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www.galaxyimrj.com

galaxyimrj@gmail.com

Avinash Kolarkar's *Vidyankatha*: A Critical Study

Dr. Muktaja Mathkari

Associate Professor & Head of the Dept. English, B.M.C.C., Pune-4
Member, Bos & Research Guide-University of Pune and Bharati Vidyapith
Deemed University, Pune, India.

Today, the Marathi Science Fiction has gained some status as a literary form. One of the major reasons for this is science fiction writing by scientist-writers like Jayant Naraliker, in the year 1900, Keral Kokil, a magazine started publishing 'Chandravarti Manav' which of course, was not original writing in Marathi but a translation. During the same period, Vaman Malhar Joshi introduced science fiction story to Marathi, it was titled "Kiranancha Divya Prakash" (The divine Light Rays). The year 1916 was a land mark since S.B. Ranade's story; "Tareche Hasya" (The Smile of a Star) was published. However, it just be said that the Marathi science fiction had always been a translation, a transcreation or a story borrowed from a foreign land. Some writers indianized the foreign ideas and some of them mentioned their original source. Actually, the independent science fiction was written after 1955 but this form of literature has not been much studied and therefore, Marathi language has not developed a very clear definition of science fiction. Isaac Asimov, the great science fiction writer defines science fiction as 'a psychological journey into infinite future possibilities.' According to Michael Stapleton, Science fiction is an expression of hope about the future.

The job of the science fiction writer is not to note the present research in science but to think about the possible research in the future based on the present research and this writer will also check the effects of all this human behaviour and will cross the boundaries of time and space.

Of course, good science fiction has to be good fiction and as Asimov states 'besides literary and dramatic virtue, the science fiction must indicate that the writer 'knows' science and he knows it correctly. Science fiction has to have; Asimov states 'imaginative' plots in order that it becomes decent science fiction.

Against this backdrop, this paper is an attempt at evaluating Avinash Kolarkar's (1960-1990) science fiction by studying and analyzing his representative short stories. It is proposed to bring out the major concerns in these stories and to show how these stories pronouncedly create the possibility of human welfare and universal brotherhood. It is also proposed to show how Kolarkar's science fiction is good fiction.

1. *Vidyankatha*, a set of four collections of science fiction which contains 22 stories was published in 1989. It won the prestigious Maharashtra Sahitya Parishad Award for the best science fiction of the year. Kolarkar by then already had to his credit, 'Kangaroo', a collection of children's poetry, 'Andharachi Pawla', a collection of poems and 'Echoing Green', a collection of short stories. 'Kangaroo' won the state award for the best children's literature of the year, 'Andharachi Pawla' won the prestigious Kusumagraj award for the best poetry of the year.

The stories of *Vidyankatha* can be categorized like this: There are stories dealing with 1) disaster on the earth 2) aliens seeking help of Indian scientists in order to solve their problems 3) Highly ambitious aliens 4) the possible rule of the robots 5) science for human welfare 6) antagonistic relationship between the aliens and the earth 7) amiable relationship between the earth and the aliens

1. Disaster on the earth: 'Sarpil Gati' (Zigzag motion) and 'Fakta 29 Minutes' (29 Minutes Only) belong to this category. 'Sarpil Gati' is based on astronomy and astrophysics. The earth is to face severe problems due to the zigzag motion of the moon and itself and a scientific solution is found. Due to the change in the motion, earth is moving towards the sun and the expected result is the earth losing her moon and also rise in the temperature of the earth. So, it is predicted that human habitation here will be an impossibility. The Indian scientists put in a lot of efforts and their analysis is certainly based on scientific knowledge and therefore, one of the scientists Mr. Damle states, 'the earth originally moved with great velocity but the role of high tide and low tide was such that the velocity reduced. On the basis of Homeberg's phenomenon, we can prove that the earth is moving towards the sun in a subtly zigzag way'. Dr. Damle holds 'the happenings on the sun' responsible for this change and suggests that 'earth's velocity can be reduced only if we use enormous gravitational force, so that we pull the moon close to the earth.' The scientists give the statistics and justify their solution.(p.10). A satellite named 'Friend' is to be used for this mission and the mission is successful.

2. Aliens seeking help from the Indian Scientists: 'Pralay' (The Great flood), 'Udtya Tabakditil Manus' (The Man in the UFO) and 'Lal Dhug' (The Red Cloud) belong to this category. Pralay deals with an alien planet which is to see a dooms day due to a great flood. This planet is inclined towards the sun in such a way that its two moons refract so much light that their gravitational force acts upon the seas, lakes and land on the planet. The solution suggested, therefore is 'the thickening of ozone layer of the planet and maintaining a proper distance between the two moons of the planet by a scientific method.' (p.37). The story ends on a happy note as the Indian scientists succeed in helping the other planet.

3 Highly ambitious aliens and 4. Possible rule of robots: 'Kat'(Conspiracy) is a story about conspiracy by aliens against the earth to establish the rule of robots and it shows how Indian scientists 'saved the whole world from this calamity'(p. 158).

This story brings out the importance and necessity of universal brotherhood in order to fight against the highly ambitious aliens and the possible rule of the robots on the earth. The antagonistic relationship between the aliens and human beings has also been brought out in this story.

5 Science for human welfare: The story 'Saha Inchacha Manus' (Six Inches Tall Man) introduces the reader to a man who is born out of a chemical reaction and tells the protagonist the secret of the flower remedy for various diseases and also about the technique of preserving flowers for long and thereby,benefitting the whole race of humanity. The protagonist succeeds in his experiments and is duly awarded. The man survives only for eight hours but proves how science can be used for human welfare. Thus, this story expresses a major concern for the well being of the humanity.

6 Antagonistic relationship between aliens and human beings: The story, 'Pratikruti'(The Duplicate) deals with the attack and kidnapping of Indian scientists and doctors by aliens to prepare their duplicates and send them to the earth in order to get all the information about earth. However, their plan is thwarted by the protagonists of the story. Suspense is very cleverly maintained in the story. The story predicts the disaster due to the antagonistic relationship between aliens and humans.

7 Amiable relationship between aliens and the earth: 'Chandra Konacha?' (Who Owns the Moon?) 'Poorvasuchana' (Intimation) and 'Anuyuddhavar Maat' belong to this

category. 'Poorvasuchana' deals with the theme of aliens whose ancestors used to live on the earth but had to migrate to another planet since their existence on the earth was in danger (p.163). These aliens have advance knowledge of science and technology and they have perceived the possibility of atomic war. They believe that they should avoid it for the sake of the whole galaxy. 'The night after such a war will last for a year and there will be only darkness. Those who survive will envy the dead' (p.163). And, therefore, they will destroy the weapons in the air itself and will not tolerate any sort of destruction as a result of race for power between some super powers. 'We wish that science should be used only for the wellbeing of man' (p.163).

Vishnu Mohan Tiwari states that 'Human values must be preserved in the science fiction works that are created'. He also mentions the need for 'suitable message' and 'humane behaviour'. The stories in this category maintain V.M. Tiwari's Point.

All these stories follow the structure of the short-story as mentioned in 'The Modern Short Story' By H.E. Bates. The beginning of the story creates the atmosphere, it is followed by some problem or conflict and the resolution. The protagonists of all the stories are the Indian scientists. They are intelligent, wise, studious, honest and broad minded men of integrity who are always able to solve a problem and thereby, establish their supremacy. They think about the universal man and his wellbeing. These scientists are shown in a positive light.

The nature of the problem and its analysis and the resultant solutions are all scientific and show the author's 'scientific attitude' and the correct knowledge of science. Yet the stories are a good reading since the language is lucid and the description and dialogues are quite realistic. The descriptions have a poetic quality about them.

These stories make us travel in the future, psychologically and create a possibility, of course, of a happy and peaceful future, of course and therefore, of hope in the future.

Morality, integrity and fundamental rights of human beings seem to be of great importance to the author and the scientists - protagonists become the spokespersons of the author. All these stories illustrate the story telling ability of the author. Brevity is the soul of all these stories and they revolve around a single character, a single action and a single time. All this, makes these stories good science fiction since their base is science and these stories become a good fiction as well.

Therefore, to conclude, it may be stated that:

- All the stories in Vidyankatha by Kolarkar have scientific base which is evident from the theme, description, analysis and dialogues in the stories. The author has correct knowledge of science and a great capacity to 'imagine'. The stories are good science fiction as well as good fiction.
- Certain things like the atomic war in 1991 and the use of flower remedies are a reality today.
- These stories establish the supremacy of human intelligence and create a possibility of human welfare and universal brotherhood. The stories reveal human welfare as the major concern of the author and his constructive attitude towards the use of science.

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