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The Concept of the Avtaras in the Novels of Bhalchandra Nemade

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Bhalchandra Nemade an eminent novelist, poet and critic appeared on the scene of Marathi literature with his debut novel, *Kosala* (1963). This followed the novels in Changdev Quartet, *Bidhar*, *Hool*, *Jarila* and *Zool*. In 2010 he published his long awaited novel *Hindu*. In *Kosala* he introduced Pandurang Sangvikar a village youth aspiring for his emergence as young person. In Changdev Quartet novels it is Changdev Patil who is college lecturer in English. In *Hindu* it is Khanderao Kundlik who is the protagonist. All these protagonists are actually incarnations or avatars of one hero. These incarnations have been inspired by the incarnations of God in Hindu myths and the Panchkrishna in Mahanubhav cult in Maharashtra. Nemade seems to highlight the Hindu concept that soul never dies but appears in another body in all his novels.

Bhalchandra Nemade, an eminent Marathi novelist, poet and critic, started his long literary career with the publication of *Kosala* (1963). As a critic, a poet and a novelist, Nemade has always impressed Marathi readers and critics. Nemade strongly believes in his literary principle of Nativism or Desivad which insists that a literature, like the plants and trees growing on the native soil in a region, grows on the native literary forms and movements of the author concerned. He or she should not borrow literary forms and concepts which are unhealthy and unnatural to the growth of the writer. Having heavily depended on this belief, Nemade seeks his roots in Indian and Marathi literary streams. Nemade gives credit to Marathi literary tradition in spite of his exposure to European and Western literatures. In one interview, Nemade has said: "...the books which enthralled me are *Leelacharitra*, *Smrutisthal*, *Sutrapath*, *Drushtantpath* and *Bhausahaebanchi Bakhar*. I look at all these as a single great narrative" (Nemade 1990: 267; translated). Nemade also accepts the influence of *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabhartha* on him. Nemade dislikes the monolingual and monocultural European literary traditions accepted and imitated by the contemporary Marathi writers.

With the publication of *Kosala*, Nemade wiped out the popular concept of the hero prevalent in the novels of N.C. Phadke and V.S. Khandekar. Nemade introduced in his novels heroes devoid of romanticism and he started emphasizing realism. Nemade's heroes are not conventional but they come with special features of his literary philosophy and ideology. Nemade brought a shift in the image of hero in the Marathi novel after 1960. This paper is an attempt to study the features of heroes or protagonists in Nemade's novels.

Nemade has expressed his views about the heroes in the Marathi novel after 1960, also called the new novel. Nemade says: "In Marathi criticism these heroes have been labeled as existentialist, anti-heroes, etc. In the Hindu society such types cannot exist or take birth. In fact these heroes should represent the native tradition of Gandhi and Lohia or the literary tradition of Padamanji or Saneguruji who fought

against the British colonial forces. These heroes should have no false colonial values like ambition, liberty, humanism, love, sex etc. Such heroic qualities of bookish courage should not be present in these heroes. Because in Hindu reality such things are not found” (Nemade in Sanap 1996: 76; translated).

Nemade has created three protagonists in his novels: Pandurang Sangvikar in *Kosala*, Changdev Patil in *Bidhar*, *Hool*, *Jarila* and *Zool*, and Khanderao Kundlik in *Hindu*. Nemade believes that a novel writing requires an awareness of the whole society around the novelist. Therefore in his novels the protagonists express a number of ideologies and they are exposed to various kinds of people. Nemade says “Rather than other types of literary forms it is novel whose existence is relatively associated with the society. Of course, it also means a novel expresses the consciousness of the society” (Nemade 1990: 164; translated). Nemade believes in the morality of the novelist. A novelist possesses or implies the morality which is quite his own and not generally expected in a deteriorating society. Nemade thinks that when a writer implies his morality in the novel, a reader is bound to get caught in it. If the reader opposes the morality that is implied or expressed, it is the success of the novelist. If a novel is written about imaginary or false reality or in the unknown past, it lacks morality and it deteriorates merely at the level of entertainment. As Nemade believes in the close relationship between the reality and literature he has created the protagonists drawing on his experiences as an eminent professor of English literature. However, he does not forget to relate it with the other social issues. All the three protagonists who experience a vast social space in his novels actually are the part of a long novel. Pandurang Sangvikar in *Kosala*, Changdev Patil in *Changdev Quartet* novels and Khanderao Kundlik in *Hindu* all are the incarnations of the same protagonist. In fact the incarnations of a deity are very common in the Hindu myths. Nemade who loves the Hindu myths might have been attracted towards the idea albeit he has used the technique with his own speciality.

Some Marathi critics have already traced the commonalities between Pandurang Sangvikar and Changdev Patil. They think that *Kosala*, the debut novel, and *Zool*, the last novel, in the *Changdev Quartet* novels constitute a single line of narration. Only there is a change in the name of the protagonist, from Pandurang to Changdev. According to Dr. Kishor Sanap, a critic in Marathi literature, Pandurang Sangvikar in *Kosala* incarnates in Changdev Patil in *Bidhar*. Sanap thinks that the ending of *Kosala* is the beginning of *Bidhar*. In *Kosala* Pandurang Sangvikar is a young unemployed youth of twenty five years age in 1963 and after twelve years in 1975 Changdev Patil appears as if to continue the narration in *Bidhar*. The only difference is that of the point of view. In *Kosala* it is the first person narration of Pandurang Sangvikar while in *Bidhar* the third person narration has been used. Another critic Arvind Mangaonkar says “Pandurang Sangvikar in *Kosala* has been transformed into Changdev Patil in the novels of *Changdev Chatusthi*” (Mangaonkar in Sanap 1996: 31; translated). To Sanap, Changdev is mature than Pandurang. Sanap thinks that the quotation of Yogananda at the beginning of *Bidhar* illustrates or is an evidence of the hero incarnation. Sanap says “As Indradat with his yogic power enters into the body of Yoganand, the King, to acquire the wealth to pay the honorarium to his teacher or Guru, so does Pandurang enters into Changdev Patil to carry out his social responsibility” (Sanap 1996: 32; translated). Sanap refers to Nemade who says “we also try to be a transformed image of someone like Yoganand and live in the society” (Nemade in Sanap 1996: 32; translated). In the opinion of Sanap this is evidence that Nemade himself thinks that Changdev is an incarnation or reflection of Pandurang. Sanap further argues that Nemade has created Changdev Patil with the

morality of Pandurang Sangvikar. Changdev begins his role from the point where *Kosala* ends and Changdev with features of Pandurang continues the trail. Therefore if we ignore Pandurang we may not be able to understand Changdev Patil. According to Sanap, “the meaninglessness in the life of Pandurang and the meaningfulness in the life of Changdev Patil and Namdev Bhole have been connected with Nemade’s own life. Nemade connects all his novels with his vast experience of life” (Sanap 1996: 32; translated). Sanap refers to Nemade who says “the implied idealism in *Kosala* has been clarified by Changdev Patil who puts the morals of living under all other values and Namdev Bhole who wants to live meaningfully in the deteriorated society” (Nemade in Sanap 1996: 32; translated). Sanap further argues that Pandurang Sangvikar and Changdev Patil are inseparable. On the contrary Nemade himself has given the hint that the implied idealism in *Kosala* has been expressed through the life of Changdev Patil and Namdev Bhole. Sanap says “Therefore there is a single moral vision in Pandurang Sangvikar –Changdev Patil–Namdev Bhole. This principle makes a single journey from *Kosala* to *Zool*” (Sanap 1996: 32; translated).

Thus Marathi critics put Pandurang Sangvikar, Changdev Patil and Namdev Bhole on a parallel level. However Namdev Bhole was introduced in the last of the Changdev Quartet novel *Zool*. *Zool* was published in 1979, two years after *Jarila* (1977) was published. Sanap argues that *Zool* is the artistic innovation of Nemade like *Kosala*. Sanap wants to suggest that *Zool* stands at the turning point of Nemade’s artistic career subsequent to *Kosala*. He thinks that in *Zool* Changdev Patil comes with two images: one is Changdev himself and the other is Namdev Bhole. Thus Changdev and Namdev are not different. Sanap disagrees with the opinion of Nemade who thinks that Namdev Bhole is the new hero in *Zool*. Sanap gives his reasons for it. He says “Though Nemade thinks Namdev is parallel to Changdev in *Zool*, Namdev is not an independent protagonist. In *Zool* also it is Changdev Patil who is the hero and Namdev only supports him. Namdev Bhole is parallel to Changdev’s morality as a seed of possible hero in *Hindu*. If there is no Changdev Patil in *Hindu*, Namdev Bhole will incarnate him. It is because in the novels of Nemade all the heroes present the same morality. Nemade’s heroes Sangvikar, Changdev Patil and Namdev Bhole change only their bodies and name but their internal make up and morality is the same like the roots of a big tree which provide nutrition to the tree” (Sanap 1996: 61-62; translated).

The three Nemadian heroes discussed so far raise the doubt about the change of the hero in *Hindu*. In *Hindu*, as mentioned earlier, it is not Namdev Bhole who is the hero but it is Khanderao Kundlik who is the hero. The next doubt that poses immediately is ‘Is Khanderao the variation of the earlier protagonists in any sense?’ Before attempting to answer these questions it is necessary to find out the reasons of discontinuing Namdev in *Hindu*.

Hindu was written over a period of almost three decades. However, Nemade confessed his intention of changing the hero of *Hindu*. While answering a question in an interview, Nemade says: “Namdev Bhole is not in *Hindu*. It was my earlier plan to have Namdev as the hero in *Hindu*. But I have understood that he cannot be the protagonist in *Hindu*. He will not be there. If I had written *Hindu* immediately after *Zool*, Namdev might have been the hero in *Hindu*. However there have been many changes in between and if I keep Namdev as hero I will not be able to do justice to the various themes I want to deal with in *Hindu*. Therefore I would like to introduce another protagonist in *Hindu* who will suit with the other things in *Hindu*” (Nemade 2008: 174; translated). This interview was conducted in 2008 and *Hindu* was published in 2010. One of the reasons of introducing Khanderao in *Hindu* could be of

his being a Kunbi. Kunbi caste in Maharashtra is an agrarian society. Kunbi holds a central place in Maharshtrian Hindu society as controlling the economical and social power. Namdev Bhole was introduced as a Dhangar belonging to the Nomadic tribe in Maharashtra. As Nemade deals with Hinduism in the novel, he might have used Khanderao as the hero to look at the social structure from the central point. In another interview, Nemade, while answering the question about introducing Namdev Bhole in *Zool* and whether he is going to be the hero *Hindu*, his next novel, Nemade answers: "I wanted to write a single novel from *Bidhar* to *Hindu*. I had made a rough written plan of it. I wanted to have an innocent hero who would note the caste crisis and other vital social matters but I found artistically such a role of the hero finished before I started writing *Hindu*. Therefore the same hero is not suitable for the atmosphere in *Hindu*. Not only that but also I want to have an aggressive hero in *Hindu*. His being a Hindu will be tasted every moment in the novel. He will be an Indian who will go abroad. I found Changdev Patil is of no use in *Hindu*. I need an aggressive hero in *Hindu*" (Nemade 2008: 85; translated). This clearly suggests Nemade's intention of dissolving earlier protagonists when he wanted to write *Hindu*. He has very clearly said about the dissolution of Changdev Patil in *Zool*. Nemade says "it was necessary to dissolve Changdev in the frame of the novel" (Nemade 2008: 175; translated). It is clear then that Nemade did not want to continue either Changdev or Namdev in *Hindu*. However, when he admits that *Kosala* is more successful than the novels in Changdev Quartet, we can conclude that in *Hindu* the hero could be a variation of the earlier protagonists. Nemade says, "*Kosala* is more successful because *Kosala* is more intense. May be because it is the first novel that the readers think that Marathi personality has been expressed completely in it. Once the original colour has been established, the variations of it cannot be changed. We might be going ahead like that established colour" (Nemade 2008: 143; translated). Is Khanderao 'a going' into the direction of the established colour? Before this question is answered, it is necessary to study the influences on Nemade.

Nemade has been influenced by the Hindu scriptures. The Hindu mythology incorporates the idea of the incarnations of the God. The ten avatars of Vishnu are famous in Hinduism. Avatara is a descent in Hinduism to denote the descent upon the earth of a part of the God. Nemade, who has been influenced by *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabhartha*, must have been influenced by the concept of the incarnations. Secondly, he is also influenced by Mahanubhav cult established by Shri Chakradhar. Mahanubhav followers believe in Panchkrishna, the variations of the same God, Lord Krishna. Dr. Deshpande gives the idea about Mahanubhav. Deshpande says "at the very beginning of *Sutrapath* it is said that unless the manifested God has blessed the devotee, the devotee cannot have salvation. Immediately after this is said the five names of God have been given which are called as Panchkrishna. Though the names of the avatars are different all of them are called as Panchkrishna which exemplifies respect for Shri Krishna in Mahanubhav" (Deshpande 1995: 323; translated). Deshpande, in the same article, points out the myths about Chakradhar that he was a manifestation of Haripal, the son of Vishaldev. Vishaldev was the chief in the court of the King Maldev. In a war Haripaldev was killed in whose dead body Shri Changdev, the third of the Panchkrishna entered. As Haripaldev rejuvenated to life, his parents and wife was happy. Haripaldev later met Shri Govindprabhu who addressed him as Shri Chakradhar. Shri Chakradhar became the fifth Panchkrishna. He is an incarnation in Mahanubhav. Now Nemade who accepts the influence of Mahanubhav literature might have imported the technique of the descent of the heroes in his novels. It is discernible in the qualities of his protagonists though they deal with the issues of the

society of which they are the part. They are the heroes not in the traditional sense who want to guide the society. Nemadian heroes exemplify the changed concept of 'hero' as Rosette L Lamont refers in her essay "The Hero in spite of Himself". She states If we examine the works of contemporary writers, we are struck with the shift which has occurred in the image of the hero. The traditional concept no longer applies to our times. In the past the hero was the shining example of society. Whether he was myth turned reality, or reality become myth, he was the man or woman who has been able to battle past personal and local historical limitations to the generally valid, normally human forces (Lamont 1962: 73).

As mentioned earlier, Nemade has adopted the techniques from his own literary tradition. However, he changed the concept of the hero found in the contemporary Marathi novel. He discarded the romantic and idealistic heroes in the novels of N.C. Phadke and V.S. Khandekar. His heroes deal with the realistic issues and they are not the shining example of society as they have their own moral standpoint.

Considering Nemade's strong emphasis on the depiction of the famer community in *Hindu*, it becomes clear that the hero in this novel is also the incarnation of the earlier protagonists. It is because they are also from the farmer's family. Pandurang Sangvikar in *Kosala* belongs to a farmer's family. He ironically comments that in his family everyone is worried of each penny. In *Kosala* Nemade begins with the key issues in the life of a farmer. Pandurang is critical of his father's hypocrisy as his father worships god everyday but sales sulfate at the higher rates and orders Pandurang to apply for the scholarship which is provided for poor students. In *Kosala* Pandurang is in direct conflict with his father. Pandurang does not like to continue as the male heir of his family. He dislikes running ahead his clan. He wants to marry the girl who will not be able to give birth to children. He gets very much melancholic by the death of his younger sister, Mani by plague. He gets angry at his father, mother and grandmother who neglected Mani in her illness.

In the novels comprising the Changdev Quartet, Changdev Patil also belongs to a village called Udli. However he is in Mumbai at the beginning of *Bidhar*. He has already left the village though occasionally he draws mental sustenance from the memories of his childhood spent in the village. Changdev is also the male heir to his father's land because his brother Digambar died by falling from the top of a tree. There is an occasional conflict between the father and Changdev though it is not so intense like that in *Kosala*. In these novels the father's image has been made prominent with the depiction of the responsibility he carries as the head of the joint family. In these novels there is the picture of the disintegration of the joint family. Changdev continues the trait in Pandurang's character as he dislikes being a farmer. Changdev wants to experience the world outside instead of living in the village.

All these issues have been dealt in *Hindu* by Nemade. Of course he has given a lot of details of the farmer's life in *Hindu*. He has mainly focused on the commune of farmers in the village Morgaon. Like the earlier heroes, Khanderao also dislikes being a farmer. He is a research scholar in Archaeology. Khanderao tells us about the village system in Maharashtra that has the base of farming. In this novel Nemade has given a vast spectrum of the caste system in Hinduism. In *Hindu* too Khanderao is left as the only male heir as his brother Bhavdu dies in an accident. Khanderao seems to have accepted the responsibility of his father almost unwillingly.

All the discussion so far suggests that Khanderao is in the line of the earlier protagonists. If we consider all these novels as a big canvass we can realize that Nemade has tried to reflect the Marathi society in the last hundred years through the

experiences of his modern young heroes. These experiences could be seen on a parallel level as the protagonists are more or less a continuation of the same hero.

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