

HOSTILITY BETWEEN THE CULTURES OF HINDUISM AND CATHOLICISM IN KIRAN NAGARKAR'S *RAVAN AND EDDIE*

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Abstract: - Kiran Nagarkar is a novelist, a playwright, a scriptwriter and a critic too. Multi-talented Nagarkar is the receiver of Sahitya Akademi Award for his novel *Cuckold* and Germany's highest civilian honour, the Cross of the Order of the Merit. The Marathi-English author talks about how the characters have evolved, his own days in a Mumbai's *chawl* and the despair he feels about the city's non-inclusive development. Present paper highlights Kiran Nagarkar's views on cultures of Hinduism and Catholicism in *Ravan and Eddie* and Nagarkar's tactics of introducing varied themes, the range of values, cultural milieu, fictional techniques, unique and complicated language and fragmentary episodic plot.

Key words: Culture, humanity, poverty, religion, society.

Kiran Nagarkar is a noteworthy writer from Maharashtra, India who has made valuable contribution to Indian literature. He does not enjoy success or popular recognition but his works are considered as pioneering efforts for his times. His works are regarded as milestone achievements in both the regional literature of Marathi, and in Indian Writing in English. His works are often frank and honest narrations of social evils that prevail in the society. His writing is brilliant and thought provoking. His literary career illuminates through his linguistic choices and political discourse. This paper aims at analyzing his work in order to understand how he projects the realities of various aspects of the Indian society and culture. Nagarkar captures the essence of the social reality of the contemporary society and at the same time, their ability to present the realities as critical commentaries.

The Indian society is unique in its multifarious nature. It is unity in diversity. The social institution itself is an amalgamation of various culturally, religiously and linguistically

different groups of people. He is well aware of the ignorance and poverty that plague the Indian society. Kiran Nagarkar does not spare the society for its blatant negligence of issues like poverty, exploitation, caste, religion and discrimination. His views are honest in presenting reality. Nagarkar makes an insightful observation in understanding the relationship between the society and religion. There is continuous discourse on the impact of religion on individuals and the society as a whole.

The author is able to skillfully project how human beings and religion complement each other. In some cases, religion guides human beings, which in turn end up in human beings guiding religion. When such an interaction happens within a set boundary, all is well in the society. However, when the relationship between religion and an individual reaches a point at which both cease to exist separately and when both become one, uncontrolled and unguided by tolerance and experience, the combination turns out to be destructive. Nagarkar shows how such an entity can destroy indiscriminately. The author not only looks at how religious fanaticism operates within the social infrastructure but also delves deep into the process by which an individual becomes a fanatic.

The novel, in spite of being forecast on religion and individuals, become relevant social document in terms of understanding the fringe elements that operate outside social law. The thorough inspection of these characters by the author enables the readers to understand that in spite of being animalistic nature, a terrorist is basically a human being driven by obsession. This is a significant contribution in the sense that the reader is allowed to understand how a terrorist is born and who is a terrorist.

Nagarkar has clear and profound perception in all the issues that connect society, culture, religion and individual human beings. *Ravan and Eddie* which presents the life of Indians in the congested chawls of Mumbai. The novel is witty but it is realistic and enlightening in terms of human existence amidst everyday struggles. The novel presents the lives of lower middle class and lower class families. The novel weaves a gripping tale of struggle and endurance shown by families of over a dozen members living in two rooms, sharing a common toilet at the end of the corridor, and drawing water for drinking and bathing from a public tap.

Ravan and Eddie is to be considered as an important literary work in the context of the multifarious nature of India and how it is exploited for various reasons including political, economical and religious profits. Nagarkar concentrates on other scarcities in the chawls and the critical differences between Catholics and Hindus. He has used mixture of terrible and humorous events in the fiction. Ravan's trust in his own extra ordinary powers to do black magic and kill of people is fantastical and expands the boundaries of realism. It is through

comedy and violence he questions the sanctity of religion, communalism and superstition. He illustrates mysterious region of Bombay such as lust and sexuality.

The present paper focuses on incorporation of personal life and public life in society and culture in two novels, *Ravan and Eddie*. The novel is observed with twin genre of individuality and socio cultural challenges faced by them. It is a mixture of socio cultural challenges where unbelievable elements are considered usual by the characters and by “authorial memoirs.” The novel has depicted Bombay chawl life and its multi-cultural community. Simultaneously he has depicted youngster’s fascination of Hindi movies. All the novels are resolving tension between the world of self- desire in life and its inevitable denial in reality of social culture.

Ravan and Eddie is one of the waitlist, bawdiest, most perceptive novels in contemporary Indian English literature. *Ravan & Eddie* tells the story of two boys, one Hindu and the other Christian. They live in the same CWD Chawl in Mumbai’s Mazagaon area. Religious and caste- based divisions are very much a part of the day-to-day lives of everyone in the chawl. The Hindus do not talk to the Christians and vice-versa. *Ravan* on the other hand is curious about everything Christian—especially the girls. Their skirts, lipsticks, make up, language and lifestyle. He is of the curious kind. But he just cannot figure out why people refer to him as the murderer of *Eddie*’s father. How could he have killed a man when he was barely a year old?

“It was of course religion that was the source of all the differences between the two communities. Hindus go to temples as and when they felt like it. Catholics one and all, go to mass on Sundays.” Kiran Nagarkar’s knowledge about the lives of the chawl and the chawl-dwellers is amazing. The choice of words, the conversations, the language, the issues among the day-to-day lives... everything makes perfect sense in his descriptions, everything is believable. *The Meditation on Neighbours* stands out among them with a very accurate elaboration of the differences between the Catholics and Hindus living on different floors of the chawls.

The social divide among the Hindus and Christians is clearly evident; with Hindus occupy the bottom four floors of the chawls and Christians residing in the topmost fifth floor of each chawl, having as little interaction and friendship as possible, barring a single exception. The religious rebellion is very much evident in Nagarkar’s words, where he sarcastically comments on Catholicism as well as Hinduism and their individual idiosyncrasies. Kiran Nagarkar's novels are connected with intricacies of self and social relationship. Thus, the novel affords a prospect to learn the issue of man's position in society and his voyage of recognizing it through incorporated by society. With the dawn of nineties, the environment of Indian reality and civilization as described in the novels have prolonged its horizons and changed at large scale chiefly

because of vast changes in social, political, cultural and familial patterns. Being an artist, sensitive to the micro changes in society, Indian English novelists have explicitly reproduced the complexities and the anguish of new circumstances in their fiction.

The purpose of the present research paper is to examine and assess the selected text by Kiran Nagarkar. It will find out how both genres personal life style and cultural traditions are blended in the novels by Kiran Nagarkar. In his novels both genre are woven in simultaneously. The research will help us to understand Nagarkar's pioneering technique of fact and fiction. It will explore the combined aspects of reality and possible world of social awareness in the novels such as *Ravan and Eddie* (1995). Kiran Nagarkar portrays protagonist's conflict between self and social norms of the world through these novels.

The study will find out the united standpoints of individual and society used by novelist in a stylistic way. Recent literature involves the insinuations of advances in science and philosophy. The limitations have brought the values of realism in disarray. Realist thinkers are facing the void, the implicit meaningless of the cosmos. Realistic literature provided its readers a sense of power and insight, an outlet for feelings. It reflects the life, the society as it is which is serious, full of suffering. In modern and postmodern literature writers retreat from the edge and try to write in needful conventional realistic veins. Kiran Nagarkar has focused on different issues which are pertinent. He has focused on ethical, socio-cultural issues. He writes about modern society, politics, history and culture.

This paper has examined the conflict between self and social norms in the contexts of contemporary India as represented in the works of Kiran Nagarkar has investigated into the dynamics of social conflict in them. The works selected for the purpose of this study are *Ravan and Eddie* (1995), by the novel explores the conflict of class and issues of nationalism and migration. The setting of Nagarkar's tale is noteworthy because it symbolizes not only a varied cross section of present-day urban life in India but also the impact of how low-income housing and scarce resources on different Indian communities as they co-exist and disagreement with one another. Though it defines the squalid lives of populace in the lower rungs of society it is not a tale of pessimism but of optimism. The ways of Ravan and Eddie cross again as adults in his novel *The Extras*. Ravan Pawar and Eddie Coutinho are, 20 years on, still living at the CWD Chawl, their lives run parallel but on dissimilar tracks. Despite being neighbors in the same chawl, the two are divided by language, regardless of social custom.

Kiran Nagarkar attempts to reveal the tragic circumstances of the ordinary people, their craze to pursue their thoughts despite of hurdles, oddities in life, willingness to achieve the desired target and adjustment with situations. As a sequel to *Ravan and Eddie*, *The Extras* mimics much of the style of the earlier book. He highlights on the droll and scattered aspects

of Bombay life. Here is the careful, almost too obvious similar structuring of the major characters' lives.

The novelist acquires things further by providing counterpoints to events from the previous book aspects of Eddie's relationship with the Auntie who runs the speakeasy, and Ravan's entry into Catholicism will seem very familiar. For more than 40 years, he has been trying to shake us out of stupor with themes that are real, riveting and thought-provoking. Adept at the art of making the reader uncomfortable with the truth, Kiran Nagarkar's modest manner complements his literary eloquence. To understand Nagarkar fully, humour is crucial. Generally hailed as an 'Indian writer you must read', Nagarkar is a highly praised bilingual novelist, playwright and screenplay writer as well as social, political and literary critic of eminence. Besides to this, the works focus our concentration on estrangement, cultural clash, displacement, exile, exploitation, economic inequality, fundamentalism, globalization, hybridity, insurgency and immigration, loss of identity, loneliness, multiculturalism, poverty and racial-discrimination. One of the major apprehensions in postcolonial literature is the crisis of displacement and its consequence resulting in the loss of home. Uprooting from one's own culture and land, and the agonies of re-routing in an alien land are depicted in the works here.

In his second novel *Ravan and Eddie* (1995), Nagarkar has replicated a tragic undertone and analytical comments on life characteristics. Nagarkar projects the difficulty of modern man living in a sundry society with mixed identity and multi cultural milieu. He divulges the intricacies of dual identity of the character in present times. It then follows them through the twists and turns of their mounting up, the pleasure, the pain, the horror, the angst, the guilt, responsibility, sin and sex, crime and punishment, power, expiation, domination, betrayal, and self-discovery etc. Nagarkar projects their tragic condition through black but passionate humour, wit and satire. Lukmani comments, "The main focus remains on the characters. He makes the readers have a stake in his characters" (2004: X).

The chief attempt of the researcher is to show the true identity of the protagonists through thematic feature of distress and disorientation and identity crisis. The term distress and disorientation refers to a period of uncertainty and confusion in which a person's sense of identity becomes insecure, typically due to a change in their expected aims or role in society. The factors responsible for this distress and disorientation are extreme poverty, class struggle, humiliation, real self, psychological relationship, conflicts, pain and suffering etc. He focuses on Ravan's dilemma. He doesn't know about his identity crisis.

Verma comments on individuality of human being. In a true sense, an ideal society is a community of mankind, a brotherhood that apprehends the individuality of man." (Verma: 54). The intolerable burden of identity crisis starts in Ravan's life right from his birth. The first thing he doesn't know how he is the murderer of Victor Coutinho when he was one year baby. In victor's funeral, with a superhuman effort, she took a deep breath,

pointed her finger at Parvati's son and proclaimed, Cain, Murderer. (1995: 10). "I do not wish to sully my tongue with that abominable name." Violet advised her, "Beware of him. He killed my husband." (1995: 295-296).

Ravan carries this burden of 'murder' throughout the life. This was the root cause of his unhappiness. Ravan's problem is that he has been drifting towards the world of 'sin' and 'evil' for which he is not at all responsible. Parvati repeatedly says, "Ravan is beyond redemption". Ravan's disorientation affects badly on his domestic life. When Ravan grow up, he is confronted with the identity crisis. He couldn't figure out why Parvati asked his father to mind his language. He rarely swore. He certainly hadn't just now. Unless bed was a swear word. He would have liked to have made everybody happy by calling himself Ram-Ravan or Ravan-Ram, but both his parents found the hyphenated conjoining offensive. (1995: 21)

Nagarkar demonstrates the humiliations in his protagonist's life. He is humiliated by the orthodoxies and religious authorities. They didn't give him fair and humane treatment. One day, he put on his white shirt and khaki half, left home and didn't go to the Sabha. Sebastian's School and Church to watch a game of cricket. A teacher of St. Sebastian unnoticed him and called as a ghati. Go back to you Sabha. (1995: 29) Humiliation made him panic. He confidently spoke about Eddie's persuasion. Eddie denies this and blames him for his father's murder. In a state of loneliness, finally Ravan is kicked off from the Sabha.

Nagarkar is proved as the victim of alienation and loneliness and accused as a murderer by Eddie in RSS Sabha. By receiving the offers of killing, Ravan got confused. He lost his sleep and weight. Throughout the novel, he struggles to find himself. He has no idea who or what he is, where he belongs or where he wants to go. His characters are memorable. They effectively build relationship with one another. He is, at times, a feisty polemicist, but always a pithy and racy one. Nagarkar uses the technique of digressions to retain the interest of his readers as well as to get some comic relief. Nagarkar has depicted protagonists as rebellious, brave, daring, hopeful, intellectual, spiritual fanatic and individual lives.

Nagarkar is a versatile and serious writer of the contemporary world. He is a brilliant story-teller, a writer and his narrative technique is different from other novelists. His novels have multiple themes therefore these are difficult to understand. He has applied various narrative technique including innovative writing style, digression method, epistolary and diary form, authorial memories, songs sung by characters and story telling method. Storytelling and story listening are the basic ways of thinking about the world and continue to play their role in our lives at multifarious levels.

The digression method of storytelling is perhaps the oldest device used in the Indian classical texts such as the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and the Panachtanatra which are

written but technically part of the oral tradition. His writing takes note of the contemporary multi-cultured communities, superstition, history and myth, dream of Bollywood world, and religious obsessive faith. Author has interwoven social reality as well as fantastic stories by his imagination. No doubt, the scope of the study is limited and circumscribed. Nagarkar focuses on the caste system in Indian society and the way Dalits are humiliated by upper castes. Though the Hindu wedding is one of the most sacred and auspicious ceremony, it is not celebrated without the presence of the 'Dalit members' brass bands. Nagarkar portrays detail scenes of wedding ceremony in Karjat. He depicts how people of Maharashtra spend money in wedding ceremony. The people go by truck and they drink full alcohol in wedding ceremony. Mr. Patil arranges his daughter's marriage ceremony and spends much money on pandal, food and the guests. He provides delicious food as three vegetables, a salad, chutney, and two kinds of pickles, rice, chapattis, dal and boondi laddus. He arranges other facilities to people in Sita's wedding ceremony. Though he is a Hindu boy but saves Christian girl's life. Author depicts some terror incident in the Bombay. Haji Bashir Akhtar is a thief and smuggler who travels by Ravan's taxi. It encourages them to dream, while hampering their realization. The novel especially focuses on Bollywood life of Bombay.

Nagarkar's novel is witty, funny, and sarcastic. It is good fun to read about the origins of India's famous brass band or the Bombay taxi or the rise of Johnny walker and Rajanikant. Author has depicted dark side of Bombay as poverty, open vegetables market 'Bhendi Bazar', whore houses, illegal bars, and world of Mafia Dons. Other writers remark that Mumbai is better than Nagarkar's depiction. Today, hardly any actor, or actress has made their position without godfather in the film industry. Some exceptions are there. Andheri is a particular area where thousands of men and women are just waiting to get their break.

Conclusion: - In the end of the novel Nagarkar shows that reunion of both enemies Ravan and Eddie. There were people gathered on the stairs now. Eddie's mother looked in disbelief of at her son hugging Ravan. That time Ravan tells to Eddie that I didn't do it. I swear I didn't. It means Ravan didn't kill his father Victor. The digressions make them clearly distinct from the rest of the narrative. These interludes not only establish a contrast but heighten the narrative with a tinge of black humour.

The end of the novel also takes us back to questions of the fantasy and reality: "Life is nothing but a series of possibilities. Why was only one chosen to be reality? Fantasy was a fact that had not yet occurred but certainly could" (1995: 264). For whether one wants equal respect to all religions, or equal indifference to hem, the violence of everyday references to warriors and enemies, implicates people, whether they know it or not, in the daims of religion that are king made for their position in the nation, since as the narrator says there is "one city, one chawl," but then also a

reductive relapsing into the binarism of "two floors, two cultures, two languages, two religions, and the enmity of the two" that "separated them" (1995: 195)

At the end of the novel, Ravan, Eddie and their colleagues remained extras in the Bollywood industry. Ravan and Eddie choose another way for survival of life. They provide music to Hindi movies songs and compose new songs for the film. The Extras has happy ending because their songs becomes super hit in the movie and they earn money. They succeed in their life through the music but they do not get what they desired. Nagarkar's Ravan and Eddie are optimistic, positive in their life and live content life. They did everything to become a hero in the film industry but their fate and economic background became responsible for their failure.

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