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Regionalism in G.A. Kulkarni's Short Stories

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Abstract:

Many of G. A. Kulkarni's short stories can be studied from the perspective of regionalism as they are replete with detailed descriptions of particular locales along with the depiction of community beliefs prevalent in these locales and their lingual peculiarities. He delineates in these stories the lives of all the social classes in rural region on the Maharashtra-Karnataka boundaries focusing on the Brahmin community in particular. However, so integral are those components to his narratives that his stories are hardly, if at all, considered as regional stories. A close reading of GA's short stories from regionalism point of view enables one to get a new insight in his storytelling art and his engagement with the search for eternal truths through the study of the human life against a specific backdrop. It also makes one realize the significant contribution that GA has made to regional Indian Literature.

Keywords: *Regionalism, Short Story, Indian Literature, Regional Colour.*

GA Kulkarni's short stories, like any truly great literary text, are open to analyses from multiple viewpoints. As such, though his stories have been studied from many different perspectives, a lot of their aspects remain unexplored. One such not so well thought upon aspect of GA's oeuvre is his use of local colour in his short stories. Right from his first short story collection *Nilasawla* (1959) till the last collection published in his lifetime *Pinglawel* (1977), in most of his stories, he depicted the life on the borders between Maharashtra and Karnataka in the vicinity of the small towns like Belgaon and Dharwar. All these stories exhibit a skilful employment of regional peculiarities in the narrative.

What makes his stories immune to such an analysis is the fact that GA hardly names the locale of his stories. "Kairi" is one such story which does not name the places where its action takes place and yet the reader gets an unmistakable impression that it is located in the same aforementioned region on the Maharashtra-Karnataka border. GA achieves this by depicting, instead of merely naming, these locales to great detail in such a picturesque language that the reader can't help but 'see' themselves amidst them. The child protagonist-narrator of "Kairi", for instance, describes the new place he is visiting by comparing it with his hometown which had red soil. He disapproves of the new place stating: "But here, as though things were burnt all around, I could only see gray ash everywhere". He adds further: "On both sides of the road, were thorny bushes bearing red fruits, and pigs, wagging their tails suddenly rushed forth from them, making a strange whizzing sound" (*A Journey Forever*)

17). It is through the depiction of these minute details that GA fills the local colour in his short stories.

M. H. Abrams enlists “the detailed presentation in prose fiction of the setting ... which [is] distinctive of a particular region” as the first of the characteristics of Local Colour (*A Glossary of Literary Terms* 153). Such detailed presentations are plentiful in GA's short stories to such an extent that they become an integral part of the narrative. The child protagonist's accounts of aunt Tani's residence, Rajasaheb's well that he visits, his new school and its surroundings, are presented in such a manner that they play a significant role in the action of the narrative as Madhav Achwal rightly points out: “In his [GA's] story, there is no atmosphere, the story is in the atmosphere; - actually it is the story of the atmosphere” (*Jaswand* 123).

“Kankane” from GA's first collection exhibits this feature to the fullest with its description of the well that takes the centre stage in the story. GA brings alive the surrounding region: Narasu Bhatt's shop, the resting place for the bullock carts, and Mistri's residence all add to the sordidness of the story's action. However it is the description of Narasu Bhatt's house that crowns all other descriptions in the story. All these masterful descriptions lead to the creation of a haunting atmosphere that becomes an inseparable part of the story.

Though GA's stories exhibit this trait to the fullest, he doesn't stop with the mere depiction of the locale and goes ahead to delineate the local beliefs as well. The child protagonist's visit to Rajasaheb's well with a shepherd boy illustrates this. On reaching the well, the child finds it to be an ordinary well, but for the shepherd boy, the native of the place, it is full of extraordinariness on the account of it accommodating an entire Ganesh temple, which is believed to have sunk into the well. He accounts for it thus: “There used to be a Ganesh temple here...It collapsed one day and sank straight in the well.” What the child says further is more pertinent here as it demonstrates GA's skill over depicting a locale in its entirety not excluding even the seemingly illogical and irrational sets of beliefs. The shepherd boy states the belief of the whole community when he says: “When the water level goes down, the trunk of Lord Ganesha becomes visible” (*A Journey Forever* 23). This detail certainly adds a distinct flavour to the depiction of that place.

“Bali” (The Sacrificial Offering) is such another story from the collection *Nilasawala* which highlights the community beliefs at their most destructive form. The villagers in this story consider an orphan girl Amashi's presence in their village to be the cause of the famine that the village faces. And Amashi is considered ill-ominous simply for having born on the new moon day, an inauspicious day! This belief of the villagers finally leads them to sacrifice Amashi as an offering to the goddess to appease her and save the village from her wrath. Such local beliefs which are characteristic of the particular region are an integral part of GA's regional stories.

In yet another tale titled “Aqua Mum”, GA has given an account of the prevalence of such beliefs in village life. In this story from the collection *Sanjshakun*, the protagonist

recounts an incident from her childhood in which a man named Sanga is cursed by his own mother and his house is infested with snakes. He kills many a snakes and yet is not able to get rid of the infestation. In order to get rid of this infestation, Sanga kills his mother, who leaves on a remote hill, transfixing her with a spear repeatedly. On his return home, he finds outside his house “a dead snake lay with its body pricked and pierced at several points” (*A Journey Forever* 186). In this story and many others, GA makes use of these beliefs to underline the multifaceted nature of reality. He lays bare the hitherto unrevealed layers of reality by depicting such beliefs.

Another factor that adds to the local colour of GA’s stories is his distinct use of the language spoken in and around the border region of Maharashtra and Karnataka. He, however, does not use this particular dialect through and through his stories but makes a skilful use of it in the speeches of his characters. Dr. D. B. Kulkarni has enlisted these linguistic peculiarities as “use of dialectal words and interrogative sentences” while emphasising the fact that despite these features GA’s stories are not regional language stories. In spite of this fact, he asserts that GA’s stories such as “Guntawal”, “Chandrawal”, “Kankane”, “Bali” are most certainly regional stories (*GAnchi Mahakatha* 120). D. V. Deshpande, too, has pointed out the lingual peculiarities of GA’s fiction in the Introduction to his *GAnchya Katha: Ek Anwayartha*. According to him “a connoisseur would readily recognize the tinge of Kannad in his language”. He makes a pertinent observation in this regard when he points out: “Without being acquainted with the Marathi spoken around the borderlands of Maharashtra and Karnataka (its syntax, stress and intonation), one cannot appreciate his language fully” (1).

Dr. Anand Yadav, wondering about the fact that GA’s stories are not classified as ‘regional stories’ despite all their obviously regional components, has made some penetrative observations in his article “Regionalism in Literature”. He observes that the content of GA’s stories is primarily regional, though he is not considered as a regional story writer. He has pointed out that GA goes against the grain when he depicts the lives of the Brahmin folks in the rural areas and not necessarily the peasant class which dominates the regional literature in general (*Regionalism: Literature and Reality* 106). In “Kairi”, Dr. Yadav’s statement is easily justifiable. The child protagonist of this story belongs to a Brahmin family and though there are characters from other classes of the society in this story like the shepherd boy Ratan, the maid Tulasia and the village teacher Jadhav, it is the child’s Brahmin family – his uncle Shripu, his aunt Tani, her husband Bhaurao – who take the centre stage. However, as Dr. Yadav asserts, this still is a regional story as it depicts the life of this Brahmin family against the rural backdrop of Maharashtra-Karnataka boundary. A number of GA’s such stories like “Kairi” are regional stories though they depict the life of a social class which is generally associated with urbanism.

Dr. Yadav has proved his point by analysing the story “Radhi” which too depicts the Brahmin village life through the point of view of the child protagonist who belongs to Brahmin community. However, unlike “Kairi” which includes non-Brahmin characters too, “Radhi” focuses majorly on Brahmin characters: the Protagonist’s family, his eponymous friend Radhi, her tormentors as well as benefactors all belong to the same class of the society.

And still this story presents itself for the analysis from the regionalism point of view as all these Brahmin folks are based in a village and exhibit all the traits of rural life as such.

In "Radhi" too, GA brings forth the significance of community beliefs in the village life- whether that of peasants or others. The villagers in this story believe the protagonist's dog Kalu to be used as a means of black magic by Radhi and therefore they kill the dog mercilessly. The dog dies along with Radhi and with them dies a part of the child protagonist too. The conflict between the individual life and the community life, as portrayed in "Bali" too, is a pivotal issue in many of GA's stories of local colour. And it is the community that wins over the individual despite their social standing as exhibited in the case of Patil from the short story "Bali" who cannot save innocent Amashi even though he is the village chief. Whether regional or urbane, GA's stories aim at such revelations of eternal truths which become more important in the final analysis than the settings of these stories.

However, all these details peculiar to particular region in GA's stories are not merely employed "to add interest and authenticity to a narrative" as J. A. Cuddon states in his definition of the *local colour* in The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms & Literary theory. He never indulges in penning the details of rural life for the sake of effect or such trivial purposes. These details have a profoundly more important role to play in GA's narratives; they are, as discussed above, an integral part of these narratives. Cuddon states about such narratives: "When it becomes an essential and intrinsic part of the work then it is more properly called *regionalism*" (476). GA's stories of *local colour* definitely pass this test to lay a claim to the more artistic sphere of *regionalism*.

GA's use of local colour is such an integral part of his story-telling art that a casual reading does not even make one realise its employment. His stories are studded with the minutest details of his locales with all their colours, scents, sounds, flavours and textures. He makes skilful use of the community beliefs that dominates and directs the rhythms of village life. He invokes the powers of regional language in order to fill his detailed descriptions with throbbing and thriving life that enthralls a reader to such an extent that they become a part of that life. GA makes use of all this to highlight the dynamic relation between the individual and the community in one story and in another he employs them to emphasise the complexities of reality which lay beyond the reaches of rationalisation and trespass the boundary lines of logic. Whatever his ends, GA always succeeds in making these details of local colour "an essential and intrinsic part" of his narratives and as such when one studies them from the perspective of *regionalism* his stories hold newer avenues for their analysis and appreciation. GA's stories, examined and evaluated in this light, reveal to us what a tremendous contribution to regional Indian literature GA has made through these stories.

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