

**KIRAN NAGARKAR: AN EMERGING STAR IN INDIAN
ENGLISH FICTION**

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Abstract

The literary output of Kiran Nagarkar, the recipient of Sahitya Akademi Award, is highly appreciable. He is recognized as a cosmopolitan, experimental, irreverent and visionary. He is one of the significant contemporary writers in the canon of Indian English literature. Present paper highlights Kiran Nagarkar's place in Indian English literature. His work cannot be viewed in isolation but can be compared with the works of other Marathi bilingual modernists Arun Kolatkar, Dilip Chitre and Vilas Sarang. His writing is brilliant and thought provoking. His literary career illuminates through his linguistic choices and political discourse. This paper investigates Kiran Nagarkar's tactics of introducing varied themes, the range of values, cultural milieus, fictional techniques, unique and complicated language, and fragmentary episodic plot. Present paper highlights his postcolonial views, approaches, influence and identity.

Key words: Craft and vision, versatile genius, visionary, cosmopolitan, brilliant story teller, experimentalist, humanist etc.

Kiran Nagarkar is a distinguished modern Novelist. He is one of India's leading and most unpredictable writers. He is the classic writer who always discovers new facets and insights every time in his novels. His work has a timeless quality which tempts the readers to read his novels. Nagarkar's craft and vision enhances the reader's enjoyment. Many writers wrote under several pseudonyms. Nagarkar writes his novels under his own name. His books are different from each other. It makes us difficult to believe that they are by the same author. He is the first Maharashtrian and the first Chitpavan Brahmin who received Sahitya Akademi Award for

English. This achievement placed him in a larger body of writers or a tradition of writing. He writes easily about the people who are similar to his own supposed community and group. Kiran Nagarkar is a part of this tradition where minorities and outsiders have found voices. He is a member of a literary avant-garde, as one of the progenitors and inaugurators of literary modernism in Marathi and English. (Yasmeen, Lukmani. 'The Shifting Worlds of Kiran Nagarkar's Fiction', Paranjape, Makarand. Kiran Nagarkar and the tradition of Indian English Novel, 2, 5, 7). Kiran Nagarkar's His move from Marathi to English composition and his subsequent reactions are praiseworthy. He composed and designed his novels for an Indian audience and Western readers. He takes utmost care in preserving Indian culture throughout his novels. His novels serve as homage to Indian traditions, religions, styles, and issues. His books have great literary taste. His novels have enormous variety, the range of values, cultural milieus and fictional techniques in his novels. All the novels of Kiran Nagarkar are modernist in parts and post modernist in others. His narrative technique is highly innovative. He is certainly not a traditional writer. He represented Indian tradition in a new format. He writes in a historically imperial language. He attracts Indian as well as Western readers through his magnificent writing style, subject matters, use of references, allusions and diction. Nagarkar has developed an ethnographic artifact. Meenakshi Mukerjee comments about Nagarkar's historical writing. "Nagarkar's story is anchored in the specificity of history and located in the indeterminacy of myth. Nagarkar never highlights the historicity of his work. He always keeps himself from imagination. He believes in the principle of Rabindranath Tagore, The primary function of a historical novel was not to record facts but to evoke the life of times." Makarand Paranjape discuss about Kiran Nagarkar's place in Indian English fiction, "Nagarkar is the only Maharashtrian to get the Sahitya Akademi Award for English fiction, because there are no specifically Maharashtrian elements in his writing. All his protagonists are outsiders. " (Lukmani, Yasmeen. The Shifting World of Kiran Nagarkar's Fiction introduction, page xv). Kiran Nagarkar's perception of human life in past and recent past is expressed through the characters of his novels. Nagarkar always combines the social, political and communal events of the past and recent past and aims at projecting the meaning of such events in context of present and future. He stresses the importance of freedom for the individual in post colonial period of India. As a novelist, he holds distinctively eminence in Indian English novels as evidenced by Sahitya Akademi Award. He boldly tackles national and international political themes. He holds distinctive place as a novelist in Indian English literature. His novels depict human relationship, national boundaries, and structuring his themes around families and their life modern life with sub version of historical events. He is one of the India's most widely known writers and has attained the stature of distinguished man of letters with international acclaim and reputation. His caliber, oeuvre and stature are really remarkable. Nagarkar's achievement as a novelist, historian and analyst is sufficient to establish him in Indian English writing as a versatile genius. Nagarkar's writing reflects his conviction in political, religious and social ideologies.

Kiran Nagarkar's western outlook:-

Kiran Nagarkar has western outlook. He is known as unpredictable writer. His lively imagination illumines every aspect of life. He was categorized with contemporary Indian practitioners who produced remarkable novels. He fearlessly writes the burning political questions of recent times. He is a great novelist, author, playwright, film and drama critic and philosopher who expand his

awareness into realization. His personality is stamped in his entire works. He has the ability to combine personal, social, political and historical events in a realistic manner. Nagarkar's personality reflects throughout his work in respect of cultural heritage, nationalism, political freedom, thread of historicity, fanaticism, quest for identity etc. Nagarkar visualizes the brighter side of materialism of the west. He regards that western intellectual is deeply committed to the search of philosophical truth. He observed the great splendor of western countries and inclined upon his country as homeland of brave new world. Thus Kiran Nagarkar is immensely of great height and has a commanding personality. Kiran Nagarkar's Indianness for an English reading audience has been observed different because of his choice of language. His novels gained recognition in national as well as international level.

In *Seven Sixes Are Forty Three*, Nagarkar describes Kushank's bitter and burlesque description and his growth to adulthood in Mumbai in 1960's and the shaping of his highly individual identity. He is always torn between westernized norms and Indian cultural moorings. It raises many issues such as love, honour, pain, suffering, death and rationality. (Nagarkar, Kiran. 'Seven Sixes Are Forty Three.' Trans. Shubha Slee. St. Lucia: University of Queensland P, 1980). In the first page of *Ravan and Eddie*, Victor's stream-of-consciousness transitions easily seen from complimenting Parvati's son to stare at her breasts. After listing the physical attributes of Ravan, Victor thinks, "Though of course he doesn't have your pomegranate breasts. Pom-pom, pom-pom, may I squeeze them?" (Nagarkar, Kiran. 'Ravan and Eddie', p.1). Although this segment of text is largely written to partially surprise and humor the audience, as well as to establish that Victor's intense passion with Parvati is not platonic, it is notable in how unashamed it is in its frankness. Nagarkar's images of sexuality are integrated casually into his writings. His overt sexualizations suggest that he has not been exceedingly influenced by Western culture, particularly in his desire to depict characters that express dimensions of both male and female sexualities. Nagarkar writes: "If he had been horrified at the thought of masquerading as a transvestite, why was he not incensed that his step had become light and his torso lissome? Or were the reasons for this quite simple and banal? That at heart he was a woman or perhaps all human beings are really bisexual? ... What is the most complete and sufficient idea that mankind has had? God. And yet if you assign sex to God, then he or she too becomes finite and incomplete." (Nagarkar, Kiran. 'Cuckold,' p. 496)

Nagarkar's Quest for Identity:-

Kiran Nagarkar depicts effectively traditional themes, their ironic mode of narration and outlines of the plot moving transcontinental territories. During this period of his life, he established his true intellectual reputation and degree of eminence in circle of philosophy and literary writers. He has tremendous quest for the unifying Indian novels. Despite the consistent strength of his literary works, his English novels have become a lightning rod. Nagarkar has been accused of several crimes against his heritage, from abandoning a dedicated readership to targeting more profitable Western markets. His novels are clearly written for a diverse Indian audience and offers accessibility for Western readers. Nagarkar effectively introduces English language usage, literary conceits and allusions in his novels to provide readability to the most possible multicoloured Indian audience. He mentions cultural elements and composes his works for Indian ethnic groups. He presents cohesive cultural face to the world at large. Nagarkar speaks about nationalism in his novels, "Nationalism has been the major preoccupation of postcolonial

studies since its inception and the novel has been the privileged site of the literary study of nationalism. Indeed, one of the most influential texts in the larger field.” (Nandy, Ashish. ‘Creating a Nationality,’ Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1995)

Kiran Nagarkar as a Literary Cosmopolitan:-

Kiran Nagarkar is a cosmopolitan writer. He gives a sensuous quality to his prose, whether he deals with London, California or Kabul or with mathematics or architecture. He is a bilingual writer. His nomadic life has taken him from India to abroad. His views of human life make him global cosmopolitan personality. Various prestigious awards are given to Kiran Nagarkar. His fiction declines with philosophical elements of various cultures. Kiran Nagarkar believes in exploring the new facts. Denis Scheck praises Nagarkar for his valuable contribution in Marathi and English literature. He asserts, “Kiran Nagarkar is a name you definitely have to remember, because this author is one of the genuine great new discoveries of the past few years.”

Kiran Nagarkar as a brilliant Story-Teller:-

Kiran Nagarkar is proficient in Storytelling. He is a born story teller and thinker. He is a highly gifted stylist and sarcastic story teller who address various contemporary topics throughout his work. He addresses one of the most urgent contemporary topics in his novels. Khushwant Singh comments in India Today, “Kiran Nagarkar has exuberant talent in storytelling. His novels leave an imprint on the minds of the readers and compel them to think about the post colonial issues and their consequences on human beings. His writing is powerful in holding the interest of the reader. Nagarkar has established himself as a story teller in the tradition of Graham Greene. He is a born story teller with an unerring eye for detail, skilled in the use of words and an artist of the erotica. I’m glad that Kiran writes in English as I admire his novels immensely. His books make the reader think and interact with narrative and author; they also have humour and a sense of the absurd. ” Nagarkar takes constant efforts to create subversive pleasure in his fictions. He has the touch of genius. His universal approach reflects immensely in his novels. He succeeds in holding the interest of the readers. Khushwant Singh praises for the novels of Kiran Nagarkar in his own words, Kiran Nagarkar is a story teller who addresses topics in *Gods Little Soldier* such as intolerance and fundamentalism, spirituality, ethics and responsibility with great seriousness and with the greatest of ease. (Cornelia Zetzsche, Borsenblatt Spezial). Kiran Nagarkar proves fidelity to his characters. He is a genuine experimentalist. He combines in his writing a tremendous instinct for storytelling with a rare openness of imagination. He is willing to go where it takes him, express it in whatever form and through whichever language. What remains constant is his subversive pleasure in fiction for its own sake. It makes him one of our most precious writers. (Anjum Hasan, Caravan). Suparna Sharma proclaims in Asian Age, “The Extras is a fine story by Kiran Nagarkar. It offers cunning brilliance in storytelling, in conjuring up feral sex scenes, wicked black humour and disturbing insights into human nature.” Nagarkar’s aspiration and endeavour is to make the story the product, a compelling product and the insights and the deep questioning by-products.”

Kiran Nagarkar as an Experimentalist:

Kiran Nagarkar is an experimentalist. He was born in 1942, on the verge of independence. He was primarily educated in English. His family was highly westernized. “His grandfather was monotheistic. He rebelled openly against idol worship and his belief alienated him within his

Hindu community. His father was both English literate and anglicized. In such an environment, Nagarkar's revolutionary manipulation of traditional Marathi grammar might have been more an act of ignorance than of protest and adaptation. For academic purposes, Marathi ceased to be Nagarkar's language when he began attending English schools, and self-admittedly using English for his academic thinking. Nagarkar began his career writing in Marathi, the regional language of Maharashtra, and initially, he was proclaimed as the writer who would re-define the Marathi novel. Sarang especially comments about the Marathi literature, "Marathi literature is largely construed as pandering to middle-class ideals and traditional narrative structure. Nagarkar's inclination toward language manipulation was established in his first novel *Saat Sakkam Trechalis* 1974 which includes long passages written in Hindi and English. It is the bold linguistic experiment, use of syntax and establishment of grammatical rules of Marathi to suit the narrative purpose. (Dhavan, R.K. 50 Years of Indian Writing, IAES, Delhi, 1999. P.16). Nagarkar's English language is very much Indian in its form and contents and his treatment of the content in term of language is superb. The success of the translation inspired Nagarkar and he published his first novel written in English, *Ravan and Eddie* in 1995. As Nagarkar began to publish in English, Marathi readers branded him a traitor to his home state; while Marathi critics let his novels go almost entirely un-reviewed. The privilege for Nagarkar's English writing seemed to alienate his original Marathi readers who viewed his turn to English as a grave misstep. This was the brilliant and sincere attempt by Nagarkar. In an interview published in 2006, Nagarkar states his attempt of writing a novel in Marathi language, "My taking to Marathi was a big event. Barring the four years in school, I never studied Marathi. It has always been English. So it was more like going back when I wrote my first book" (Verghese, Paul. Essays on Indian Writing in English, N.V. Publication, New Delhi, 1975, p.122).

Nagarkar's effective use of language in his fictions is estimable. His works can be described as overwhelmed imaginative, a feast for the mind, a marvelous performance in the art of using language like a paintbrush to fill the eye with colour and the ear with the rhythms. His writing is so stunning that the readers tempt to read his novels again and again ceaselessly. In Nagarkar's writing, one can observe the problem of interpersonal communication and language barriers. For example, in the opening pages of *Ravan and Eddie*, Nagarkar discusses the inability of Victor Coutinho to speak to his beloved Parvati Pawar. He writes, "Victor could have talked to Parvati for hours. But who was going to translate his Konkani or English into Marathi for her?" (Nagarkar, Kiran. *Ravan and Eddie*, 1-2). Despite being neighbors in the same chawl, the two are divided by language, regardless of social custom. The language difference is perhaps further highlighted by the words of Victor's wife, Violet, to Parvati after Victor's sudden, unfortunate death. As Violet accuses Ravan of being responsible for the demise of her husband, she calls him a "murderer," unwilling or unable to translate her condemnation into a language the infant's mother might be capable of understanding. (Nagarkar, Kiran. *Ravan and Eddie*, p. 6). Nagarkar acknowledges his linguistic shift and a religious invocation, "Even the Hindu neighbours had no way of figuring out what the priest recited, though it was in their mother tongue, Marathi. He didn't give a damn about the meaning of the words, the feeling behind them, the poetry of the language or the complex manoeuvres of the plot line. He had no thought for metaphysical implications or time to translate them in terms of everyday life. The people who should have been most comfortable with Marathi had become estranged from the language, unable to relate to it as anything other than a cacophonous, ambiguous recitation. Moreover, the

sentiment that the priest is unwilling to translate the scripture into terms of everyday life suggests that Marathi is no longer the language of the people, even in Maharashtra. Subtly, Nagarkar is acknowledging his linguistic shift and excusing it in his first English novel- he is predicting the demise of Marathi before it has fully come to pass.” (Lukmani, Yasmeen. *The Shifting World of Kiran Nagarkar’s Fiction*, “Introduction” xii). In such a context, Nagarkar’s unpleasant suggestion that Marathi is incomprehensible to the general natives to suggest that such renaming are not truly designed to strengthen cultural identities, but to illustrate the power of local political organizations. *Ravan and Eddie* compel attention. The sheer power, vigour and imaginative lushness of the narration possess a stunning visual quality. (The Telegraph, Calcutta). Usha Hemmadi, the Chief Editor of Indian Express, comments about Kiran Nagarkar’s unpredictable language, “Kiran Nagarkar is totally unpredictable and reading his books is like taking a roller coaster ride for the imagination. His use of language recognizes no barriers and flows over, through and around the reader, engulfing him in a torrent of fantastic images. His digressions are perhaps the best art of the book.” In *Cuckold*, Nagarkar elucidates his thoughts on language death through the veil of antiquity. Speaking through the first-person voice of the Raj Kumar Bhojraj, the Mewari heir-apparent in the 16th century, Nagarkar discusses his frustration with his attempts to understand Sanskrit. Nagarkar writes: “Who killed Sanskrit? How does a language die? It wasn’t as if a cataclysm had wiped out the populace of the country or the Muslims had decreed one day that Arabic or Afghani would replace the mother of our languages.... a mother tongue is the destiny of a people. I have the strange feeling that man created language but now it creates us.” (Nagarkar, Kiran. *Cuckold*. Delhi: Harper Collins India 1997. p. 463)

By suggesting that language invents its speakers, Nagarkar is subtly questioning how the languages we speak shape our world view and reality. “I must confess I was mildly surprised that a writer who was so powerful in Marathi should now choose to write in English” (Yasmeen, Lukamani. *The Shifting World of Kiran Nagarkar’s Fiction*, “Celebrating Cuckold” Meenakshi Mukherjee, 27). Nagarkar’s shift undeniably alienated from his devoted readership in Maharashtra earned him admission into a larger national and to international community. Nagarkar writes of life in the chawls of Bombay, the interactions of untouchables and members of the lower middle class, the existential crises that are associated with coming of age, regardless of region, and the missteps that opened the door for the Mogul invasion. The presence of colonialism permeates his writings, and the fact that he is writing in English focuses the reader’s attention in this direction. Nagarkar’s style in English language reflects his ability to write in English smoothly and confidently. The novels of Kiran Nagarkar depict as attentive and effortless writer in English. He uses the English language skillfully and artistically. His style can be compared to a flowing river with all its moods. His novels narrate story and evocates historical and political events. For Kiran Nagarkar, English language is no longer a barrier for expression of thought as well as for expression of social events of history and politics. Nagarkar’s English language is very much Indian in its form and contents and his treatment of the content in term of language is superb. The descriptions of places, cities, villages, societies, in this novel reveal his deep knowledge of English language. His novels obtained International acclaim and recognition. Bakhtin says, “Nagarkar invites the kind of free traffic of words across dialogic contexts and he seeks an easy colloquial currency of language in his novels.” (Lukmani, Yasmeen. *The Shifting Worlds of Kiran Nagarkar’s Fiction*, Democratic Intention and Dialogic Intelligibility in *Cuckold*, Janet, Giltrow. 39)

Nagarkar's Indianness and the merits of his novels as ethnographic representations of Indian society for an English readers, has been repeatedly called into question because of his choice of language. His novels are nationally representative and far away from compositional language. Kiran Nagarkar is the most significant and contemporary Indian novelist. He has made unbelievable footprints on the world literary scenario. His novels are on list of best seller novels. His novels reveal the quality of creative writing. Being a creative writer, he uses history which pleads freedom of imagination. He does not highlight the historicity of other writer's work. He evokes the life of the times. He is expert in portraying the characters and story telling. "Nagarkar's novels exhibit great creative ability, skilled language control, cultural heritage and unique perception of political and communal forces. All these qualities reveal that Kiran Nagarkar is not only a modern novelist but also as great literary writer. His ability to express multiple layers of meaning, narrative technique, time and place shift, history and subversion of history, personal and public concerns make the novels-earning high eminence for the author." (Lukmani Yasmeen. *The Shifting Worlds of Kiran Nagarkar's Fiction*, Introduction, xv). Nagarkar's novels depict family stories of middle class people in the past and present. He has witnessed many social and civil disturbances which arise out of political and communal events creating extreme uproot in contemporary India. Nagarkar has himself lived through such extreme adversity which has been projected in his novels. Kiran Nagarkar is an outstanding figure of contemporary Indian literature. When readers read Nagarkar's novel, they appreciate about the crystal clear depth of his aesthetics and the harsh reality, his use of humour, a corrosive sense of irony and hilarity which almost reaches absurdity. His novels are transparent and have certain depth which reflects his natural wisdom. Through his commentaries, he reveals his valuable opinions on literature, the world and their close relationship. He openly talked about his problems with the censorship of the Maharashtrian political authorities as well as the fierce rejection he suffered from the Marathi literary establishment, and overtly expressed his considerations on the Iraq war and other worldwide conflicts. Some of Kiran Nagarkar's fellow-countrymen don't understand the nature of what is being said, and deliberately misinterpret it. But it has not prevented him from writing whatever he wants to. The play *Bedtime Story* got him into so much trouble. He genuinely points out that we are responsible for our deeds. He justifies the fact by using one of the sentences from his novels: The one thing that experience seems to teach thing that experience seems to teach us is to make the same mistakes again and again.

Nagarkar employs the humour as a measure of emotional disengagement. C.T.Indra rightly comments that "History and Humour are the strange bedfellows. They both go hand in hand." He used humour to correct, to restore, to define, to cope with situations, to mirror truths, and to set a value on things in Indian English literature. He is known for his use of dark and passionate humour in his novels. His writing is of varied nature. His readers are unable to pin him down to a single style. His humour has different shades, tones and textures. He has a fine sense of humour, sharp irony and is good at making accurate judgments in detail. (Lukmani, Yasmeen. *The Shifting Worlds of Kiran Nagarkar*, 173).

Nagarkar uses black, dark, detached and grim humour in *Seven Sixes Are Forty Three*. Kushank makes his observations while in hospital, "There are two kinds of people in the world-the sick and the not sick. The sick person lives in a world of his own. The not- sick have a collective world of their own too." (Nagarkar, Kiran. *Seven Sixes Are Forty Three*, 9)

On the contrary, in *Ravan and Eddie*, Nagarkar used bawdy, ribald and witty humour.

Nagarkar makes the use of humour as a model of survival and as an instrument to understand and empathize with human predicaments and frailties. “Nagarkar’s intention to use humour in *Cuckold* is to negotiate, to ridicule, to rail, to banter, to discern, to criticize, to reflect, to mock, to enhance, to undercut every possible gamut of human emotion and condition.” (Lukmani, Yasmeen, ‘The Shifting Worlds of Kiran Nagarkar’s Fiction,’ Shobha Vishwanath, Mirth, Introspection and Human Condition, p.193-194). In *Cuckold*, Kiran Nagarkar employed the humorous scene with the Saint Kabir which got him into trouble for making fun of God. The scene between God and Kabir is a very funny scene. (Fernandez, Christina. Transparency and Depth Revista, Canaria. *De Estudios Ingleses*, 62; April 2011, p. 139-148). Aparna Karthikeyan says in ‘The Hindu’, “Kiran Nagarkar’s latest novel *The Extras* is packed with extraordinary energy drenched in dark humour and is an affirmation of life.”

Kiran Nagarkar as a humanist:

Kiran Nagarkar depicts crushing realities of downtrodden and underprivileged people in his novels. He focuses his attention on the plight and sufferings of such people in his *Seven Sixes Are Forty Three*. He has strong binding with the society due to his social conscience. He condemns the wrong notions in society such as caste, gender, religion, class, language, ethnicity etc. throughout his novels. He makes a request in an urgent and emotional manner for the poor people in his novels. In order to meet this purpose, he descends deep into the lowest strata of his society and lampoons the rich, the affluent and the powerful. (Nagarkar, Kiran. *Seven Sixes Are Forty Three* trans. Shubha Slee, 1980). Kiran Nagarkar is called as a cultural worker. Jaiswal, Rajeshkumar rightly asserts that “Through this literary cultural exploration, Nagarkar has not simply given a powerful representation to those who are the chief victims of structural violence, but also a violence to ones who succumb to their wretched circumstances and whose sufferings are not unnoticed. The text is a searing critique of the society which generates, sustains and promotes the hierarchical and discriminatory cultural values and ideologies through the institutions of caste, gender, religion, class, language, ethnicity etc. Here Nagarkar has a great concern for underprivileged and marginalized. The novel offers a vast panorama of poverty, alienation, desperation, injustice, violence and wretchedness of cross sections of people and their distressing social surroundings.” (Jaiswal, Rajeshkumar. Cultural Politics of Caste, Religion and Gender in Kiran Nagarkar’s novel ‘Seven Sixes Are Forty Three,’ Punjab University Research Journal, vol.38, Nos.1 & 2). Kiran Nagarkar has done a great social service in his novels by championing the cause of humanity, social justice and human welfare. He derived his impetus for the oppressed and exploited in his writing. He draws our attention to the fact that there can be no alleviation of human suffering without the restoration of human dignity to the common people and no positive change can be wrought in a society without realizing the value of respecting the different, the other. (Yasmeen, Lukmani. ‘The Shifting Worlds of Kiran Nagarkar’s Fiction’, Paranjape, Makarand. Kiran Nagarkar and the tradition of Indian English Novel, 2)

In short, Kiran Nagarkar illuminates different strokes of postcolonial aspects in his humanitarian language. He discloses the secret of his writing on the basis of his personality trait. His place in Indian English Literature as a contemporary writer is indeed remarkable. It would not be exaggeration if we proclaim, his lively imagination is like a force of light, which torches each problem in a realistic manner.

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