

A MULTIDIMENSIONAL VIEW IN KIRAN NAGARKAR'S NARRATIVE

Kamalakar Baburao Gaikwad

Assistant Professor in English
SIES Graduate School of Technology,
Nerul, Navi Mumbai.

Abstract

Kiran Nagarkar is the outstanding representative of contemporary Indian Literature. His novels always remain as classic, not an ordinary fiction. His work has a timeless quality. He enhances the reader's enjoyment through his novels in India and abroad. He employs enormous variety throughout his works. He examines the range of values, cultural milieus and fictional techniques in his novels. While writing his novels, he demands serious scrutiny and study. He discovers new facets and insights every time.

This paper probes into Kiran Nagarkar's multidimensional view of narrative techniques such as use of present tense, autobiographical mode, convincing starting of the novel, use of epilogue, frequent use of the second person pronoun, shift from the first person perspective to the third person and back again to the first person, idioms etc. through which he makes his writing productive. Kiran Nagarkar prominently explores the psyche of his protagonists, their relationship with others and process of introspection. He projects narrative perspectives or the nature of the persona's voice in a superb manner. The subjectivity of the author emerges through the technique of digressions. Frequent use of dialogue makes the work interesting and obviously reader gets tempted towards Nagarkar.

Key words: Narrative technique, Psyche of protagonists, intermingling of past with present, process of introspection, self questioning, apprehension of reality, unobtrusive narrative voice.

Kiran Nagarkar's novels are very close to the heart of his readers. He is one of the India's most talented and most overlooked writers of novels in English. His books are a target of ideological critique due to the hybrid nature of his vision of Post-colonialism. Kiran Nagarkar's notable novels are- *Saat Sakkam Trechalis* (1974), translated in English as *Seven Sixes Are Forty Three* (1978), *Ravan and Eddie* (1995), *Cuckold* (1997), *Ravan and Eddie* (1997), *God's Little Soldier* (2004) and *The Extras* (2012).

The researcher intends to focus on various narrative techniques of Kiran Nagarkar. He skillfully highlights the psyche of his protagonists, their relationship with others and process of introspection. He makes his readers to see them in action.

KIRAN NAGARKAR'S NARRATION

Nagarkar's narration is injected with precisely meaningful observations of human behavior, description of natural phenomenon, god, religion, music, political and social morality etc. His

narrations are not bawdy in nature. In fact, they are introduced with sensuous literature which is intended to arouse sexual desire.

Nagarkar's art of injecting dazzling narrative with multiple layers of philosophical, historical and spiritual meaning is remarkable. His novel *Cuckold* contains many moods and registers. This range from a vivid and racy narrative voice which mocks those who demand historical fiction be served up a comfortable period piece, to scenes of harrowing realism, to astonishingly beautiful and tranquil depiction of places. He skillfully combines history and action, character studies and philosophical reflections in his novels.

Nagarkar *intermingles the past with present* which acts as a dual perspective so that his readers can see past life through modern eyes. It enlarges our perception of the present through the understanding provided by the past. The 16th century Mewar in *Cuckold* (1997), based on political and social patterns combines with *Ravan and Eddie*, (1997), lower class middle Hindu and Christian slum boys.

The narrative perspective or the nature of the persona's voice is projected In Kiran Nagarkar's writing. Burger rightly asserts,

"Perspective makes the single eye the centre of the visible world. The centre shifts and changes as the perspective changes." (16)

In *Ravan and Eddie*, Nagarkar describes the incidences in the third person narrative. Here Ravan and Eddie, the two young boys are interested mainly in developing their physical skill or expertise in a particular activity or field. Basically they are action oriented, non intellectual and non introspective, still they have the inner urge and passion for music. *Seven Sixes Are Forty Three* written in the first person narrative. Protagonists like Kushank Purandare and others express their personalities, loneliness, desires and doubts. In *Cuckold*, there is a continuous shift in focus from the protagonist's perspective to that of the narrator and both protagonists Maharaj kumar and the Princess are highly sensitive and they have anxiety or fear that something bad or unpleasant will happen. Nagarkar uses the first person narrative in order to focus on the parameters such as self analysis and self questioning. In *Cuckold* and *Seven Sixes Are Forty Three* mental makeup and sensibility of the protagonist's approaches wonderfully close to that of the author. "I" mode allows the author to express the inner world of these characters. This shift of narration adds complexity in the works of Kiran Nagarkar. In *Ravan and Eddie*, in the middle of the third person narrative, there are first person sections. For example, Eddie overhears his grandmother urging his mother to re-marry. We are not told that Eddie is anywhere on the scene, but suddenly we get,

"And I thought you were on our side. How could you do this to me, Granna? It was shameful the way Granna was carrying on, trying to get his mother to marry Machado, Furtado, Figueredo or someone as bad." (154)

There are large numbers of *deliberate authorial intrusions*. Nagarkar make his readers dragged out of the story and made them to consider various ethical, social and cultural issues.

He uses digressions to create the interest in reading a novel. At the same time, he uses uncontrollably exuberant humour and wit through which he succeeds in keeping our focus on the story. Thus writer's subjectivity emerges through the technique of digressions. In a true sense, digressions are similar to the mode of second person narration. In that the narrator has to step out of the narrative and directly addresses the readers. He brings various topics in digressions such as Indian obsession with white skin, the loss of human dignity suffered by people in chawls,

ruminations on language. These all factors are introduced in the texture and body of the narrative itself.

“I have avoided the speaking about the rights of succession as much as the other forbidden subject which tears my guts and paralyzes my mind.” (54)

There are many instances of contemplation by the characters, reflecting on their situations and way of life. For example, parallel lives followed by the two boys, each going his separate way in the same direction.

Nagarkar draws our attention towards the dream or vision of Ravan and Eddie. Ravan has two dreams- In chapter 7, in his first dream, he sees himself as Krishna disporting himself with the Sarang girls as gossips whereas in another dream, we have Ravan’s dream of free-floating with the kite. (318-322). These dreams allow us fresh insights into Ravan’s character. On the contrary, when Eddie is forced to manufacture stories for the edification of Father Agnello and confess the forbidden acts. Both are locked together in a battle for regaining their ability to think and behave in a normal manner in face of the terror of encountering the suspended figure of Shobhan who had hanged herself. It was an interlocking in which there was simultaneously sinuous grace, terrible beauty, struggle for power and harmony.

In the epilogue, we have the interaction of two practitioners of two different martial arts, two life-long enemies intersecting in total surrender to the forces of space and motion, leading to complete harmony. These three incidences clearly state that both the characters surrender themselves to the force of motion and freedom.

Later on, complexity of pronominal use indicates a complexity in the perspective on the characters. It observes in his novel *Cuckold*. The princess is she and I, with the use of I, we penetrate into her mind and for Maharaj Kumar, he and you, for Maharaj Kumar and the princess. The authorial statement for Maharaj Kumar’s perspective reflects in the narration.

He drew his head back and laughed. A loud, unambiguous laugh. Do you keep your secret to herself, no sir; you are a lain speaking, honest person. 102-103

The use of free indirect speech is the additional narrative in Nagarkars writing. It brings the third person chapters closer to those in the first person. The objectivity of the narrator coincides with the perspectives of the characters and makes smooth flow from third person to the first person. We see the interpretation of the protagonist’s voice into that of the narrator. The narrator speaks by considering the character’s view. However it is protagonist’s narration through the voice of the narrator. Sometimes it projects both the protagonist’s and narrators thought into the narrator’s voice.

It was time to go to the bride’s house and get married. (43)

The views expressed by the narrator reflect the sense of feeling of the character. Nagarkar directly addresses readers throughout his novels. He calls the readers to participate in a conscience manner in order to see the protagonists in external and internal manner.

The use of humour and wit is the special skill employed by Nagarkar. His novels are packed with extra-ordinary energy, drenched in dark humour and are in affirmation of life. Humour plays an important role in distancing the event from the character. In *Seven Sixes Are Forty Three*, detached humour is represented by Kushank Purandare, as he was in hospital and he makes observation,

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 havea collective world of their own too.(9)

In *Cuckold*, the Maharaj Kumar's wry reflections and self deprecations enable different degrees of distance from the readers. The tone remains constant throughout the novels, which acts as an effective link. The tone is the resonance of the protagonists' thoughts, feelings and actions. This tonal connection is associated with wit and humour in such a way that the real life persona of the author focuses on the personalities of the author and the protagonist.

Another narrative technique used by Nagarkar is the ironical use of epigraphs. These epigraphs which occur in the third person only, undercut the seriousness of the issues being dealt with in the story. Nagarkar effectively reflects the feelings and views of the protagonist through epigraphs. In most of the epigraphs, narrator and author speak in their own voice. The irony counter balances the fervour,

eg. "Ah yes, the truth, What a to-do we make of this word when we all know we would be so much better off without it." (Epigraph to Ch.6, *Cuckold*)

For example, in *Cuckold*, the author and the narrator can easily identify with the Maharaj Kumar, who simultaneously undercut the passions and sufferings through the ironical use of epigraphs. The cynicism is displayed in these epigraphs is defensive on the part of the protagonist. There is constant shifting in perspectives, irony wit and humour in the epigraphs.

Nagarkar is expert enough in *introducing the songs* in third person chapters in his novels. These chapters are deeply involved in argument and conflicts. There are four such songs occurring in chapters 8, 12 and 25. Other songs occur into first person in chapters 15 and 24 which give insight into the meanings of the narrative. In *Cuckold*, the final song sung by Maharaj Kumar at Bruhannada's funeral pyre is from the Gita.(546-47). Maharaj Kumar's songs are sober and restrained which maintains the supreme paradox of life and death accepted by the tradition. On the contrary, the princess's songs are supplement and a means of commenting on life.

Use of letters is the significant technique employed by Kiran Nagarkar in his novels. In *Cuckold*, Nagarkar conveys that the purpose of the letter or diary carries the narrative forward and provides variety in his presentation and to give voice to the characters through the eyes of the Maharaj Kumar, for example- letters written by Kausalya, Leelavati, Mangal, Rana and excerpts from Babur's diary.

Kiran Nagarkar is expert in *Story telling* technique. He is a born story teller and thinker. He has exuberant talent in story-telling. He is a highly gifted stylist and sardonic story teller who address various contemporary topics throughout his work. He is a genuine experimentalist. He combines tremendous instinct for storytelling with a rare openness of imagination. He 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 born story teller with an unerring eye for detail, skilled in the use of words and an artist of the erotica."

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. Nagarkar employs a distinctive yet unobtrusive narrative voice which comes as a welcome relief from recent trivialized novels. It's a matter of proud that Kiran Nagarkar never uses a technique of magic realism in his works like Marquez or Salman Rushdie.

Nagarkar uses *other shifts in perspectives* such as constant movements between centuries, intermingling of past and present, sexual relations, warfare, retreat, loneliness, extreme poverty, fanaticism etc.

Thus in present research paper, various narrative techniques have been discussed by the researcher. These aspects reveal Kiran Nagarkar's mastery over language and extraordinary writing style. In each of his books, he has experimented with language and form. He succeeds in presenting these tactics throughout his novels in a superb manner. Nagarkar believes in close reading which offers a wide range of philosophical, sociological and historiographic reflections. He constantly tries out new techniques and fictional experiments.

Summing up the paper, Nagarkar highlights on the various aspects of narrative techniques such as injection of narratives in multiple layers, intermingling the past with present, The narrative perspective or the nature of the persona's voice, deliberate authorial intrusions, the use of digressions, contemplation, dream or vision, complexity of pronominal use, the use of free indirect speech, the use of humour and wit, the ironical use of epigraphs. introducing the songs in third person, Use of letters, story- telling, effective use of language, other shifts in perspectives etc.

Works Cited:

1. Nagarkar, Kiran. *Seven Sixes are Forty-Three*. Trans. Shubha Slee. Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1980. Print.
2. Nagarkar, Kiran. *Ravan & Eddie*. 1995. New York: Penguin, 1996. Print.
3. Nagarkar, Kiran. *Cuckold*. 1997. New Delhi: HarperCollins-The India Today Group, 2011. Print.
4. Nagarkar, Kiran. *God's Little Soldier*. New Delhi: HarperCollins-The India Today Group, 2006. Print.
5. "Kiran Nagarkar". New York Review Books. Retrieved October 21, 2013.
6. Yasmeen Lukamani, ed. *The Shifting Worlds of Kiran Nagarkar's Fiction*, Indialog Publications, New Delhi, 2004 ISBN 81-87981-59-8
7. Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*, UK:BBC &Penguin Books, 1972.