

Title: THE RELIGIOUS DIMENSION IN H.R.F. KEATING'S *UNDER A MONSOON CLOUD*

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Introduction

H.R.F. Keating, past president of the Detection Club following such as Chesterton, Sayers, and Christie, is one of the great masters of detective fiction in our time. He is also the creator of a marvelous detective character, Inspector Ganesh Ghote of the Bombay C.I.D. Keating's Ghote novels are always rich in their presentation of human action and its moral implications. They are at many times also rich in spiritual implications as well. In this paper, I want to focus on one Ghote novel, *Under a Monsoon Cloud*,¹ in which the religious dimension is especially prominent.

Of course, the Ghote novels are set in India, which is primarily a Hindu country. Nevertheless, *Monsoon* is worthy of discussion at this Conference because it is rich in explicit and implicit allusions not only to the sacred scriptures of Hinduism, but also of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. In this novel, Ghote commits a serious wrong and as a result is plunged into a profound crisis that puts his ideals and his career at stake. My thesis: These religious allusions help to develop the story and to encourage reflection on its meaning.

The detective story as a whodunit is about discovering the truth. In the course of the story, the detective must learn about other people, one of whom is a murderer. But some outstanding novels centering on an investigation to apprehend a murderer are not whodunnits. *Crime and Punishment* is a famous example. Although not a whodunit, *Crime* is about discovery of truth – the truth about the ideals of the wrongdoer and the truth of character. And in *Crime*, Raskolnikov must test his beliefs by confronting the judgment of others.

Monsoon is a crime novel of this type. It starts with a homicide and with Ghote's effort to cover-up this crime because it was committed by a superior officer whom he almost worships. So as the main part of the novel proceeds, there is nothing to be discovered about the key underlying facts. Nevertheless, *Monsoon* is very definitely a novel about the discovery of truth – about exposing oneself to searching scrutiny and about the discovery of truth as a spiritual force that profoundly affects one's highest ideals and about how one should live. And because of the marvelous way in which Keating has constructed this novel, the truth that Ghote must consider bringing to light involves not only his own career and beliefs but the lives of other people as well – the truth of how to live in community with others.

¹ First published in the United States by Viking Penguin Inc. in 1986. All citations to pages referenced hereafter will be in parentheses in the text of this paper, citing to the Penguin edition (New York 1987).

In *Monsoon*, Ghote commits a serious wrong, not for personal gain, but motivated by his highest ideals. When an investigation into the matter is launched, Ghote's career as a police officer will be at stake. He will be conflicted about whether to tell the truth or to lie in order to save the career to which he has dedicated himself. Hindu sources may seem to encourage him to lie because being a police officer is his karma. But, as we shall see, there is also a very different possibility, suggested in the writings of St. Paul, that suggest that Ghote should break with his former ways, become a new man, and tell the truth.

A final introductory word: This novel abounds in and ends with questions. Perhaps it is not a fault of a spiritually sensitive mystery novel that it ends in a way that deepens our sense of the mystery of human existence.

I. THE PLOT OF *MONSOON*

In *Monsoon*, the events take place over the course of two calendar years. In the spring of year 1, Ghote is sent from his duties in Bombay to a police station in the small, backwoods town of Vigatpore, to take over temporarily for the officer in charge, Inspector Khan, who has supposedly taken sick. Ghote finds the station in a terrible state of slackness and indiscipline, with its records in disarray, and he begins to make efforts for correction. Some weeks after arriving, he learns that the station is to be inspected by Additional Deputy Inspector General Vasant Kelkar, who is nicknamed "Tiger" because of the ferocious way he enforces discipline among subordinates. Ghote had previously worked with Kelkar and admired his forcefulness and efficiency.

During Kelkar's inspection of the station late on the evening of June 24 of year 1, Ghote sends all other personnel home because the monsoon has broken out. But Ghote discovers that Sergeant Desai, who is something of a slacker, has disregarded Ghote's command and is still at the station. Ghote angrily orders Desai to take some papers to Kelkar that Kelkar wants to examine. Rattled by Ghote's shouting at him, Desai, when handing the papers to Kelkar, tips over a brass inkpot, which spills ink on Kelkar's clothes. Kelkar, in a fit of anger at this clumsiness, throws the inkpot at Desai, hitting him in the head, as a result of which Desai dies. While Kelkar certainly did not intend to kill Desai, this is still a homicide, which under the law should subject Kelkar to arrest and prosecution. Indeed, Kelkar, as an upright officer, himself insists that Ghote arrest him and charge him with homicide. Nevertheless, without hesitation Ghote, who was the only witness to this act, determines not to arrest Kelkar but to undertake a scheme to cover up the killing. He does this because Desai's death was accidental and because of his admiration for Kelkar, whom he firmly believes to be a force for good for the police force and its work. Ghote does not want Kelkar's career to be destroyed because of this one act. He tells Kelkar that the two of them can dispose of Desai's body in a nearby lake and make it seem as if Desai accidentally drowned while swimming. Desai was known to boast of his swimming prowess and often took bets that he could swim across this lake. Ghote tells Kelkar that they can make it seem as if Desai drowned after making such

a bet on the evening in question. Seizing on Ghote's suggestion, Kelkar and Ghote then take Desai's body in a boat out into the lake and dump the corpse overboard.

The next day, Kelkar completes his inspection of the station, and the following day Inspector Khan returns to duty, his supposed illness appearing to be a ruse to avoid being present during Kelkar's inspection. Ghote returns to Bombay, leaving the inefficient Inspector Khan to deal with what will seem to be an accidental death by drowning of one of his subordinates. The matter seems to be ended.

But the matter is far from ended. In April of the following year, an investigation of the events at Vigatpore is started as a result of a complaint lodged by the dead man's sister-in-law, who has serious reasons to doubt that Desai's death was accidental. When Ghote informs Kelkar of the strong possibility that the investigation may lead to him, Kelkar commits suicide, leaving a confessional note taking sole responsibility and not mentioning Ghote's involvement.

When evidence is uncovered that points to the need for further investigation, the police commissioner suspends Ghote from active duty and informs him that he will be subject to an official Inquiry to determine whether he is culpable and, if so, what discipline (which would likely include dismissal from the force) should be imposed.

In what follows – the greater part of the novel – Ghote wavers between whether to give up and tell the truth or to lie about his involvement. Lying can no longer save Kelkar, but it seems the only way for Ghote to save his career as a police officer. During the Inquiry, Ghote is subject to a series of experiences that cause him to think about whether he should persist in lying. As the Inquiry approaches its conclusion, Ghote comes to a renewed resolve to maintain his lie. But on the final day of the Inquiry, in his concluding statement before the judges, after first denying his involvement he suddenly tells the truth. As a result of this confession, the Presiding Officer at the Inquiry pronounces a verdict of dismissal. But this Officer – without explanation but apparently deliberately – neglects to sign the Show Cause Order necessary to give effect to the verdict, and as a result, Ghote is not dismissed and will continue as a police officer.

II. PRELIMINARY REFLECTIONS

On the bare facts of the plot, this is certainly not an edifying story. Nor is Ghote's behavior in *Monsoon* something that readers of the thirteen prior Ghote novels were primed to expect. (*Monsoon*, the fourteenth Ghote novel, was published in 1986, 22 years after the first Ghote novel.) Readers had come to know Ghote as an officer dedicated to upholding the law who takes pride in doggedly performing his duty despite obstacles and lack of appreciation by his sometimes arrogant and un-supportive bosses. Readers had also become endeared to the humanity of Ghote, who hates hypocrisy and is sensitive to the call of conscience. But in *Monsoon*, Ghote initiates and carries out a cover-up to protect a superior who has abused a subordinate with deadly result. And this cover-up involves a desecration of the subordinate's corpse and a falsification of the circumstances of his death, making

the death appear to be the result of the subordinate's own foolishness. As if all this was not bad enough, Ghote eventually escapes punishment for his complicity in these wrongs through a sort of *deus ex machina*. Indeed, a writer who admires Keating's Ghote stories complained to Keating himself in an interview that she found it hard to believe that Ghote would have acted as he did.² She wrote that "[t]he premise that our hero, Ghote, who however diffident, however comic, is always so scrupulously honest, could go to the lengths of concealing a homicide because of his admiration for the culprit strains our credibility. (*sic*) ... That such a man would collude with his boss, however admired, to conceal the killing of a hapless underling strains belief."³ And yet Keating said to this critic that he thought *Monsoon* his "finest book."⁴ How are we to resolve this?

Before attempting such a resolution, we need mention a few things about Keating's methods and about the background of this story.

(1) Point of view: For the most part, in Ghote novels the story is developed through the eyes and thoughts of Ghote. Even when Keating as narrator is speaking, nothing takes place without Ghote's presence. (Contrast Agatha Christie's Poirot and Marple, who may not appear until well after the story has been developed, and even after they do appear, events are often related without their presence.) Events unfold for the reader as Ghote sees and reflects on them. Keating has described this method of presentation as one in which he takes "an angel-over-the-shoulder position" through which he enters into Ghote's mind.⁵ Because of this method, the focus throughout a story is on what Ghote himself learns and as he learns it. As a result of this method, there is usually little or no need for a post-arrest explanation, as we typically get, for example, in a Christie novel.

But at the same time, Keating does not always make us privy to how events are processed in Ghote's mind. Ghote sometimes arrives at ultimate decisions suddenly, seemingly by intuition.⁶ This is particularly important at the end of *Monsoon*, as we shall see.

(2) Ghote and religion. Keating has said that several years after embarking on the Ghote novels, he made Ghote an "unbeliever" in 1971 when he was asked to write a

² Meera Tamaya, *H.R.F. Keating: Post-Colonial Detection / A Critical Study* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1993), 136.

³ *Id.* at 64.

⁴ *Id.* at 146.

⁵ *Id.* at 127; see also H.R.F. Keating, *Inspector Ghote, His Life and Crimes* (London: Arrow Books, 1990), 5.

⁶ See Tamaya, *supra*, at 144.

Christmas story involving Ghote.⁷ He said that he found this necessary because of the “angel-over-the-shoulder” position he takes with respect to Ghote and because he himself in his adult years had given up his Catholic faith and become an atheist.⁸ But two things must be noted about this. First, Keating says that he felt unable to imbue Ghote with “*simple faith*,”⁹ which leaves much wiggle room for religious influence. Second, he acknowledges that he had to backtrack on this to some degree after he subsequently visited India and saw how Bombay police officers evidenced their religious belief.¹⁰ Indeed, in a 1974 novel, Ghote expresses “indignation” toward a fellow officer because Ghote thought that officer “was just the sort of fellow not to have beliefs,” “was probably an atheist,” and was “irresponsible.”¹¹ And while it is clear in *Monsoon* that Ghote is hostile to priestly claims of superior wisdom and to “the trappings of religion” (81), in the same thought in which he expresses disdain for the “trappings” of religion, he also condemns the “tarnishings” of religion (81) – which leaves open the possibility that religious belief may have something good to offer when it is not tarnished.

In any event, Ghote’s attitude, whatever it may be, is not going to seal him off from constantly having to confront the pervasiveness of religion in his society. Ghote was born into the Brahmin varna, and initiated into Hindu manhood in the sacred thread ceremony (his religious rebellion came later). (178) He is married to a pious Hindu wife who has borne him a son. While Ghote is hostile to the trappings of religion, his wife, Protima, is definitely not. Her enthusiastic devotion often leads Ghote into areas where he would not otherwise go, if only because he loves his wife.¹² And, perhaps most importantly, he is living in India. “Mother India” is a country abounding in public manifestations and celebrations of Hinduism, with reminders of religion present at every turn. And the many, many believers Ghote encounters in his work appear not in the least to be disturbed by whatever may be lacking in his belief.

At times in the novels, the priestly practitioners of Hinduism represent obstacles to Ghote’s investigations, and he is wary of any religion-based obstruction that may

⁷ Keating, *Inspector Ghote, His Life and Crimes*, at 5. The first Ghote novel, *The Perfect Murder*, was published in 1964.

⁸ *Id.* at 5, 10; see also Tamaya, *supra*, at 127.

⁹ Keating, *Inspector Ghote, His life and Crimes*, at 5 (emphasis added).

¹⁰ *Id.* at 5, 10.

¹¹ *Bats Fly Up for Inspector Ghote* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), 86. This officer turns out to be the villain of the story.

¹² See, for example, *Bribery, Corruption Also* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999).

impede his work.¹³ Ghote has a general hostility to hypocrisy, and he reacts cynically when he sees religion invoked hypocritically to frustrate the uncovering of the truth. But it is his moral sense, and not mean-spiritedness, that is the cause of such cynicism. Having married a believer whom he loves, his stance toward particular religion-inspired beliefs and rituals is at times necessarily one of accommodation, if sometimes grudging accommodation. And Ghote himself, despite his skepticism, often finds himself thinking of Hindu analogies to situations or incidents in the novels – even thinking of himself at times as acting in a way similar to an avatar of God as recounted in some sacred story.¹⁴ The reader – whether or not he or she is a believer – tends to view these references to the sacred through Ghote’s somewhat jaundiced eyes. Under such scrutiny, these references will be worth reflection if they provide some insight into the truth of human experience as it is portrayed in the novels.

(3) Keating’s use of leitmotifs. One of the most charming features of the Ghote novels is that Keating often has a leitmotiv or theme that appears throughout a novel. For example, in *Asking Questions*, the theme of the right question to ask is prominent. In *BATS*, suspiciousness is a pervasive leitmotiv. In *Inspector Ghote Trusts the Heart*, the theme of compassion is prominent. And in *Monsoon*, the theme, as Keating himself has stated, is anger.¹⁵ The occasionally salutary and occasionally self-destructive effects of anger, its misuse and proper use, and its manifestations in shouting and cursing, pervade the story. But *Monsoon* also features other themes. The opposition of truth and lying is especially prominent in this novel, as is the theme of the wandering of Ghote’s mind as he tries to decide whether to continue to lie or to tell the truth.

(4) Finally, it must be mentioned that the initial events of *Monsoon* are based on something that actually happened in the Bombay police force: some police officers dumped into a lake the body of a man killed by a young and promising officer who subsequently committed suicide.¹⁶

What does Keating do with this true story in creating *Monsoon*? In the first place, he populates *Monsoon* with some characters that appeared in earlier Ghote novels. Most importantly, Kelkar was a major participant in *Bats Fly Up for Inspector Ghote*, as was Ghote’s mentor, Inspector Arvind Nadkarni, who, as we will see, also plays an important role in *Monsoon*. *Bats* was about the work of a special squad of the Bombay police force set up to capture ringleaders running black-money operations.

¹³ See, for example, *Inspector Ghote Breaks an Egg* (New York: Penguin Books, 1974).

¹⁴ See, for example, *Monsoon*, at 47; see also *Inspector Ghote’s First Case* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2008), 42.

¹⁵ H.R.F. Keating, *Inspector Ghote, His Life and Crimes*, at 12.

¹⁶ *Id.* at 12-23; see also Tamaya, *supra*, at 147.

Because the squad's operations were undermined several times just as they were about to capture a key suspect, there was reason to believe that a member of the squad was betraying its work by tipping off the suspects. A youthful Ghote was given the confidential task of trying to discover the betrayer. Ghote was told by the superior who assigned him to the squad that he must suspect everyone. This is not a task relished by Ghote, who wants to believe in the integrity of the police force, particularly in these circumstances because Kelkar and Nadkarni were senior members of the squad whom Ghote admired but had to suspect. Nadkarni had been his mentor, and he greatly admires Kelkar as a dedicated officer. In the outcome, neither of these men was the betrayer.

III. ANALYSIS OF *MONSOON*

Despite the way things may look if one focuses only on the surface of the events as recounted in the above plot summary (which would justify the not-surprising adverse judgment of the commentator mentioned above), *Monsoon* operates not only on the surface, but beneath the surface it tells a story that is rich in moral and spiritual encounter and reflection. (On the dichotomy between what's on the surface as opposed to under the surface, see 83.) On the surface, the facts of the key incident and Ghote's responsibility are known to the reader very early on. But under the surface, Ghote is constantly forced to reflect on and reevaluate what he did on that fateful night of June 24. As a result of this experience, he undergoes a transformation of his beliefs and ideals – a transformation that the reader is invited to reflect upon along with Ghote.

To see how this happens, we must first consider Kelkar and Ghote's attitude to him. How does Ghote think of Kelkar? What is it about Kelkar that could lead Ghote seemingly to abandon his dedication to the law on that fateful night when the monsoon began?

The Character and Significance of Tiger Kelkar

As mentioned, Kelkar played a major role in *Bats*. In that earlier novel, Kelkar was in the rank of Inspector, with seniority in service as compared to Ghote. He did not have the nickname "Tiger," a nickname given to him now in his new office as Assistant Deputy Inspector General because of his ferocious anger when pointing out the laxity of subordinates.

Kelkar in *Monsoon* is not a complex character, drawn with subtlety and depth. Instead, we see him solely through his role as a superior officer who is "strict and upright." (17) Emotionally, he is characterized almost exclusively by his anger, which he uses as a tool to enforce discipline. He is almost not a human being at all, but rather a force of nature or a representation of a supernatural presence. His outbursts of anger are likened to the outbursts of the rain and wind of the monsoon. (86, more) Kelkar is thus like Krishna, who contains within himself "the howling

storm gods"¹⁷ and "the gods of wind, death, fire, and water."¹⁸ Kelkar is described as sending his fire and vigor down through the ranks (86), and his anger is described as fiery and issuing in lightning bolts (20), suggesting the lightning bolts of fiery Zeus. His anger reminds not only of Zeus but the God of the Hebrew Bible. Repeatedly, Ghote refers to the "blasts" of Tiger's anger (18, 19, 23), which calls to mind a reference to God in the Book of Job:

... they that plow iniquity,
And sow trouble, reap the same.
By the breath of God they perish,
And by the blast of his anger are they consumed.
(Job 4: 8-9; King James Bible)

The association of Kelkar with the God of the Hebrew Bible is further suggested by the fact that he has come to inspect a station that is very lax, with its records in disarray. (10, 13; Ghote will later say: the station was in "a hell of a mess." (61) As with God in the first chapter of Genesis, Tiger's forceful words at Vigatpore impose order on chaos. And like a god, he is all-seeing in his inspection of those whom he supervises. Ghote notes that Kelkar has a "sharp eye" and misses no detail in the scrutiny required by his office. (17, 19) Similarly suggesting Kelkar's quasi-divine mission, Ghote repeatedly describes the effects of Tiger's anger as "saving" and "cleansing." (27, 28, 52, 70, 104; but see 206) And Ghote says that Kelkar's anger "clean[s] and castigate[s] the evil of the world." (27)

Not surprisingly, given the quasi-divine qualities he attributes to Kelkar, Ghote wants to follow Kelkar's example and use anger as a force for good. He reflects that in just a few days Kelkar's anger has been much more effective in imposing order on the Vigatpore station than Ghote's efforts over the course of several weeks had been. (19) In accord with the quasi-divine descriptions of Kelkar, Ghote acknowledges his "awe" of (17), and "reverence" for (118), the man and that he "almost worshipped" him. (26. In *Bats*, Ghote thought of Kelkar with "respect, admiration, almost worship." *Bats* at 153.) Accordingly, Ghote is deeply moved and gratified whenever this angry god deigns to acknowledge approval of his actions. (20, 38-39) Despite or because of his dedication to the impersonal force of the law, Ghote seems to feel a need for approval of a human being whom he can admire for exemplary dedication to the law, and whose approval of his own efforts can reinforce his service to the law.

Thus, in a world of corruption and dishonesty, with compromising of integrity all too common, it is not surprising that Ghote, who has fixed on police work as his

¹⁷ *The Bhagavad-Gita*, trans. By Barbara Stoler Miller (New York: Bantam Book 1986), XI, 6.

¹⁸ *Id.* at XI, 39. This text will hereinafter be cited in parentheses in the text as *BG*.

calling and who wants very much to be an upright officer, should be intensely drawn to an officer like Kelkar as a model to be followed. For Ghote, Tiger is the example of someone who pursues police work with single-minded dedication and does not give in to corruption. He is the living embodiment of the law as something that must be respected and enforced, despite temptation and despite the falling-away and slackness of others.

But on that night in June when the monsoon started, Ghote witnesses a disaster (brought about by Tiger's own most effective weapon of anger) that threatens to bring down the man he most admires, the man he almost worships. In a description recalling the self-destructive death of Samson, Ghote thinks of Kelkar as bringing his career tumbling in ruins around him. (27; see *Judges*, 16: 23-30) What is to be done? Ghote, in his humility, seems to be in need of a superior example to follow. If Tiger goes down, who can there be to look to as a model? Who else is there who is honestly dedicated to upholding the law, who is above suspicion or can survive suspicious scrutiny?

Ghote cannot fathom a way out of this crisis other than to try to "save" his god. (32, 39) On the night of June 24, fate placed Ghote – and Ghote alone – in the position of being able to save Kelkar. And he acted accordingly. Indeed, when he falls asleep after helping Kelkar, Ghote dreams that he is like God Krishna, saving Kelkar, as Krishna protected the people of Braj. (47) Kelkar, having manifested weakness while exercising his power, seems to have fallen out of the role of a human avatar of Krishna, with circumstances thrusting Ghote into that role. This dream seems to confirm Ghote's sense of the rightness of what he did.

It is important to observe that while Ghote acts contrary to his duty and the law, he does not do so for personal gain. He believes that what he is doing is for the good of the police force and for society. Nevertheless, Ghote's decision is in flat contradiction of his duty and of the maxim: do not do evil that good may come of it.

We must also note that there is a double-aspect to the wrong that Ghote does. In the first place, he fails to arrest Kelkar in order to hide the truth of what Kelkar did. And to achieve this purpose he also falsifies the circumstances of Desai's death. In addition to denying Desai timely funeral rites (Ghote acknowledges this as a "desecration" [39]), this falsification denies to Desai's relatives the truth about his death. The cover-up makes Desai's death appear to be the result of a foolish act by Desai himself, thus making Desai a scapegoat for the wrong done by Kelkar.

What is common to both aspects of this double wrong is concealment of the truth. Ghote may have had a good purpose in doing what he did, but his course of action requires the suppression of truth. And this suppression had, and will have in what follows, consequences for others. As we will see, the course of action on which Ghote embarked on the night of June 24 presents him with a decision that does not involve only himself. It will involve him with associations with people he is yet to meet and make him consider deep associations with people close to him in his past

and present. And he will be forced to reflect on the implications of his action for these relationships.¹⁹

The Investigation Begins

In year 2, Ghote's confidence in the rightness of what he did will be subject to severe testing.

The assault on his confidence begins in April of year 2 when Ghote encounters Desai's sister-in-law, who has come to the police to challenge the official finding of accidental death by drowning. As the reader and Ghote know, she has the truth on her side. But despite this threat to his position and Kelkar's, Ghote, who hates hypocrisy and whose inner sense seems committed to truth (59), cannot help but admire her for standing up to authority. Her conduct suggests that she is a modern exemplar of the Biblical character of Nathan. In the famous story in the second book of Samuel, God sends Nathan to confront King David with the truth of his complicity in the death of a subordinate who was an obstacle to his desire. (2 Samuel 12: 1-12) Nathan presented David with a fictitious story of wrongdoing that paralleled David's own wrong. In response, David condemned the fictitious wrongdoer and thereby unwittingly condemned himself. Nathan's speaking truth to power led David to repent (2 Samuel 12: 13), and the sister-in-law's speaking truth to power will eventually lead to exposing Ghote's complicity and have a similar spiritual consequence for Ghote.

As a result of the sister-in-law's complaint, an investigation is started. In what follows during this investigation and the subsequent official Inquiry, Ghote will be in danger of ruin. The question for the novel becomes: Will he be saved? Indeed, the question is: Should he be saved? The latter question takes on particular significance after Kelkar's suicide, which occurs not long after the investigation begins. The god that Ghote hoped to save is now dead. The question for Ghote then becomes: Is his own career worth saving, given that that will require him to make additional compromises with the truth? Ghote was rock-solid in his determination to do what he did on the night of June 24 when he thought a purpose greater than himself was involved. But now what?

Thus, like *Crime and Punishment*, *Monsoon* is not a whodunit but a novel about whether the protagonist will be brought to justice.²⁰ Will the perpetrator's resolve to get away with his crime – which he thinks is justified – be undermined by the

¹⁹ On the night of the homicide, Ghote's did have some misgivings about his conduct toward Desai's body (31-32, 39), but he had no doubt that the disrespect to Desai was necessary to "save" Kelkar. Ghote was willing to "sacrifice[] Desai's dignity in death" (51) as a price to be paid in order to save the superior being in the drama.

²⁰ A Ghote novel that is even more similar in this respect to *Crime and Punishment* is *Doing Wrong* (London: MacMillan London Limited 1994).

pressure of scrutiny – a scrutiny that becomes more intense as the novel proceeds? This also makes the story a mystery, or at least a philosophical puzzle, because it raises the question: What is justice in this case?

Ghote's State of Mind at the Outset of the Investigation

When, after the complaint of Desai's sister-in-law, Ghote gets notice from the Bombay Police Commissioner ordering Ghote to submit an account of his actions at Vigatpore on the night of June 24, his primary response is anger. He does not at this point feel any sense of guilt. His primary response is anger because he thinks he is a victim of fate, which has played a dirty trick on him. (5) This response is made somewhat plausible by the facts of the story, which emphasize in many ways the chance nature of Ghote's involvement in the homicide. To be posted temporarily to Vigatpore was a matter of chance when the officer in charge of that station claimed to be sick and when other officers who could have been sent to Vigatpore were unavailable. (6, 7) Additionally, officers other than Kelkar might have been sent to inspect the station. (14) And when Kelkar threw the inkpot at Desai, it was by chance that it hit him and even more unexpected that such a blow would cause Desai's death. Remarkably, even though he had chosen to neglect his duty and engaged in furious and laborious efforts to dispose of Desai's body, Ghote does not think that the trouble he now faces is primarily the result of his own action (karma). Because he has no doubt that what he did in trying to save Kelkar was the right thing to do, he is merely angry that fate has placed him in a position of danger to his career. The only other feeling he has is not guilt but a feeling of sickness at the possibility that he will be dismissed from the police force. (6)

Ghote's Encounter with the Temple Priest

In the days before Ghote must submit a written response to the Police Commissioner about his conduct on June 24 of the preceding year, Ghote is unable to decide whether to admit the truth of his action or to lie in order to try to save his career as a police officer. As the time for his response draws near, however, he feels unable to lie and seems to be resolved to tell the truth. But Ghote's wife, Protima, who wants him to lie to save his career, begs him to go with her to seek guidance from a temple priest whom she regards with hero-worship (80), perhaps not unlike the hero-worship that Ghote has for Kelkar. Ghote, who has hitherto been firm in rejecting what he calls "the mumbo-jumbo of religion" (80), grudgingly accedes to Protima's request.

Primed by Protima as to Ghote's situation and to the advice she wants him to give Ghote, the priest offers a suggestion that he knows Ghote will appreciate: that Ghote's karma is bound up with being a police officer and a police officer is what he must continue to be. (84) In passages of the *Bhagavad-Gita* that the priest does not quote but on which he seems to rely for this advice, Krishna tells Arjuna that "a man should not relinquish action (karma) he is born to, even if it is flawed" (*BG*, XVIII, 48) and that "[y]ou are bound by your own action (karma), intrinsic to your being" (*BG*, XVIII, 60).

Apparently intuiting the anger Ghote feels in his predicament, the priest recites another verse from the *Gita*, in which Krishna says: "From anger comes bewilderment, from bewilderment wandering of the mind, from wandering of the mind destruction of the soul; once the soul is destroyed the man is lost." (84)²¹

This is the priest's translation of the verse from the *Gita* (really, Keating's "translation" into English of the priest's translation from Sanskrit to Marathi), which changes the usual translation of loss or lapse of "memory" to "wandering of the mind." The tension between Ghote's desire to fix on a firm resolution and the wandering of his mind as he ponders information necessary for resolution will become a principal theme in what follows. ("Wandering" is also the word often used to translate "samsara," the Sanskrit word that refers to the wandering of the soul in its journeys through incarnation.) The priest wants to stop the wandering of Ghote's mind and make him resolved to fight the charges despite Ghote's disinclination to do battle against the truth, just as Krishna sought to make Arjuna resolved to fight despite Arjuna's disinclination to take arms against his relatives who were in the opposing force.

In addition, the priest says something to Ghote that Ghote in his inner thoughts angrily rejects as what appears to him to be typical priestly hypocrisy, perhaps because it seems to be what Ghote would perceive as a prime example of the "mumbo-jumbo of religion." The priest asks Ghote, "Will you find that this is a time when the truth that floats on the surface must give way to the truth under the water?" (83. Note the reference to "a time." This is one of the first of several references to "a time" that recalls *Ecclesiastes*.) But these words of the priest hardly seem to be mumbo-jumbo in the context of the novel. They touch on the key idea of truth, of a truth that has been concealed under the surface. In the priest's mind, the truth under the surface is Ghote's desire to remain a police officer. But, unknown to the priest, his words also fathom something under the surface of Ghote's conscious mind, which conceals "deep-down a feeling, which he did his best to quell ... [t]o do what he ought to do, reveal the truth." (59) In exposing the truth about Ghote's karma, the priest has touched on only one truth – the truth that Ghote wants to remain a police officer. It would seem that this truth could only be served by keeping under the surface another truth – the truth of what he did. So two truths are in conflict, and it seems that to fight for one of these truths involves abandonment of the other.

Ghote expressed to the priest his belief that he is not wrong to be angry because fate had played a dirty trick on him. (84) Nevertheless, apparently moved by this encounter despite his hostility to priestly claims of wisdom, Ghote changes his mind

²¹ The Stoler translation has this as: "From anger arises bewilderment, from bewilderment loss of memory; and from loss of memory, the destruction of intelligence and from the destruction of intelligence he perishes." II, 63.

and decides to fight the charges. He does so out of a desire to go on doing what he does best, while still taking Kelkar as “his ever-to-be-followed model.” (86)

But during the coming Inquiry, Ghote’s mind will continue to wander, thinking over many past and present experiences in re-evaluating his devotion to Kelkar and trying to decide what he should do.

Mrs. Ahmed

Another important person in Ghote’s learning experience is the woman he chooses to be his advocate at the Inquiry. This is Mrs. Vimala Ahmed, a public interest lawyer who spends much of her time advocating for the poorest of the poor in Bombay. Her younger brother, whom she dearly loves, is a leper, whose leprosy was thought by her parents to be the result of a grave sin committed in a previous life. (111) But because of her love for her brother, rather than accepting his dissociation from family and community, she takes action to make his life better. Angry with the gods and with her parents because of what she regards as a false judgment, she commits herself to a career in which she can use her anger at injustice to help those who are outcasts and otherwise defenseless and to fight for truth and “against all hypocrisies.” (113) Her life is one of connection with those whom others shun. We must note that Mrs. Ahmed, who is dedicated to truth (92), agreed to represent Ghote on the understanding that the charge against him was false and that Ghote, as a subordinate, was being made a scapegoat for a wrong done by a superior. (101) That, of course, is false, and Ghote has cheated Mrs. Ahmed of the truth. Indeed, far from himself being a scapegoat, didn’t Ghote make his own subordinate Sergeant Desai the scapegoat for Kelkar’s wrong?

At one point during the Inquiry, when the prosecution finished examining a witness who gave adverse, but truthful, testimony against Ghote, Mrs. Ahmed rises to cross-examine the witness “with anger crackling in her voice.” This cross-examination is effective, but its short-term effect at the inquiry is secondary to the effect Mrs. Ahmed’s display of professional anger has on Ghote. It causes him to reflect that professional duty requires speaking out in controlled anger when the time is appropriate for such. This again suggests a reference to *Ecclesiastes*: There is “a time to every purpose under the heaven: ... A time to keep silence, and a time to speak....”

Mrs. Ahmed’s defense of the lowly also makes Ghote think of the plight of those who need others to speak for them. Between the lines, the reader should reflect that it is the subordinate Desai who, at present, needs someone to speak for him. Desai’s sister-in-law came forward to do so, but Ghote is now in the process of trying to cheat her of the truth, as he is also cheating Mrs. Ahmed of the truth.

We should note a final instance in the interactions between Mrs. Ahmed and Ghote. At one point during the Inquiry, Ghote admitted to the prosecutor that he regarded Kelkar as his guru. As desired by the prosecutor, this admission expresses Ghote’s commitment to Kelkar and thus increases his peril. When he subsequently

apologized to Mrs. Ahmed for making this admission, she said to him, “In the end the truth is always best.” (125) This, of course, is a very important statement in the context of Ghote’s crisis. Mrs. Ahmed’s statement reaches a deeper issue than she realizes, implicitly condemning Ghote’s quest to cover up the truth. But perhaps the more important question is: How does she know truth is always best? Is this conviction something she has come to believe in through a life of action (karma) in commitment to others? But how could such a firm belief – that truth is *always* best – come about empirically through action, since it transcends all action? Does it instead stem from – or at least reflect – some transcendent religious teaching that one should be honest regardless of the consequences?²²

The Testimony of Nadkarni

On the second day of the Inquiry, the lawyer presenting the case against Ghote calls as a witness Ghote’s mentor, Nadkarni, whom Ghote readers first met in *Bats* and who is now very old and retired from the policed force. When Nadkarni’s name is called, Ghote realizes that the prosecutor’s purpose in calling Nadkarni must be to have him testify, based on his experience with the black-money squad described in *Bats*, that Ghote greatly admired Kelkar, to the extent – the prosecution would suggest – that Ghote would be eager to cover up for Kelkar’s homicidal act. The prosecutor’s action in this regard has mixed results. It alerts the judges to the possibility – indeed the truth – of Ghote’s admiration of Kelkar. But the most important effect of Nadkarni’s re-appearance is on the memory and soul of Ghote, which is where the real drama of the novel is taking place. Nadkarni’s appearance causes Ghote to reflect on Nadkarni’s mentoring and on Nadkarni’s way of disciplining and teaching subordinates. At this time, the only difference Ghote notes between Nadkarni and Kelkar is that now Nadkarni “had lost almost everything of the inward vitality he had once possessed, very different from tiger Kelkar’s aggressiveness...” (114) But Ghote reflects that as mentor Nadkarni was “kind always yet unsparing in quiet criticism when such had been his [Ghote’s] due.” (114-115) [Note the adjective “quiet.”] Nadkarni’s way of teaching would yield “[a] rebuke more effective than any shouted abuse.” (115) At this point, Ghote does not explicitly call to mind and contrast Kelkar’s use of shouted abuse. Ghote will have to undergo further reflection before he himself draws this comparison and its implications. But Keating has provided the reader with the opportunity for such comparison, and the just-quoted words should recall to the reader another passage in Ecclesiastes, 9:17:

²² Later, while observing her zealous advocacy on his behalf, Ghote notes that Mrs. Ahmed “would not stand back from the fight.” (156) Ghote’s relation to Mrs. Ahmed is thus in a way like Krishna’s relation to Arjuna, persuading her to do battle despite her reluctance to fight against the truth. Ghote had persuaded Mrs. Ahmed to engage in a fight she would have stood back from had she known that Ghote had lied. A feeling of guilt enters Ghote’s soul as he contemplates that he has put the truth-loving Mrs. Ahmed in the position of fighting for a lie.

“The words of the wise spoken in quiet are heard more than the cry of him that ruleth among fools.” (King James Version) Or: “The quiet words of the wise are better heeded than the shout of the ruler of fools.” (*The Catholic Bible: New American Bible*)

We should note that while Nadkarni seems to model what *Ecclesiastes* advises, his conduct and temperament also accord with the advice of Hindu scripture. In addition to the reference to his kindness and quiet criticism, Ghote thinks of Nadkarni as “a perfect example of pure patience.” (118; Nadkarni is repeatedly characterized as patient in *Bats*.) The *Gita* counsels that the way of spiritual truth exhibits patience, honesty, control, kindness, and silence. (See, for example, *BG*, X, 4, 5) We should also observe that these qualities of spirit are very different from the fierce anger that caused Ghote to admire and almost worship Kelkar.

Ghote, who as we have noted seems to crave approval for his conduct, reflects that though he would like to have had Nadkarni represent him at the Inquiry, Nadkarni would not have done so because he would not have approved of what Ghote did. (116, 118) Ghote’s sense of pain and shame at this thought is heightened when, under Mrs. Ahmed’s cross-examination, Nadkarni praises Ghote for his conduct when he was Nadkarni’s pupil. (117) The experience of this feeling of shame reflects the beginning of a conflict in Ghote’s mind. At this point, Ghote still regards Kelkar as the officer he most admired. When Kelkar was at Vigatpore, Ghote wanted Kelkar’s approval. (20, 38-39) But he now feels shame when he hears the belated approval of Nadkarni.

The Visit of Ram Bhaskar

The final experience I will mention occurs very near the end of the story. As the Inquiry is coming to its conclusion, Ghote’s wife, Protima, unknown to Ghote, invites Ghote’s friend since boyhood, Ram Bhaskar, to visit at Ghote’s home. Protima’s purpose – as it was in taking Ghote to the temple priest – is to have Bhaskar persuade Ghote to maintain his lie. But at this point, after flip-flopping repeatedly, Ghote has resolved once again to tell the truth, casting aside the likely consequence that he will be dismissed from the police force.

In accord with this resolution, Ghote is determined to resist any effort by Bakshar to persuade him to change his mind, even though Ram has come forward out of love of his old friend and concern for his future. But despite Ghote’s resolve to resist Ram’s efforts, Bakshar succeeds in breaking down his friend’s resolution. The primary way he does this is through a trap. Ram first reminds Ghote of an incident in their youth when Ram angrily attacked a Christian preacher who came proselytizing to their village. Ghote tried to act as a peacemaker during this incident, which Ram suggests was evidence that from a very early age Ghote was to be a police officer. (180) Although he does not refer to the *Gita*, Ram’s comment about Ghote’s youthful action recalls what Krishna said about karma being “intrinsic” to one’s being. Ram subsequently suggests that he (Ram) could offer a bribe to the Inquiry’s Presiding Officer to induce the Officer to make some error in the Show Cause order,

thus letting Ghote remain a police officer. (182) Ghote flatly rejects this suggestion, telling Ram that not all police officials are corrupt. Ram closes the trap and seizes on Ghote's answer as evidence that Ghote, despite his suspension from duty and the prospect that he will be dismissed from service, remains a police officer through and through. (183)

In an internal monologue, Ghote acknowledges that Ram had caught him out by a kind of riddle – a riddle that forced him to see the truth about himself, that he could not really accept any other work than being a police officer. (183) Ghote reflects that it was if a blast of monsoon wind had blown away a makeshift curtain to uncover what was concealed within. (183)²³ Ram's revelatory trick that makes Ghote see the truth about himself again recalls the way Nathan used a fictitious story to catch out David and make him see the truth about what he did.

We should pause to compare Ram's effort at persuasion to that of the temple priest. Shortly before the beginning of the Inquiry (with the temple priest) and just before its end (with Ram, the son of a temple priest), Protima arranges to have Ghote meet with someone who attempts to persuade him to maintain his lie in order to remain a police officer. The key element of persuasion employed by both men is that what Ghote has been is what he should continue to be – what he has chosen to do in the past determines what he should continue to do. This is a karmic argument. It must also be observed that both efforts at persuasion rely on the revelation of a truth – that Ghote wants deeply to remain a police officer – but that to serve this truth the truth of what Ghote did must be concealed.

But the meeting with Ram suggests another – and quite different – thought to Ghote – one unintended by Ram. This new thought is not about Ghote but about Ram. Ram had from his youth been famous for his angry temperament. Indeed, because of this Ram typically played the role of a demon god in the annual Ramayana plays. Yet Ram now says he is no longer an angry man; he no longer shouts and curses, as he did so often in his youth – not even in his business dealings. In the face of Ghote's skepticism, Ram insists that this is "true-true." (182) Ghote is amazed by this extraordinary transformation. (182-183) He asks himself, "Had the demon god become a good god? Could such a change happen in human nature?" (183) Ghote concludes that this could happen. Indeed, he considers, it did happen with Ram. Ram had shown that someone who was once ruled by anger could overcome that weakness and become, in Ghote's words, "a new man." (184) Or at least, Ghote further reflects, one could "shed an unnecessary outer casing and fall back to the new shape underneath." (184)

²³ Compare *Ecclesiastes*, 3:22: "And I saw that there is nothing better for a man than to rejoice in his work, for this is his lot."

Ghote's reference to shedding or casting off the old way – particularly, the old way of anger, shouting, and cursing – and becoming a new man should recall to the reader the repeated calls of St. Paul to cast off the old man – as if this were clothing or an “outer casing” – and put on the new man. For example, in the third chapter of his Letter to the Colossians, Paul tells the Colossians that they must “lay aside all anger, passion, malice, cursing, and filthy talk” and “stop lying to one another, now that you have discarded the old nature with its deeds and have put on the new nature ...” (The New English Bible [NEB], Colossians 3:8-10) Paul continues that they should adopt “compassion, kindness, humility, and patience.” (3:12) And in *Ephesians*, Paul says, “You must be made new in mind and spirit, and put on the new nature of God's creating, which shows itself in the just and devout life called for by the truth. Then throw off all falsehood; speak the truth to each other, for all of us are parts of one body. If you are angry, do not let your anger lead you into sin; do not let the sunset still find you nursing it ...” (NEB, Ephesians, 4:23-26) “Have done with ... all angry shouting and cursing, and bad feeling of every kind.” (NEB, Ephesians, 4:31)

Note the irony here. The youthful Ram, who “shouting and black with rage,” railed at the Christian preacher's call to come to Jesus meek and mild has now in effect, and without religious conversion, followed Paul's injunction to put aside anger, shouting, and cursing and become a new man. And despite some teasing jocularity with his old friend, Ram follows Paul's advice to speak the truth – here, an important truth that Ghote's deepest desire, despite his latest resolve to admit the truth of his complicity, is to remain a police officer. (183) [But note again the conflict of two truths.]

Ram's shedding of his old way of anger also leads Ghote to reflect further about his mentor, Nadkarni. Ghote thinks of Nadkarni as “ever quite,” (184) and he recollects that Nadkarni's way of correcting a lax subordinate was through “quite criticism.” (184; recall *Ecclesiastes*) For the first time, Ghote comes to the realization that Nadkarni's quiet way is a “counter-example” (184) to Kelkar's way of anger. In BATS, Ghote had thought of Kelkar, but not of his worthy mentor, Nadkarni, as an example to follow. Ghote now says to himself that he never really did believe in Kelkar's way of anger.

Before moving on, there is one matter that we must consider more carefully about Ram's visit – the youthful incident mentioned above during which Ram angrily attacked a Christian preacher who, accompanied by some converts, came to their neighborhood. When the preacher called upon his hearers to throw the temple idol into the village pond and come to “Jesus meek and mild,” Bhaskar, whose father was a temple priest, angrily attempted to chase him away. (180-181) The converts accompanying the preacher scattered at this angry response, but the preacher himself held out, saying as his final words, “Remember then these words of the Bible. Yea, I do well to be angry even unto death.” (181)

Ghote reflects that he remembered these words of the preacher “through all the years” and that they “floated into his mind – at the most unlikely moments.” (181)

The source of these words of the Bible is not mentioned, but they are from the Book of Jonah, which, among other things, is about the anger of God. In that Book, God sends Jonah to cry out against the wickedness of Nineveh. Carrying out this order, Jonah tells the Ninevites that God is going to overthrow their city. In response to Jonah's prophecy, the king of Nineveh succeeds in getting his people to turn away from their evil ways so that "God will ... turn away from his fierce anger." Because of the Ninevites' repentance, God decides not to punish them. But God's merciful response made Jonah angry. Jonah says to God that God is "slow to anger" (like Nadkarni), but Jonah thinks that God should still use his anger against the Ninevites to punish them, despite their repentance. God asks Jonah, "Doest thou well to be angry ...?" Jonah replies, "I do well to be angry, even unto death." But Jonah's angry response does not stop God from diverting His own anger against the repentant Ninevites.

Given that it is Ram Bhaskar whose anger instigates the attack on the preacher, it might seem more appropriate to the facts of this incident for Keating, if he wanted to use a quote on anger from the Book of Jonah, to have the preacher quote to the angry Bhaskar, "Doest thou well to be angry?" But instead of this reference to Ram's anger, Keating has the preacher say, "I do well to be angry, even unto death." These words of Jonah are odd words for a preacher to quote because, while they are the words of a servant of God, they are spoken in anger in opposition to God, who has turned away from anger. The oddity of this suggests the question: Who in *Monsoon* had reason to be angry unto death against a "god"? The answer is: Desai. Desai had reason to be angry for the lordly Kelkar's rash action that caused Desai's death – not allowing Desai time to repent his blunder – and he had reason after his death to be angry at Ghote for falsifying the circumstances of his death. The question is thus posed whether Ghote can have a change of heart in a way that dissolves this anger unto death.

As a result of Bhaskar's visit, Ghote once again fixes his wandering mind and determines to do what he can in order to save his calling as a police officer. But there is a difference in his new resolution. In his previous determinations to lie to save his career, his inspiration was the thought that he could use Kelkar's anger as a force for good in carrying out his duties. But now for the first time he has come to reject for himself Kelkar's way of anger, which he says to himself that he never really believed in. While Ghote does not explicitly consider any religious inspiration for his abandonment of belief in the way of anger, his change of heart reflects the teachings of the Hebrew Bible (the Jonah story) and the New Testament (St. Paul). And it also reflects the teaching of the *Gita*, which refers to anger as one of the "gates of hell that destroy the self." (*BG*, XVI, 21) Indeed, didn't Kelkar's anger destroy him?

Still looking for a model to look to, Ghote now begins to think that his original mentor, Nadkarni, is a counter-example to Kelkar. It is as if Kelkar's way was an unnecessary cloak Ghote had put on after he had learned how to be a good officer under Nadkarni's tutelage. Ghote thus leans toward the karmic argument: while

casting aside what is superfluous, he resolves to continue his course of action (karma) and maintain his commitment to what he has been and what he has devoted himself to be. And so he will maintain his lie.

But what about Ghote's earlier realization that Nadkarni, whom he now sees as a counter-example to Kelkar, would not have approved of his action in concealing the truth of what Kelkar did?

And what about the rejection of lying and the call to speak the truth that had surfaced occasionally from the depths of Ghote's soul and that, unknown of course to Ghote, Paul says is required if one is to reject the old way of anger and lying and become a new man?

On the next day of the Inquiry after Bakshar's visit (which is the Inquiry's next-to-last day), things go favorably for Ghote, giving him renewed hope that he will be exonerated. He becomes more determined that on the following day, when he is to make his final statement at the Inquiry, he will maintain his lie. To fortify himself in this resolution, Ghote writes out a short speech for the Inquiry in which he will deny being associated with Kelkar in the death of Desai. Keating mentions that Ghote practiced reciting this denial "three times." (201) This repetition reflects Ghote's desire to arrest the wandering of his mind and to bolster his resolution, but it also recalls Peter's three-time denial of association with Jesus. As with Peter's falsehood, Ghote intends to make this false denial in order to protect himself from the adverse judgment of others who attempt to associate him with a god under suspicion and to save himself from the peril threatened by admitting such association. But, as we have seen, Ghote's denial of Kelkar's way of anger appears to be not so much a denial as the discovery of a spiritual and emotional truth, and it will prove, somewhat miraculously, to lead to the salvation of Ghote's career.

The Final Day of the Inquiry

At the start of the final day of the Inquiry, on which the only scheduled event is Ghote's final statement, the prosecutor makes an unanticipated request, which the Board grants, to introduce the evidence of Kelkar's report on the Vigatpore station, which commends Ghote's service, and to recall as a witness the officer in charge of investigating the facts of Desai's death. This officer – Inspector Pimputkar – is convinced (correctly, of course) that Ghote assisted Kelkar, but in light of events at the Inquiry, he fears that Ghote is going to be exonerated. As a result, Pimputkar makes a sudden last-minute effort to establish the case against Ghote by entering into evidence a document indicating the cover-up of a crime at Vigatpore – a document on which Pimputkar has falsified the date to make the incident fall within the time when Ghote was in charge at Vigatpore. The document in question is one that Ghote had noticed upon his arrival in Vigatpore. Ghote suspected that it was evidence that Inspector Khan had colluded with a wealthy local businessman to cover up a crime the businessman committed. Pimputkar was thus falsely

attempting to show that it was Ghote – rather than Khan – who suppressed evidence of this crime and that Kelkar, who would have discovered this problem in his review, nevertheless gave Ghote a good report in return for Ghote’s assistance in covering up the circumstances of Desai’s death.

As he listens to the presentation of Kelkar’s Report, Ghote’s mind again wanders. He reflects on the different disciplinary methods of Nadkarni and Kelkar. Ghote thinks of Tiger shouting at Desai. (205) Ghote reflects that had Nadkarni been at Vigatpore he would have brought about reform without “shouting.” (205) He also reflects that had he, instead of following Kelkar’s way of anger, not shouted at Desai, Desai might not have tipped over the inkpot, leading to his death. (205) This is a very significant juncture in Ghote’s reflections. Hitherto, he had thought of his involvement in Desai’s death as purely a matter of fate. In his self-serving view, as a result of a myriad of circumstances he just happened to be present when Kelkar accidentally killed Desai. But now he comes to see that his own angry shout at Desai – exhibiting an anger that he modeled on Kelkar and which he expected Kelkar would want him to exhibit – may have played a role in Desai’s death. This would mean that not fate, but Ghote’s own ideals and action (his karma) implicated him in responsibility for Desai’s death. Ghote reflects that when Kelkar threw the inkpot at Desai, “it had not been out of any cleansing rage,” but “out of uncontrolled, dangerous anger.” (206) And so wasn’t Ghote’s angry shout at Desai also uncontrolled and dangerous?

After this falsified evidence is presented, it is time for Ghote to make his final statement to the judges. He begins by denying the charge that he assisted Kelkar and then goes on to expose effectively the effort by Pimputkar to use falsehood to present the truth. If Ghote’s career is to be terminated, it must be through the truth of what he did. Whatever wrong Ghote may have done, he is not guilty of a cover-up carried out for corrupt self-interested purposes.

Or is he – now that Kelkar is dead and his own career is what is at stake? Had he not, for his own sake and by his lying, cheated the truth-loving Mrs. Ahmed, leading her to take time from her service to the poor to defend his lie? Had he not, for his own sake and by his lying, continued to cheat Desai’s family of the truth about his death?

Moreover, isn’t Inspector Pimputkar’s use of falsehood so that the truth may come to light a mirror in which Ghote can see his own effort to create a false cover-up so that good may come of it? Is Pimputkar unwittingly yet another Nathan figure, employing a fiction that makes Ghote see the truth of what he has done, leading him, as Nathan led David, to acknowledge his responsibility for the death of a subordinate? To save Kelkar, Ghote had fabricated a false account for what he thought was a good purpose. In what may be seen as a following out his karma, Ghote now sees the officer investigating his case doing against him what he himself did – using fabricated evidence in an effort to achieve what he thinks is a good end. In response to a tactic similar to the one he himself used, Ghote rebels and stands up for the truth. Or at least, for a part of the truth.

The judges examine the document and determine that it has indeed been falsified. The officer is taken into custody and led away in anger.

At this point, it seems that Ghote will be exonerated. The Presiding Officer says to Ghote that he expects Ghote's final statement is completed. Given Ghote's desire to remain a police officer, it seems that this is now a time (following *Ecclesiastes*) for Ghote to remain silent and not to speak further. But unexpectedly, Ghote tells the Board of Inquiry the truth about what he did.

Why does he do this? Reflecting later, Ghote could not explain to himself why he suddenly spoke the truth. At the threshold of his long fought-for exoneration, Ghote seems to cast aside the hope he has for his career – the hope that had fueled his resolve to lie. In doing so, he seems also to cast aside all the hope and effort that Protima had put forth to save her husband as a support for her and their son, Ved. Additionally, he casts aside all the persuasions he had accepted from the temple priest and from Ram Bhaskar about his karma as a police officer, putting this calling in peril. And Ghote also casts aside the anger he had, not only for the trick he thought fate had played on him, but also for the devious Inspector Pimputkar. He tells the Board that while Pimputkar's evidence was falsified, "nevertheless everything Inspector Pimputkar has been alleging is one hundred and one percent true." (215) And while Ghote now speaks the truth about his assistance to Kelkar, he separates himself from his old hero, explaining to the Board that though his motivation was to preserve Kelkar as a good officer, he now sees that Kelkar's way is not the only way.

What is happening here? A fundamental teaching of the *Gita* is that one who wants to achieve peace and liberation must act without regard to the fruits of his action (karma). He must not be motivated by attachments to comrades et al. and from anger, etc. In casting aside his anger and so much of his former attachments, Ghote seems to be acting in accordance with advice.

Or is he? Has Ghote really cast aside all commitments and attachments? While he has cast aside Kelkar as a model and as someone whose approval he sought, Ghote, in this extremity, is still looking for a dedicated person as a model to follow. And at this moment he finds one. He feels sure that, as he finally speaks the truth, Mrs. Ahmed was looking at him with approval. (216) But, as we have noted, Mrs. Ahmed's whole life has been one of commitment to others (especially to outcasts), not detachment from them. And in speaking the truth now, doesn't Ghote imply solidarity with Desai's sister-in-law, whose search for the truth aroused his own inner sense for truth? As had been brought to his conscience on that night when he assisted Kelkar, Desai was a human being and as Paul says, we should "speak the truth to each other, for all of us are parts of one body." So when Ghote suddenly speaks the truth, is he releasing himself from attachments or making an even deeper commitment to others?

Under further questioning by the Presiding Officer, Ghote explains that while he now sees that Kelkar's way is excellent, it is not the only way.

The Presiding Officer expresses sympathy for Ghote's motivation but says that because of what he refers to as Ghote's "change of heart" he must pronounce sentence of dismissal. But he neglects to sign the Show Cause order, which must be signed during the Inquiry if its judgment is to take effect. The failure to sign the Order will mean that Ghote will not be dismissed.

The text of the novel clearly suggests that the Officer deliberately neglected to sign the order, but it does not indicate the reason for this neglect. So the reader is left with still another unresolved question: Why did the Presiding Officer neglect to sign the Order?

Did the Officer decide that as a result of Ghote's renunciation of his former ways and his conversion to a new way Ghote should not be punished – as God decided not to punish the Ninevites because of their renunciation of their former ways? Does the Officer believe that one can become a new man despite one's past action, thus perhaps contradicting what the notion of karma would suggest? Did Ghote's action in speaking the truth set him free? (John 8:32) Or did the Officer decide to neglect his duty in order to save the career of an essentially good officer, just as Ghote neglected his duty in an effort to save the career of another good officer. This would again be, like Pimputkar's use of fabricated evidence, a karmic solution: one's past action will determine what one should expect to happen to one in the future. Or did Ram Bakshar, out of love of his friend, bribe the judge, as he suggested he could? Again, the text does not indicate. But the text's author has created an extraordinary opportunity to reflect on such questions and their moral and spiritual implications.

The Final Chapter

Ghote's struggle and the wandering of his mind are now over. He had embarked on a perilous course of action that would create unforeseen involvements with others and would subject his most cherished beliefs to a critical test. Though he was unable to save Kelkar, he has come to learn that his zeal in that effort was misplaced. And whether through karma or through some other source, Ghote did eventually speak the truth and thereby do justice to Desai and his family.

In the final chapter of the book, with the Inquiry over and his police career saved, Ghote, along with Protima and their son, Ved, are at the seaside enjoying a religious festival, Nareli Purnima, Coconut Day – a celebration marking the end of the monsoon and the end of troubles associated with it. Under a cheerful sky, Ghote says, "I am thinking monsoon is definitely finished now." (221) In light of the wanderings of Ghote's mind and his efforts to come to resolution, the reader can sympathize with the definiteness of Ghote's pronouncement, despite awareness that the monsoon will come again in its season.

As Ghote and Protima observe Ved in an angry dispute with some other boys during the celebration, Protima asks her husband why he doesn't rebuke the boys. It seems that even now when the Inquiry is over and his monsoon of troubles has at least temporarily ended, Ghote must still be subject to a searching question about anger

and about how he should behave. But Ghote does not react angrily to Protima's question. He has learned much during his time of trial. No doubt summoning something about what he has learned, Ghote says: "it is best for me to keep my anger until a time when it will be truly needed." (221)

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