

MIRRORING THE DILEMMA OF MODERN YOUTH: KIRAN NAGARKAR'S *SEVEN SIXES ARE FORTY- THREE*

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Abstract

Kiran Nagarkar emerged as a powerful literary figure on the contemporary Indian literary scene with his path-breaking modernist Marathi novel Saat Sikkam Trechalis later published in English as Seven Sixes are Forty -Three. Nagarkar as a social realist has boldly and honestly portrayed the multi-faceted fabric of our nation infused with layers of spiritual, historical and socio-cultural under currents. The present paper seeks to explore the various facets of the life of modern youth in Seven Sixes are Forty -Three through the messy life of a young protagonist Kushank Purandre, an unpublished author, living in a Mumbai chawl. The young have never rested on their past laurels nor have they felt contended with their present possibilities. The chords of their impulses, instincts and attitudes have always been vocal and vibrant. Kushank represents to quite an extent every middle class Indian youth who struggles in his life for settlement, survival and stability and recognition amidst poverty, social inequality, unemployment, violence and corruption rampant in our present day society.

The paper would trace the multiple dimensions of relationships in terms of an empty physicality and loneliness as an inherent element in present day lives. Deprived of the opportunities to grow and develop emotionally and intellectually, how the youth today suffer from subjective isolation and estrangement. The fault lies as much with their socio-economic milieu as with the education system.

Key words: Youth, dilemma, injustice, deprivation, isolation, corruption.

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Kiran Nagarkar emerged as a powerful literary figure on the contemporary Indian literary scene with his path-breaking modernist Marathi novel *Saat Sikkam Trechalis* (1974) later published in English as *Seven Sixes are Forty - Three* (1980). His works have witnessed a new dawn of contemporary Indian Fiction with Indian identity, representing Indian soil, and influencing not only Indian sensibilities but gaining appreciation globally. The novel *Seven Sixes are Forty -Three* is considered as a landmark in post independent Indian literature. It won a number of awards in Marathi, including the Maharashtra State Award for the best first novel.

The present paper explores the various facets of the life of Modern Youth in *Seven Sixes are Forty -Three* through the chaotic life of a young protagonist Kushank Purandre, an unpublished author, living in a Mumbai chawl. The young have never rested on their past laurels nor have they felt contented with their present possibilities. Kushank represents to quite an extent every middle class Indian youth who struggles in his life for settlement, survival, stability and recognition amidst poverty, social inequality, unemployment, violence and corruption rampant in our present day society. The narrative takes us through Kushank's varied life experiences. The story is a bit of a jumble, but it's an impressive portrait of a young, educated but relatively poor 'genteel, barely lower middle class man' (117) and the state of India in the late 1960s. Yeshu Patil in a review rightly comments,

"The novel depicts about the messy life of Kushank. The novel is unique in language, writing style and its character graphs. It renders the cluttered world of a youth trying to understand and cope with the delightful chaos around him in a hitherto unknown style.'
(DNA)

Brain shaking philosophies neither impresses nor convinces the modern youth of today. They have their own problems and their own complaints against the stereo type life style in the contemporary Indian scenario and the author very closely and brilliantly captures other side. Nagarkar compares the life of young guys as a continuous process named struggle. He describes this struggle in the life of youth perfectly. Nagarkar narrates the struggle of young people in the form of building their career, employing themselves, attaining their safe position in the society, finding the solutions of social or family issues, raising voice against the orthodox system of society or education etc. Through Kushank, the reader gets a peep into the complexity of his universe, as well as that of the author. The novel has no plot line. Kushank narrates different incidents of his life in a nonlinear fashion making it hard for the reader to grasp the thread of each character and narration. He is a lonely man, whose actions and feelings are never in coordination. His perspective of looking at himself and the world. is different. His perceptions are based on his own experience. He says, 'I could never look at the world, at life, at others, at myself, through your eyes.' (40).

Just as he isn't able to settle down with any woman even if that is often for reasons beyond his control or influence. Kushank is generally adrift. At university he doesn't seem particularly focused on his studies, and while he immerses himself in some writing projects, including an ambitious book, doesn't really seem to be able to find much of a hold. At one point he joins an engineer friend, Raghu, who works for an NGO and is working on well-digging projects in the countryside, but the hopelessly impoverished and corrupt backwater is almost impossible to work in. This is one of the most self-contained longer episodes in the novel and ends with a quick paragraph that has them both finally succeeding (they strike water) and failing completely (because the powers that be the only powers in that lawless area can't accept their success) (Orthofer).

Lack of money hurdle is a constant, as Kushank is limited in much that he can do because he has practically no money; it is also one of the reasons he doesn't marry, the women he wants to be. Through Kushank - Chandini episode, Nagarkar reflects the truth:

'She pulled me to her and kissed me. "You're such a romantic fool, Kushank. If we live together now, without jobs, without money, we would lose each other in no time. Don't you know there's no love on an empty stomach?" (151)

Ironically enough, we see here Kushank who fears the darkness in his childhood, is sharing his views through the character of Vijay that human beings' future is in darkness. It is somehow unconvincing. He says,

'We all have darkness. Every darkness with its own shape. Who lives in you are locked up darkness? You talked of it only once. Very briefly. They used to lock you up in the dark to cure of your fear of it. Even now, when you shut your eyes, the hateful memory presses on you like a swarm of bees. The darkness change with age.' (37).

In his life, pain and sufferings were his partners. Nagarkar says, 'Lives can come close but they never merge. In suffering, you are always alone.' (Introduction 6)

An excerpt from the book very simply tells us the essence the novel holds. Kushank depicts his school day's memories where his teacher gives him inferior treatment and says,

'For heaven's sake, how can you write such blatant lies? Aren't you ashamed of yourself? Seven sixes are forty three? What are you staring at the floor for? Now rub that nonsense and write the truth.' (45).

So here we come to know that every society, as we see it, is not ideal. That not all the pieces fit together, and that its mathematics is often questionable. The youth are compelled by the present social situation to negotiate their identity among the varied and more complex roles and statuses in the contemporary society.

Anthony Giddens in his book *Modernity and Self-identity*, argues that identity is a reflexive project. It is an endeavor that we continuously work and reflect on. He writes:

'A person's identity is not to be found in behaviour, nor in the reactions of others, but in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going. The individual's biography cannot be wholly fictive. It must continually integrate events which occur in the external world, and sort them into the ongoing story about the self.'(54)

For Giddens, identity is in continuous development. In the light of new knowledge and new experiences, people constantly reconsider and redevelop their self.

Kushank completely remains in a state of confusion and dilemma all around and always manipulated and driven by others. He fails in every task as he decides to compete with. He considers that chance and coincidence play a rude game with him. It shows the problems of Indian youth and explores that how they find themselves torn between

westernized norms and Indian cultural moorings. His friendships and relationships tend to be more individual, as he remains marginal in most settings, but occasionally there are hints of the larger crowds and the darkness that lurks there such as when they're digging the well, or in the novel's final scenes. So also, when visiting a friend at university in Banaras, Kushank admires the campus but notes how all environment is stifling:

'Only one thing was taboo- women. Girls, women, females. And that's all they ever talked about. All twenty four hours of the day, even as they studied. Studied, swore, and talked about women. Over and over and over. Till the words ran out and tongues fell limp and ears grew numb. Talk, talk, talk, but never a woman in sight.'(108)

Nagarkar represented his rigorous struggle, alienation, squalor, violence, and loss of hope as a modern Indian through his burlesque and bitter description. Most of the characters (the youth) including the protagonist, Kushank Purandre suffer from multiple deprivations and incapacities such as quality-education, good health and a reasonably good standard of living. They are under the constant pressures of economic insecurities, and precarious livelihoods, strained social relations and skewed gender relations. They are frequently abused and exploited by those in power such as land-lords and the police.

Edmund Wilson in a review of James Joyce's *Ulysses* asserts,

'But Joyce, including all the ignobilities, makes his bourgeois figures command our sympathy and respect by letting us see in them the throes of the human mind straining always to perpetuate and perfect itself and of the body always laboring and throbbing to throw up some beauty from its darkness.' (The New Republic)

As a jobless person, Kushank tries his hands at various occupations. He works as a publisher, tutor, card punching person, as a labourer etc in order to feed his belly.

'I had been jobless since that hospital project. Six months of fruitless searching for a publisher. A couple of Indian publishers had shown some interest, but the bad printing would have ruined the photographs. So I looked for a publisher overseas. Two of them held our promises, but even after a year there was little progress. A whole year of despondency and hopelessness. No doubt they had good reason for the delays, but I had almost run out of money. I applied for a lot of jobs.' (84 - 85)

Because of his constant subjections to unemployment and resulting poor economic conditions, Kushank is forced to offer tuitions.

'I woke up one morning and decided to give up the book. If they publish it, well, that's fine. I started to tutor school-children. Bought myself a book to brush up my grammar. Sometimes I got bored and told them stories. One of the parents warned me against this a couple of times, but the boy and I got on well, so I hadn't been sacked yet.' (85)

Kushank Purandare, a struggling writer, is at odds with his prospects and circumstances and we are offered a glimpse of his adventurous life through his reminiscences. At times he indulges into long, sophisticated monologues but avoids being judgemental or prejudiced. Kushank mentions a long list of friends, lovers, acquaintances and relatives and it is this web of relationships and encounters which moulds and shapes his vision, understanding and opinion of social institutions. His life is a series of disjointed stays as he refuses to choose a permanent abode. This aura of temporality infuses in him the ability to observe the world in a neutral and detached manner. Kushank serves as the outsider and the participant as he has a flexible and malleable mind which can see through the mess of various forces at interplay at a particular moment. Society is dissected through the medium of relationships. Kushank's inability to sustain a relationship reflects the temporal, fleeting nature of human bonds.

The present young generation prefers to remain independent from any traditional dominance on its life. It has its advantages and disadvantages. Their minds have expanded to the extent that they feel a sort of hesitation in following the already set norms of life. The growing free-at-will behavior pattern of the present generation is endangering certain significant cultural and social values of the present day India. On the other hand, it also challenges certain established traditions and norms which are outdated and still considerably influencing the contemporary scenario of Indian society.

Since his student life Kushank is in love with young girls, particularly, Aaroti, Prachinti, Chandani and the fourth one is mysteriously called 'You'. Having had love-affairs with them during student life, but later defeated in his love, he tries to lead a secluded life in a cynical manner. Deprived of the opportunities to grow and develop emotionally and intellectually, the youth today suffer from subjective isolation and

estrangement. The fault lies as much with their socio-economic milieu as with the education system. Nowadays the teaching-learning process has become so monotonous that we hardly find scope for creative thinking on the part of the students. Nagarkar tries to say that sometimes the traditional pattern of education is also responsible for developing an inferior mentality in the youngsters.

According to Chetan Bhagat, In the modern education system, young students can hardly find the space to unleash their creative and innovative ideas. The written exam have become a process of remembering the pages of the books and reproducing it into examination paper. This kind of examination system cannot build people with wisdom and excellence. Young students are running after success instead of chasing excellence in their life. Nowadays the teaching-learning process has become so monotonous that there is hardly any scope for creative thinking on the part of the students. Modern society needs such teachers who can share their innovative concepts with their students and accept new ideas from them.

The novel ends on a painful note. It depicts the insensitiveness, intolerance and useless aggression of the social forces. Kushank is mercilessly thrashed for nothing. The mob at Ganpati Visarjan suspects Kushank of corrupting the sanctity of the function. They also charged him as a traitor. Communal and religious dichotomies prevent him from presenting the case and he defiantly chooses silence: 'It was not a question. Only the certainty of a full stop. Then blackness and no more pain.' (214). The "full stop" (Madaan 93) situation implies that a dead end has been reached. This incidence suggests the miserable condition of the minorities as well as majorities in India. The inhumane power and authority of India crushes and oppresses ruthlessly. Kiran Nagarkar in this novel has very subtly portrayed the current and realistic social situation of the Indian society. The new generation believes in liberal thinking where there is no scope of communalism, racism and religious extremism.

No solutions are offered by the author and the narrative is left open ended. Kushank's painful survival (or death) is made malleable- it can be (re) shaped by the reader's imagination and approach. Nagarkar's honesty sears and sings. His humour which unmasks social pretensions without distortion, and through Kushank's search for

meaning in life, arrives upon a personal truth which is complex, perplexing, and paradoxical, and which is never as simple as seven sixes making up forty-two.

Despite his moments of deep despair, Kushank's quest is life-affirming and accepting. Notwithstanding all the pain and suffering he sees in life, he cannot have enough of life, and again and again he protests that to him life still makes all the difference. This even when faced with utter misery, whether it is of one's own making, or because of the hand of cards one is dealt with. Life is still worth living and celebrating. One doesn't throw up one's hands because the odds are against you but merely tries a little harder. Youth must know what they want and how they want because good and bad co-exist in the society. Youngsters should understand that those who have the potential of doing something innovative and capacity of digesting failure and fighting back against the adverse circumstances of life can win the race of life.

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