



By Arun Kolatkar

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Understanding the Poem

1. The poem has a literal level and a figurative level. Why has the poet chosen 'tigers' and 'sheep' to convey his message?

Answer: Though literally the poem talks of a short story in which a shepherd made a concord with a king of tigers to maintain peace among the two communities. However, if one tries to gauge, there is more to it than just a jungle story. It speaks of the distinction between the proprietor and the proletariat. It is about the class struggle and the oppressor and the oppressed. The shepherd is the politician, the ruler, as depicted in the poem, and other sheep are subjects. The sheepdog, is the warrior, the army, to protect sheep. However, shepherd wants to maintain his sovereignty, so sacrifices a few sheep to maintain a cordial relation with the tigers and goes on signing the pact. It is depicted how the rulers sacrifice their people to maintain their regime.

2. What facet of political life does the behaviour of Ajamil illustrate?

Answer: The poem Ajamil and the Tigers is a political satire by Arun Kolatkar; Ajamil and the Tigers represent the corrupt politicians and the oppressed subjects. The sheep represent the mass, the mob; the sheepdog's is the incarnation of the army. It is to be seen how the commoners, sheep and sheepdog, are annihilated by the rulers, Ajamil. How their sentiments are overlooked. The poet has beautifully retold the fantastic story of Ajamil, the believed to be good shepherd, which he possibly heard in Jejuri. When the tigers are captured by the brave sheepdog, Ajamil lets them lose, despite being warned by the dog. To show his prominence, he did not listen to the sheepdog and did not even make any eye contact with him. Rather he offered a gala feast to the tigers and gave them gifts like sheep meat, skin and wool. The audacious warriors are paid no heed to and the subjects are sacrificed for Ajamil wanted to maintain his supremacy.

3. Why have the words, 'pretended' and 'seemed' been used in the lines:

...Pretended to believe every single word
of what the tiger king said.

And seemed to be taken in by all the lies.

How does the sense of these lines connect with the line 'Ajamil wasn't a fool'?

Answer: Ajamil, the good shepherd, was not a fool. The tigers' king requested him to set all the tigers free; the sheepdog tried to convince Ajamil that the tigers had come to him to offer a friendly hand. Ajamil though agreed to him and cut them all loose and even offered them a feast and signed a pact with the king of tigers that they were friends thenceforth. Ajamil was a fine politician and did not want to mess up with the lot and believed it best to maintain cordial relation with them. So, though he knew inside that, today or tomorrow, the tigers would attack the sheep again. He pretended that he believed all what the king told him and accepted the friendship offered by the tiger. He portrayed it so well that Ajamil

seemed taken in by all the lies of the tiger, but in heart he knew that they will return to hunt. So, he felt it better to sacrifice a few sheep every time rather than losing them all in a possible fierce battle where he might lose his reign absolutely. It is also a little disheartening, his lack of confidence in his sheepdog. However, he played it safe and avoided the risk that was hovering over his kingdom.

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