

**FEMALE PROTAGONISTS IN KIRAN NAGARKAR'S
SEVEN SIXES ARE FORTY THREE**

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Abstract

The winner of Sahitya Academi Award, Kiran Nagarkar is one of the most prestigious writers in the canon of Indian English literature. He has reflected the great concern for the condition of the people, their sufferings, poverty, illness, starvation, suffering, death, hopelessness, alienation, desperation, injustice, violence etc. Also he illumines social strong concern, sympathy and ideology for oppressed female characters. Nagarkar demonstrates the sufferings of the female protagonists in an authentic manner. He rightly asserts, "Lives can come close but they (sufferings) never merge. You are always alone." The novel exposes the social and feminine aspects of women protagonists. Present paper highlights the rich variety of female protagonists in *Seven Sixes Are Forty Three*. It is considered as a path breaking experimental Marathi novel. At the same time, he reveals the relationships between the characters, friendships, understandings, loves and disengagements. Here, author reflects the marginalized subjectivities of the central and the supporting characters and their incapability, weakness, oppression and exclusion. The researcher wants to focus on the marginalized subjectivities of the central and the supporting characters and their incapability, weakness, oppression and exclusion.

Key Words- Female protagonists, sufferings, oppression, ill and inhumane treatment, male dominated society, women as marginalized characters, injustice, violence etc.

Seven Sixes Are Forty Three is considered an avant garde experiment. It is partly autobiographical. It is supposed to be a milestone in Marathi and in Indian literature. *Seven Sixes* is full of spirit and hi-jinks and terrific fun and terribly tragic at times. Kiran Nagarkar takes us on the tour to visit his female protagonists such as Pratibha, Her mother in law, Chandini, Prachiniti, Arotie etc. in the novel. He visualizes the various glimpses of different female characters. Kiran Nagarkar's novel holds a very special significance for the woman-concerns, as it foregrounds the oppressiveness of patriarchy and precarious existence of women. Much of the unsettling and painful impact of the novel is related to the plight of the women characters. Almost all the women are subjected to violence and ill-treatment in the text. Herein even the institutions of family and marriage work to privilege men and disadvantage women. They empower men to control their female counterparts and even entitle them (husband, father and son) to batter their wives, daughters and mothers.

The novel starts with the major female protagonist Pratibha. She is terrified, hopeless and dejected woman who is really fed up with the torture by her drunken husband Ajit. She is the victim and witness of male patriarchal system. Her mother in law is also one of the women who every now and then tolerate the harassment and cruelty by her own son within four walls. Both suffer the evil and inhumane treatment in their own house. Both the women remain mute spectators, robbed of their rights and dignity in their own home. Being deeply entrenched into the historically and socially constructed artificial hierarchy of patriarchy, Ajit considers it is his birth right to treat the women abusively and brutally. And the home wherein the women – wife and mother – have to live, instead of providing safety and security to them, has turned into a confined space of cruelty and abuse. It is the great tragic aspect that they even can't talk about the house hold domestic violence to their neighbours. After the physical torture by her husband, he exercises his authority as a husband and fulfils his sexual desires without considering the mentality of his wife Pratibha. He takes the things granted. "*It is often noticed that women are physically assaulted and subjected to mental cruelties in their own homes. Men resort to violence as a means to reinforce their already existing social dominance*". (Adelman 2005: 193).

It is said that after a certain limitation, a woman can't be cool. She raises her voice to resist the torture done by the patriarchal male society. Here one day, out of frustration, Pratibha threatened to her husband that if the things will be continued, she would set fire to herself. This incidence for her husband was a casual one. He calls her as a whore and stupid bitch. This was really disgusting and humiliating experience for Pratibha. She out of anger poured a bottle of kerosene over herself and lit a match. She started to scream. She asked for help but nobody assisted her, even her husband remained passive. She tried to embrace him. On the contrary, he Ran and proclaimed, "*Get off me, you bitch. Don't come near me. You said you didn't care, right? I am fed up. That's what you said. Keep your bloody flames to yourself. Damn it, I don't want to bloody die.*" (12)

Later on, she has been hospitalized. She asked again and again to the doctor about to save her life. Her urge and interest towards her family- her husband, children was really sympathetic. She firmly asserts,

"I want to live, Doctor, Please save me; they need me- my children and my husband. He needs me too. I don't want to die." (12) Here Kiran Nagarkar wants to say that Indian women tolerate

everything for the family. They protect their husband even if he is guilty and cruel torchbearer. They want to live for their children. They remain as suppressed and oppressed and victimized for the better future of their children. Pratibha is also the same woman who has all these feelings and concern for her family.

French feminist theorist and linguist Julia Kristeva, comments on the subordinate and marginalized position of women. She writes: *“Woman as such does not exist”* (Kristeva 1977: 16). This statement signifies that – *“Woman cannot be represented outside the patriarchal symbolic cultural order. Moreover, ‘a woman cannot be: she can only exist negatively’ and she as a patriarchal construct can only be understood relationally and positionally. As a consequence, women are rendered as the marginal, since, she owes to the patriarchal, linguistic-cultural order for her identity and existence.”*

In this worst situation, it was the duty of Pratibha’s mother in law to defend her as both were the sufferers. On the contrary she defends her son. She says, *“My Ajit was such a sweet boy until she arrived. He was even scared of mice when he was a child.”* Her double minded behaviour towards her daughter in law is disgraceful. As we think that female should have proud for their self respect but we experience that this woman is simply protecting his evil natured son Ajit. For Three days, Pratibha fought against death. She died. Her husband also wept as per the traditional norms. But those were not the real tears, but as a crocodile tears. Nagarkar emphasizes the greatness of Indian woman. As Pratibha is the mouth piece of Nagarkar, she gives the final statement to the police officer at the time of her death that she had tried to commit suicide, because of an incurable illness. (15)

We witness the second character in this novel- Arotie, the best friend of Kushank Purandare, a male protagonist. Kushank’s relation with Arotie was somehow typical and strange. They both were studying at Pune College. They had attraction for one another but couldn’t express their love. Before fifteen days of her marriage, she invited Kushank for a movie. She said that she is going to Delhi. She is going to marry very soon. She just wants to have the sweet memories of Kushank in her life. She doesn’t want to wipe it out from her life. She asserts, Kushank, Kushank, Kushank.....You are Kushank, Kushank in my hand, in my eye, obstinate Kushank. Kushank, I am going to Delhi, after the exams. Not to return. (67). Aroties brother and sister in law kept an eye on her every move. They asked her who is this K, what is this k, what sort of a name is that. She didn’t disclose her love affair with K- Kushank. (69). She got married after her matric examination. She even didn’t invite Kushank for her marriage. After marriage, Kushank used to meet her at Delhi. Actually he was in love with her but he could not express his love. Sometimes she helped him by offering money.

The relationship between her husband and Arotie was like 20th century sophistication. Aroties husband was a gentleman and magnanimous. He generally doesn’t like Kushank’s presence at their house. He must have been paralyzed by Kushank’s utter lack of shame. His friendly face was harassed by Kushank’s continued presence in his house. Arotie was the only one who understands Kushank very well. She was the mother of Prutha, Guddu and Sunheria. She was very obedient and submissive to her husband. She promptly does all household chores. Her husband always blames her for any trivial reasons. Kushank always teases her especially in her frustrations and dejected mood so that she can be happy and delighted. On the contrary, Aroties husband do not have that concern to make her contented in every aspects of life. Here Nagarkar tells the dependability of husbands on their wives. Even if they are capable to look

after themselves, they ignore it tactfully. Once Arotie failed in pressing his clothes, he got irritated on her. (40). Kushank recollects his past memories about Arotie. The bonding between them was so strong that they could share each other's secrets. Kushank asserts about this bonding in his own words, These bonds are never going to understand that the people they were meant to hold and torture have slipped away, leaving them fluttering idly in the breeze. (59). Thus we find here Kushank as the bolster between Arotie and her husband.

The third character is Chandini, girl friend of Kushank Purandare. Chandini is the girl who has love affair with Mr. Kushank Purandare. Basically she has come from Indore to study at pune. Their love witnesses many hurdles such as caste, class, religion, language etc. They both intend to marry with each other. They need to undergo the patriarchal norms at the cost of their own lives. Through this episode, Nagarkar shows unfair social practice of oppressive patriarchal society. Ultimately young lovers break the affair and give a full stop of their love marriage. (142). Chandini's father rebukes her for having love relations with Kushank. He finds his daughters act is irrational, foolish, impulsive and childish. The moment women come to resist their subjection and try to change their lot by self assertion and by deciding to take their own independent decisions regarding their own matters, men tend to start feeling insecure and threatened. For example, when Chandini sheds oppressive mode of feminity based on patriarchy and refuses to be auctioned in a marriage without her consent and desires to marry a man of her choice, she is subjected to multiple cruelties including abuses, physical assault and emotional blackmailing by her patriarch father and other family members. He tries to convince her not to marry with Kushank. Here we can see how male dominance is prominent and how women's are compelled to be submissive in their family. When her exam is over, Chandini goes back to Indore. Later on Kushank met her at Indore. Chandini's father learnt about this meeting. He annoyed severely and rebuked Chandini as a slut, whore and bitch. (148) Finally Chandini's family members succeeded in breaking her affair with Kushank. Nagarkar has portrayed patriarchal gender relations. Women generally go through different positions – as wife, mother and daughter. Their marginalized subject positions deprived them of their voice to be heard. They can exercise little powers within and outside the structures of family and domesticity. Through this study, we come to a certain conclusion that unless and until men change their attitude towards women, women cannot have satisfactory and respectful position in society.

The next character is Prachiniti who is the real sufferer caused by penury. She was the intimate friend of Kushank. She married to a painter, named Shatlaj. Her son name was Arshad. Later on, she is admitted to the municipal hospital. She stayed there for twenty seven days. She lives in poverty with her husband. They don't have enough money to cater the needs of the family. In extreme poverty, now she is in hospital, just considering about the survival and recovery from the disease. Here Kushank describes that Prachiniti would have been saved if she had money for her treatment. *"If Prachiniti had been taken to hospital ten months earlier, she might have lived another couple of years"* (34) Kushank was moved due to Prachiniti's prolonged and insufferable ailment. Shatlaj, husband of Prachiniti tried his best for his wife. He took ceaseless efforts for her recovery of disease. "Shatlaj tried to sell his paintings. Tutored others in painting. And then sold his colours and easel too. To buy Prachiniti's medicine" (34).

Finally Prachiniti and her husband Shatlaj asked a monetary help to meet the hospital expenses and contact Kushank for the same. But Kushank, being a helpless and parasite, could not help them. He replies helplessly: "If I had money I wouldn't come and eat at your house

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every other day. “There’s no one else I can ask. I’ve already borrowed from other friends. And they ask me why I always need money. To survive. To eat. Why don’t they understand? Don’t they ever get hungry? Morning, noon, and night? Why not just eat once? For a lifetime? Why do we eat so often? Even people who have never lent me money ask the same questions”. (34-35) Kushank recounts: Sometimes, I tried begging; begging doesn’t necessarily get you anything. Certainly not money. My friends were happy to take me to the movies, the theatre, concerts. But they didn’t offer me the money for the tickets. So my wallet stayed empty and Prachiniti went without medicine for days. (34) And Prachiniti “only died, slowly through ten months, ten times thirty days. Days and weeks and all the hours of the day”. (35)

Thus the aer focus on female protagonists and their status in society. They every now and then undergo through various sufferings. Their humiliation, dependability on male dominated society, inability to resist against male is cleverly described by Kiran Nagarkar.

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