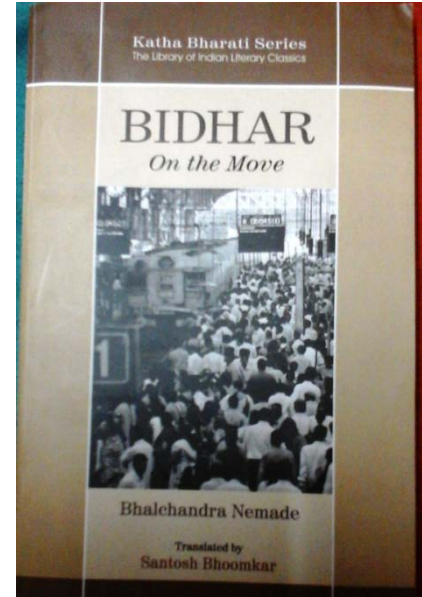


Marathi Novel in Translationby Swagata Bhattacharya¹***Bidhar – On the Move* by Bhalchandra Nemade.****Trans. Santosh Bhoomkar.**

Mysore: Katha Bharati Series,

Sahitya Akademi & CIIL. 2016.

Print. ISBN 978-81-260-2845-0. 254 pp. ₹ 130.



Marathi novelist Bhalchandra Nemade's *Bidhar* is the first of his tetralogy with Changdeo Patil as the protagonist. Published in 1967, *Bidhar* was followed by *Hool*, *Jarila* and *Jhool* which presented before his readers a 'hero' forever engaged in both simultaneously rejecting and accepting the world. Patil's confrontation with the world at large and his inclination to be a part of it begins with *Bidhar* where he comes forward as the quintessential protagonist coping with an existentialist crisis. In fact, Nemade's concept of 'Deshvad', as opposed to nationalism, found its roots in *Bidhar*.

Changdeo Patil, the son of a family that owned a substantial amount of landed property in the village of Udali surrounded by the hills of Satpura, goes to Mumbai for higher studies. His ambition and his desperation to become a citizen of the new world make him oblivious of the family's financial condition. In an attempt to sharpen his intellect and satisfy his cultural tastes, Changdeo, Changya to his friends, wastes all his family's money and even decides to bunk his exams. As the gulf between him and his family widens, Changdeo immerses himself more and more into political debates and is deeply intrigued by the question of death. His obsession with disease and death haunts him throughout the novel. His eternal anxiety is a direct manifestation of the crisis—what does his existence actually signify? Educated in Western philosophy and immersed in the Western notions of politics and idealism, Changdeo Patil is the prototype of one far removed from the society in which

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he happens to live. Yet he dreams of changing this society and in his desire he only suffers, both physically as well as psychologically. In fact, his physical suffering is a metaphor for his internal turmoil and anguish. Fatal questions of life and death were vexing him. He had never come across such questions in native or western plays. That was why everything new and amazing was like hell to him (p 8)

The story moves back and forth in time with Patil reminiscing his childhood back in his ancestral home and his adulthood in the busy streets of Mumbai. He also travels in and out of consciousness and his reveries. Threatened with the possibility of tuberculosis, Changdeo feels he must never get married. He also feels he has lost all interest in women. Nevertheless, his inability to marry frustrates him. He emerges as an eternally frustrated human being who considers himself superior to others and yet does not know where and how to manifest his superiority. He found himself in the midst of many other young men equally frustrated with the system and looking for a way-out. His nights were plagued by anxiety followed by a tremendous urge to sleep. In an attempt to rid himself of the pain, Patil took to pursuing higher studies without the knowledge of his family and sustained himself by writing articles for newspapers and journals. Even then, the medium of writing became a matter of debate. It was a time when English was fast overtaking the market of the native tongue. *Bidhar* ends with the rise of Narayan who was once an idealist and used to write in Marathi. Towards the end of *Bidhar*, it is this Narayan who says, “Writers in Marathi are bloody fool...Marathi literature is a big hoax.” (p 241) Through the character of Narayan Nemade critiques the urge to find quick money and fame by choosing English as the only language for communication. Nemade’s concept of ‘Deshvad’ is all for reviving the native tongue and enriching it with the help of indigenous resources. Patil leaves Narayan’s house in search of another journey. As he leaves he says to himself, “At this moment I have no house, but everything is going to be sorted out soon”. (p 248) The title ‘Bidhar’ has been translated into English as ‘on the move’. Changdeo Patil’s eternal quest for the meaning of life and existence keeps him forever on the move. *Bidhar* is indeed a tale of movement, of life in flux. Published two years after the publication of U.R. Ananthamurthy’s existentialist novel *Samskara* (1965), *Bidhar* is an open-ended novel which refuses to reach any conclusion as the protagonist refuses to overcome his existentialist crisis. Instead, Nemade prolongs Patil’s search by making him continue as the central character in *Hool*.

Bidhar is a reflection of its era. It describes the Mumbai of 1960s (Bombay to the rest of India but Mumbai to Maharashtrians), the city of dreams, of opportunities, of exploitations and of disillusionments. It also portrays side-by-side the gradual disintegration of joint-families and the demise of feudal structures in the rural areas. The rise of communist ideals and emergence of trade unions were characteristic markers of 1960s India. Radical views on politics and religion were being propagated by Western-educated young men like Changdeo Patil who were in favour of a radical reformation of the society through Western idealism. Sahitya Akademi's initiative to publish translations of works written in regional Indian languages is highly commendable since it gives access to a wider audience who would have been otherwise unaware of the works existing in the various Indian languages. Jnanpith winner Bhalchandra Nemade's *Bidhar* may not be his greatest work, yet it is a significant one. Its translated version gives us the opportunity to access and study the world of the lost and confused Changdeo Patils of 1960s India who were caught between ideas and ideals and did not know how to react.

The translation is replete with indigenous words and references to ancient texts like *The Ramayana*, *The Mahabharata* and *The Kathasaritsagar*. Culture-specific words such as 'babu', 'bhau-ji', 'bhang', 'Dasera', 'dholki', etc. Have been retained within the text and have been listed in the glossary at the end. There are references to eminent figures of the time such as Kishore Kumar, 'Burman dada' and Waheeda Rahman, who have also been listed in the glossary which shall help foreign readers gain interest in the text.