly effective medical help. But the hungry paralytic in a wheelchair in poem number twenty has to use his ‘wheelchair made by cannibalizing two bicycles’. Like him is the ‘legless hunchback’ in poem number twenty one. Nobody on the road is surprised to see him, the speed-king of Bombay:

pushing the road back, expertly,  
with his bare hands,  
and with a big grin on his face. (13-15)

All the homeless persons enjoy idlis in their bowls, katoras, mugs, plates or almond leaves in poem number twenty two. Such homeless and beggars in India disturb writers like V. S. Naipaul who says, “the beggars have become a nuisance and a disgrace. By becoming too numerous they have lost their place in the Hindu system and have no claim on anyone”. (58) Of course, Kolatkar does not speak about the homeless of any particular religion living at Kala Ghoda. He seriously ponders over the pathetic conditions of the wounded indigenious. They are not a nuisance for him, but they are helpless Indians who are denied the comforts of social equality.

### **God’s Glory for All**

In poem number twenty five, the poet shows a leper whose clean-shaven head is glistening to god’s glory’. It puts forth the situation of the helpless lepers in postmodern India. One hippy also comes to this area. After asking him about his whereabouts, the street people of Kala Ghoda offer him idlis because he is hungry and they take him to be their friend.

The poet sarcastically depicts the positive attitude and happiness of the downtrodden in poem number twenty seven. The street-person is happy to find a shelter to rest on the road. He is thankful for the blocks of concrete on the street. It gives him the pleasure of being in a house.

In poem number twenty eight, the poet describes a naked child killing a rat with the help of his bat. His mother brings him back, puts some clothes on him and takes him to the



little traffic island to feed him. The poet brings all the mothers in the world to her level of motherly love and says:

Like all good mothers, she knows  
that good breakfasts  
make good cricketers. (49-51)

The rich cricketers are cared for by their mothers who give them good breakfasts, but the poor mother can give only meager food to her child and make him survive. The poet contrasts the grand life of cricketers with the naked child on the street skillfully using his bat to kill a rat.

### **Realistic, Passionate and Loving Description of the Poor and Unwanted**

To accompany the hungry and the marginalized, the Kala Ghoda is visited by a 'delegation of crows' in poem number twenty nine. The area of one mile radius from the Kala Ghoda becomes very active and resourceful with the arrival of Annapurna. When she packs up and leaves the place in poem number thirty, a sort of after-image lingers behind her. She goes away with a lighter basket on her head, an empty bucket in her hand, and a full purse at her waist.

In poem number thirty one, the poet calls the situation around Annapurna a cafeteria which disappears 'like a castle in a children's book'. After the breakfast, the traffic island at Kala Ghoda becomes a flat old boring self.'

### **Conclusion**

The poems in "The Breakfast Time at Kala Ghoda" depict the social outcasts living the impoverished life in postmodern India. They are the strings of indictments on the downtrodden. Human beings are at their centre. The poet is interested in humanizing the victims of the capitalistic society which has created a vast gap between the privileged and the underprivileged. He deals with the life of these people in postmodern Mumbai. The pre-British past, as well as the colonial past of their lives are in no way different from its present. The poet writes about this situation because he is a conscientious writer who cannot ignore it. His poems insist on granting the legitimate human worth, value, and respectable position to the oppressed and the neglected.

The people living on the streets of Kala Ghoda do not revolt or fight for their identity or alienation. The poet very succinctly, but ironically emphasizes that these people are the victims of social, economic, and cultural inequality. The poems are endowed with radical humanism which becomes a perpetual foundation for universal values of human life. Such a work becomes naturally a means of achieving identity for the homeless, oppressed, and marginalized people. They portray India with innumerable, minute details. The poet's concerns call entire humanity to see the pangs of the underprivileged. These poems focus on the dearth of food and also the dearth of sensitivity of the privileged towards the unfortunate.

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