

## A Critical Appraisal of Kiran Nagarkar's Seven Sixes are Forty Three

Dr. Pravin R. Waghmare

Shri Shivaji College of Arts, Commerce and Science  
Akola

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### Abstract

The paper aims at bringing forth various critical aspects of the novel under the study. Moreover, it also emphasizes the novel's unique narrative style

**Keywords:** Stream of consciousness, Writing style, interplay of Psychology

Kiran Nagarkar is a bilingual writer. He writes in Marathi and English. He is an Indian novelist, dramatist, screenwriter, and a recognised film and drama critic. Nagarkar is remarkable for his brilliant gift of storytelling and an excellent style, whose words are charged with rebellious spirit, when he deals with the existent socio, political and religious conditions. By virtue of his thematic experiments and narrative techniques he has secured a distinguished place in Indian English fiction. Overall he has five novels to his credit. He successfully brings to light the multicultural and cosmopolitan reality of changing post-colonial India. Nagarkar brings out the predicament of modern individuals who are forced to live only the physical existence bereft of spiritual touch. Nagarkar is a man of multi talents and a genius for craftsmanship. He writes with concern, pathos and empathy with the condition and the tragedy of today's violent and selfish society and gets down to the root of all human need of love. He explores, with uncompromising boldness and rare black humour, the social milieu, the multicultural reality present in Indian society and the underlying tension.

Kiran Nagarkar received Hari Narayan Apte Award 1975, for best debut novel in Marathi for his *Saat Sakam Trechalis* translated in English as *Seven Sixes are Forty-three*. It is translated in over forty languages. In Marathi it was published in 1974. After 43 years of its publication Nagarkar unveiled it again, albeit translated into English by Shubha Slee. Regarded as a milestone in post-colonial Indian Literature the novel presents the story of protagonist Kushank Purandare, in a stream of consciousness style. The world created by Nagarkar is very complex. This novel explores the dimensions of relationships in terms of an arid physicality and loneliness, an inherent element in modern lives. However,

what interests the reader is the honest and graphic description of situations and characters.

*Seven Sixes are Forty-three* is a new experimental novel breaking away from tradition. There is no centralized story line. It is not the story of life and works of one person. It just narrates a nihilistic and existential attitude, the man who has to live only on physical plane, bearing the predestined sorrows and sufferings of life, experienced through copulation, physical diseases and anguish. Man has no other alternative than to be honest to the life, till the end of life. The first episode itself sets the tone of the novel. The drunkard neighbour of the narrator Kushank Purandare beats his wife brutally every day. The wife threatens him to commit suicide. The husband taunts her and encourages her to do it. Finally in a feat of passion, she pours kerosene over her and lights a match-stick. Unable to bear the pain she runs here and there to save herself. She doesn't want to die. Kushank Purandare is asked to inform her mother-in-law and to fetch her. The mother-in-law is deaf and thinks that her maid has committed suicide. She is worried that her house might have been burned. Kushank informs her:

"She burnt herself".

"Run away? Was nobody at home? What did she take with her?" The old hag was impossible.

"Not run away, burnt herself", I yelled into her ear.

"Poured kerosene over herself"

"Good lord! And if the house had caught fire?" (*Seven Sixes* 13)

Thus, in the very opening episode, we find very powerful example of Kiran Nagarkar's biting black humour.

The protagonist of the novel is Kushank Purandare and the novel proceeds, through his dispersed meditations, in the stream of consciousness style. He is a young writer waiting to gain recognition for his work. He is living off the goodwill of a number of friends, relatives and lovers. Not much is revealed about his family history. The narration revolves around his four friends, Jitendra, Sadhan, Rakesh and Raghu and the girls he is in love with, Aaroti, Chandani, Prachinti and some mysterious 'you' whose identity is never disclosed in the novel. Along with these chief characters there is neighbour like

Pratibha, who is brutally beaten by her husband and forced to commit suicide. Another neighbour Bhau Kathavate, who beats his daughters every night and the daughters enjoy the beating by reacting over dramatically. The beating is almost every day ritual. Bhau Kathavate and his daughters seem to enjoy the drama. The neighbours are harassed. Anna Pradhan would try to interfere: "Kathavate, that's enough for now, Kathavate. Give it a rest, and let us all get some sleep. She is getting too old for this; she's a big girl now" (36).

Kushank's friend Raghu works with international organization MORE with its headquarters in Geneva. It sends its experts to disaster areas of the world for the rehabilitation of the affected people. Raghu is sent to Nandadhela, a draught affected area in Maharashtra, because three of its expert almost died from food poisoning while digging the well there. Raghu is sent there because of his special knowledge of the terrain. On the road they meet a starving family of the farmer riding in bullock cart, carrying the dead body of their just dead son. The farmer has sold his land to Sardar Bhisander and they are going somewhere in search of the work.

Reaching Nandadhela they start the work of digging well, but nobody is ready to help them. A group of draught-affected, starving people only stand there and watch. Raghu wants to hire them, but they refuse because they are untouchables and know very well that after completion of the well they will not be allowed to draw the water. However the next day they come to the site for work with their leader Kanhaiyalal. They want to work because it is the only way to get food. They don't have any false notions about who that well belongs to. Sardar Bhisander and his men threaten them to stop digging the well and leave Nandadhela. Sardar Bhisander is local land mafia who wants the draught to continue, so that he can buy lands at cheap rate from needy people. Ignoring the threats, they continue to dig and fortunately they strike water in the well. Raghu and his men have to leave Nandadhela as they are helpless. With complete objectivity, Nagarkar brings out the ferocity and cruelty of these vultures in human form. The people with money and muscle power exploit the situation of extreme draught as the golden opportunity for money making. They are callous and inhuman towards the sufferings of draught affected, dying people. Sardar Bhisander is a representative such a land mafia.

Some of the relatives of Kushank are portrayed with deft touches. His father, his brother Ankush, his Kaka and Kaku with their four daughters, appear again and again in the narrative, making the novel very complex. His love

affairs are portrayed with rare sensitivity. His romance with Chandani is ill-starred as her parents force her to end her relations with him. When they know that Chandani will not submit, they compel Kushank to refuse her, manipulating his self-respect. His love for Aaroti is more meaningful but more painful. Much of the narrative is directed to some mysterious 'You', who, one is compelled to assume is a lady love. But that affair also ends painfully as she leaves him and India and settles in foreign country.

The novel ends abruptly. Kushank takes his Kaku's ashes to Marine Drive to immerse in the sea. He is beaten brutally by the goons and then in jails of Mumbai by police and by the fellow prisoner in the cell. The last memory of Kushank Purandare is about sitting with 'you' in the Berry's, a Cafe. Then he becomes unconscious. Nagarkar does not provide us with any answer to the question what happens to Kushank. *Seven Sixes are Forty-three* is a compilation of fragments that occasionally merge and flow into each other. We are never quite certain if what has been read is intended as part of the narrative or merely an imaginary aside. It is a stream of consciousness sort of literary effort. Nagarkar cloaks all his people and his tales in a dusty, depressing mantle of pessimism. There is little light in his vision of the world. He shows an uncompromising palette of suffering and disappointment, washed with a cynical brand of humour.

Kushank, the narrator and protagonist, is our window to the author's vision. Yasmeen Lukmani observes, "The 'I' mode allows the author to express the inner world of the character from very close quarter" (Lukmani 107). His reminisces of childhood, of lost loves, of incidents that left their mark on his life forms the bulk of the novel. He jumps back and forth in time, sometimes from narration to dreams, from addressing the reader to addressing what one must assume is a lady-love. Without chronology or cohesion Nagarkar has attempted one of the most difficult narrative forms in literature.

The world created in *Seven Sixes are Forty-three* is multicultural and cosmopolitan in a true sense of the word. Except one or two instances, there is complete absence of conflicts in the name of caste, creed, colour, gender etc. Written in the stream of consciousness style, the novel presents the little tragedies of life in the big metropolis. It is the story of Kushank Purandare, his friends, his relatives, his fiancés who live a drifting life in the faceless megacities without any mooring of life.

The narration moves through various metropolitan cities like Mumbai, Delhi, Banaras, Indore and Cochin. The various characters that belong to these various cities are presented without any religious, racial,

provincial and linguistic identity. Kushank has four close friends Raghu, Sadhan, Jitendra and Rakesh. It is very difficult to guess about their state, community or race as it is not emphasized. He is in love with various girls. They are introduced with bare first names like Aaroti, Prachinti, and Chandani. Most of the narration is addressed to his some mysterious lady-love 'You'. Nagarkar deliberately keeps these characters without any provincial or racial identity. Even in his relations with these ladies, no gender related complexes are depicted.

Only in two episodes we can find the religious and cultural conflict. The narrator Kushank Purandare spends his childhood with his Kaku. She is Hindu at the time of her marriage. Later she converts to Christianity. She has four daughters. All are Christians. But she insists to call them by their Hindu names. At the time of death she wants to revert to Hinduism and to be cremated according to Hindu ritual. But the padre refuses saying that there is no tradition. It may appear as an episode of religious and cultural conflict. But it is not emphasized in the narration. On the other hand it is presented as an inevitable disillusion and frustration that man is subject to. It highlights the fact that whatever you may do in your life, the ultimate end is meaningless. Life is meant for failures. The novel brings out the very existential tragedy of human life. Cutting across the clothes of nationality, caste and

religion the novel reveals the bare bones of humanity.

Other episode is about caste discrimination. The untouchables in draught-prone Nandadhela are not allowed to draw water from the well. Saved these two instances of social conflict, the novel presents the world, which is completely cosmopolitan and the deliberate presentation of the characters with their cultural, communal, religious, racial and ethnic under erasure denotes that Nagarkar's *Seven Sixes are Forty-three* is the expression of the Indian multiculturalism in its entirety. This novel is unique in every sense. It has unique language, writing style and the interplay of the psychology of characters. Kiran Nagarkar's use of language is very harsh and the characters are very sensitive. The author describes the funny side of everything i.e. poverty, suffering, illness, death and of course sexual intercourse.

#### Works Cited

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