

IDENTITY CRISIS IN KIRAN NAGARKAR'S SEVEN SIXES ARE FORTY THREE

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Abstract

Kiran Nagarkar, the winner of Sahitya Academi Award, is one of the most reputed writers in Indian English literature. His novel “Seven Sixes Are Forty Three” (1980) is the translated version of *Saat Sakkam Trechalis* by Shubha Slee. Nagarkar has cleverly depicted the identity crisis of his major protagonist Kushank Purandare in the novel. Through the various incidences in Kushank’s life, Nagarkar reveals his true attitude and tragic plight to the readers. He has portrayed his incapability, weakness, oppression, sufferings, poverty, illness, starvation, death, humiliation, rigorous struggle, alienation, squalor, violence, loss of hope, hopelessness, alienation, desperation, injustice etc. Kushank fails to understand himself as well as others. He completely remains in a state of confusion and dilemma till his tragic death. Present paper illuminates multiple aspects of Kushank’s struggle, hardships, his self identity, as an outsider, his inferiority complex etc. hopelessness, alienation, desperation, injustice, etc. through the life of Kushank. Present paper illuminates

Key words: Identity crisis, self development, inconsistency, casual approach, incapability, weakness, oppression, exclusion, sufferings, illness, poverty, starvation, hopelessness, alienation, injustice, death, etc.

Afnan Mia says, “Our identity has already been chosen for us; but it is up to us to accept it, or fight and change it.” Kushank Purandare is the major protagonist and the narrator of the novel Seven Sixes Are Forty Three. He is the window to author’s vision. He is the mouth piece of the author. Nagarkar reveals pain, sufferings, death, tragic plight, loneliness, death etc. is prominently revealed through his life. From his childhood, we see him in searching of his identity. He is unaware about his identity. Rather than fighting against the circumstances, he

simply surrendered himself to the situation. He has no ability to fight with the circumstances or to change his luck.

Kushank was parasite from his childhood. He was the hopeless and shameless character. In this novel, we see him as an unpublished author, a young writer, living in a Mumbai chawl, and enjoy the goodwill and a host of friends, relatives and lovers. He stays as a parasite. He shelters at friends and relatives as a guest. Being a writer, he simply waits to gain recognition for his work. He becomes the object of satire and ridicule. He suffers from multiple deprivations and incapability's such as quality-education, good health and a reasonably good standard of living. He is under the constant pressures of economic insecurity, and unsafe livelihoods, strained social relations and biased gender relations.

The episode of identity crisis starts from his childhood. Kushank, being a narrator, depicts his schooling day's memories. When he was studying in seventh standard, his teacher assigned some mathematical task to him. He made some mathematical error. So he was criticized to rub out the rubbish he had written and asked to write the truth. Here Kushank is helpless in knowing his guilt. His teacher gives him inferior treatment which evokes inferiority complex in him. This incidence imbibed the stamp of inferiority complex on his mind.

Kushank's father as a careful and caring father rebukes him for getting fewer marks in examination. When Kushank was in Eighth standard, he didn't come in first class. His father was very careful about his study. He saw his report and rebuked him for his poor performance in exam. Kushank is unable to understand and identify how to develop himself and fulfil the academic needs by getting good marks in examination and getting better prospect.

Franklin Roosevelt asserts, "Men and women are not prisoners of fate, but only prisoners of their own minds." Right from his childhood, Kushank lives in extreme poverty. He is a poor and helpless caricature. He stays with his friends and relatives and partially caters his needs. He is incapable to fulfill his own needs. He is unable to categorize his priorities. He doesn't feel bad even if people humiliate him. His poverty tends him to stay as a parasite. Actually he was not the prisoner of fate, chance or coincidence. He was the victim of his own thoughts. He had prejudice about the society in which he stays. His absurd and negative thoughts towards life made him dependable. He always depends on others. We observe his inconsistent nature through his activities. He is financially weak and inconsistent in his deeds. In fact, his father provided all the family members diet of perverse obstinacy, love and insecurity. Actually his father had not given him much cause for complaint. Kushank's view towards life is different. **He looks at himself and at the world in a different way.** In the novel, he is presented not only as a victim of the social structures and circumstances but also as a witness to the desperation of a host of characters as daughters, wives, workers, untouchables, forced migrants and victims of police atrocities. Being a narrator and spokesperson of Kiran Nagarkar, Kushank is agreeing with author's views. Kushank observe these things and tells the truth of life,

"There are always new children and new fathers. Children get beaten in the evenings. It gets dark. Men and women sleep with each other. And start babies. When I get married, I will do the same. After all, I am Bhau's heir, his nocturnal disciple." (37).

He blames to his fate for his failure. He fails in every task as he decides to compete with. He considers that chance and coincidence play a rude game with him. According to him, time is the cruel dictator. He is the mere puppet in the hands of fate and time. Kushank's perspective is different. He looks the world in a different way. 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). Kushank has witnessed the death of his neighbour Mrs. Pratibha, Madrasi, his mother, his uncle etc. Therefore he expresses his views about the death which is dominant in human beings life. He says that we can't predict about death.

William Shakespeare rightly says, “We know what we are, but know not what we may become.” Kushank do not know about his future. He had no future plans. He simply pushes the days as they come. Because of his poverty, Chandani's father also humiliated him and cursed his family. He blames Kushank's aunt as a prostitute. He observed that Kushank's family was not respectable. He discourages his daughter to marry with such jobless person. Keeping in view his pathetic economic conditions, Kushank himself could not commit marriage to Chandani. He was not sure of himself and his improving economic condition in future. He was hitchhiked individual.

He had strong desire to help others. But his poverty does not allow him to meet their financial needs. Kushank is a poor and jobless fellow. He has sympathy for his friends. He is always ready to help them. He can't see others hardships. He helps Prachinti, one of his intimate friends, in her trouble. She was admitted in a municipal hospital. Prachinti prolonged and insufferable illness coupled with her family's utter state of poverty hurts Kushank immensely, despite his own being in a state of distress. Prachinti and her husband Shatlaj demanded Kushank some financial help to meet the hospital expenses. However, Kushank is pained at his utter helplessness. He literally begged for her in the streets for money. Kushank still try to arrange the money and asks his friends and relatives but no one helped him. People offered him rest of the things instead money, which was of no use for him. He became upset for his inability to help Prachinti. Here Kushank narrates that hunger and poverty at times become a breeding ground of shame and humiliation. In this situation, Kushank meditates that why rich and affluent class does not help the poor people. This was beyond his imagination.

There is a dilemma in his mind. Due to this, he stays under pressure. He has very casual approach towards life. He doesn't think the consequences. He takes it lightly. If anyone asks him about his future or on any aspect, he carelessly utters, what does it matters? Kushank's casual approach reveals through his different perspectives towards life. He considers the things in life in an ordinary manner. He always says, “How does it matter?” Even though he conceals the truth of life, but he has to find out the way. The things definitely matters to him. We can say, “Yes, It does, it does.” It matters him. Kushank knows very well that he is unable to drive his life but anyhow his life drags him voluntarily or involuntarily. Sometimes he works with NGO in digging well in remote villages with his friend Raghu, live with his friend Aaroti and her husband in Mumbai in one room, spends his childhood with his uncle and aunt, getting beaten by Goons in Mumbai streets and getting beaten by Mumbai police and sending him in Jail etc. In all these situations, life takes on him and it matters him a lot. Nagarkar depicts the condition of Kushank. He never says, Kushank is sad...He just lives...writes letters shamelessly to his love Chandani. She asks him, “How does it matter even if we don't live together? How does it matter if we don't get married ...and he says,” it does!” It does matter when one gets beaten by goons...it does matter when his friend asks him to become her second man...it does matter when his three cousins no more love him, and leave their widow mother with Kushank and he has to take care of her throughout.” Thus Nagarkar portrays Kushank's reactions and identity crisis in different situations.

Actually he had shy and coward nature. His father tried to eradicate his phobia for the darkness. So he locked him inside the empty garage. He resolved that he would never let himself feel anything—joy, sorrow, fear, weakness. He would let no one come close to him. Not even his

own mother. Finally at five thirty in the morning, his father unlocked the doors. He asked Kushank whether he lost his fear or not. Kushank looked at his father and shamelessly says, "What difference does it make?" 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, 7, Jim Masselos).

Kushank is the real sufferer of utter hopelessness, illness, starvation and death. He is the representative of oppressed community. He is trapped in the extreme life-circumstances and undergoes through various humiliating experiences. There is hardly any hope of redemption for him. He is a feeble and helpless person.

Kushank is the witness of human sufferings. He experiences the restlessness of human being. After the death of Madrasi, he heard a terrifying and unintelligible scream. His throat become dry and he hugged tightly to his father. He closed his eyes out of fear. Kushank's mother tried to pat Kushank to sleep at ten, but noise till midnight was inescapable. Thus he closely observed the sadness and pain of the beloved who departs from their family members. Kushank reflects a depressing mantle of pessimism through his life. He shows an uncompromising palette of suffering and disappointment. He is frequently abused and exploited by the people who are powerful such as land-lords and the police. According to him, human life is the combination of worries, tension, loneliness, anxiety, empty physicality etc. His life is full of tragedies. So he undoubtedly expresses his view about pain, unhappiness and death. He says that "When human beings born and enter in this universe in the form of infant, his or her sufferings starts. He struggles hard to achieve things. In search of identity, he suffers various things. He shares his experience,

"Sufferings are inevitable. Every human being passes through it. Really there is no end of sufferings while we are living on the earth. No end for him, for Prachinti, for me, for anybody, for Aarotie." (71)

Kushank was very sensitive. He doesn't tolerate that anyone should insult his family members. When his relatives Don and Ursula were staying with him, Arvind, Kushank's neighbour deliberately and lustfully chased them and harassed them. In return of this, Kushank also abused and defended him. Now he thinks why his neighbours are against him and why they have evil eye on them.

Sometimes Kushank behaves like a good neighbour. He has some social bindings. He knows pros and cons of the society in which he stays. He observes the things around him with an open eye. First of all, he felt pity for Pratibha who burnt herself because of her husband's torture. She has been hospitalized. Kushank promptly informed to her mother-in-law. But she refused to come. Secondly, he is moved by the pitiable condition of Kathavate's daughters Rekha and Meena and their constant subjection to violence and cruelty. He resists Mr. Kathavate for not beating them. Anyhow in both cases, Kushank fails to understand the attitude and behavior of

Ajit and Mr.Kathavate and their continuous torture. He also fails to understand the true nature of male domination and male patriarchy in society.

After his mother's death, his relatives, friends came to console them as a part of mere formality. They showed sympathy and left. Kushank was really fed up with their pretence. Kushank did not realize their true nature.

Byrant McGill comments in *Voice of Reason*, "When we do not know our true identity, we are susceptible to being used and manipulated." Kushank do not know his own identity. He is always manipulated and drive by others. His relatives and friends rebuke him. He is in doubt whether he is really a useful person for society. After his mother's death, he started eating out. His father also offered him money as and when required. But he didn't like to ask him money every now and then. Sometimes he stayed without food. When his hunger becomes insufferable and unbearable, he has had his meal at his Sindhi friend Jitendra's house. Some times Jitendra's mother grumbled for Kushank's having lunch at their house. Kushank's face had paled. Jitendra consoled him. Kushank could never forget the bitter taste of biting words. Here Kushank thinks that if he had been from any affluent class, he might not be scolded by Jitendra's mother.

He stays at Aaroti's house shamelessly. He does household chores at Aaroti's house. Sometimes he asks money to Aarotie. She was quiet sure about his weaknesses. He is so shameless that he does not want to leave her house. So she made some tricks to drive him away from her house. Kushank's act leads to confusion whether he is immature enough or either he does it deliberately in order to be secure for couple of days.

After the death of his mother, Kushank and his school friends Gulmarg and Rakesh went to Kashmir in the summer holidays. There one of the dogs tried to harm him. As we know that Kushank had hate for dogs, he requested him to take away that (bastard) dog. Through this incidence, Nagarkar reflects the reason why Kushank hates the dogs. He considers himself inferior than dogs. They are quiet lucky at least they get food and can bark freely, but here Kushank as a human being always becomes the victim of inferiority complex.

Kushank, a jobless fellow, an absurd character, indulge in vague and meaningless activities. He just wanders here and there with an empty mind. He just seeks the opportunity whatever it may be. He doesn't think about the act which he commits. Sometimes he engages in flirting, seducing and molesting the women along with his friends. He takes sheer enjoyment in having intercourse with beautiful ladies.

He fails to understand the difference between good and bad. The Parsi woman thinks good for him. She feels sympathy for Kushank. She pitied him for being a graduate. She revealed a controlled contempt for Kushank. One day, she invited Kushank to her house. Kushank sat on her bed. She asked him to sit in a relaxed manner. When she was taking shower, Kushank's mind filled with dirt and lust. But Kushank's ear was towards the sound of water running in the bathroom. He just pretended listening music, as he doesn't understand it.

Kushank is the victim of alienation and loneliness. He faces the problems alone. Nobody helps him in his trouble. He feels himself as aloof and alone. In his loneliness, he tries to console himself. No one comforts him. No one try to understand him. They just consider him outsider. In such situation, he courageously comforts him. From his childhood, he keeps himself alienated. Kushank stayed for six months as a tenant in a landlady's house. His landlady was a strict lady. She was very economical. She and Kushank's mother had been at school together. She takes the utmost care of his her house. Every now and then she used to observe on the activities of her tenants. Kushank was one of her tenants. Kushank is still in a dilemma why this lady takes

utmost care of him, why she rebukes him for his carelessness, keeping house untidy. He fails to comprehend the touching, caring and delicate nature of this landlady.

Kushank do not concentrate on his goal. He has no job security. Whatever he takes in hand, he experiences failure. He is the real struggler. He is the symbolic representative of those modern Indian youths who struggle in their life for the settlement and stability and faces the problems like alienation, wretchedness, violence, poverty and loss of hope. As a jobless person, he 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. Jobless Shank, agrees to be an observer for the Organization and accompanies him to Nandadhela, a famine ravaged area. Along with Raghu, he fought against Sardar Bhisandersingh who opposed them not to dig well for the downtrodden. One day, Kushank went at Nariman point. He was just taking a stroll on the sea shore. One of the policemen looked at him and considered him as a pimp. He approached to him and said suspiciously, "No pimping around here." Kushank attempted to prove his innocence and convinced the policeman that he is not a pimp; he had been there for walking at the sea shore. Kushank is unable to understand why the policeman considered him as a pimp and whether he really had those qualities in him which makes others suspicious to think likewise.

In final episode, we see that one day Kushank went to his aunt's house during Ganpati festival. His aunt and Kushank were at procession. They were enjoying the procession. Suddenly police started blows on the crowd. Kushank, assumed to be a Muslim by the police, is taken to the police station and beaten black and blue there on the charge of defaming the sacred Hindu god 'Ganesh'. Then they beat him savagely and mercilessly. They put their boots into his kidneys, shoved lighted cigarettes up his nose, rapped my swollen testicles with the butt end of a pencil, broke the bridge of his nose, they never stopped. (208 – 209) Thus Kushank was wrongfully accused by the police. Believing him to be a Muslim, he is shown no sense of sympathy and fellow-feeling. In the garb of securing and safeguarding the interest of the society and acting as a state agency, the police considers Kushank as cruel, gives degrading and inhumane treatment and barbaric torture to secure confession. They also charged him as a traitor. After heavy torture by police, he lost his control over his body.

He says,

"Only the certainty of a full stop. Then blackness and no more pain. Was it hours or days of unconsciousness? All I know is that it was a time without pain without myself". (213).

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. Kushank's fault is not that he appears to belong to a minority community, but he is weak and deprived. Kushank's supposedly religious identity of being a Muslim lead to violence and eventually to death.

Thus the novel projects multidimensional aspects of Kushank Purandare's life. The twists and turns in his life made him absurd, shameless and hopeless. Finally he died for no reason being good for nothing. Justi Beau comments, "They don't know who I am; what they do know is that I'm not nothing, and that I'm not no one." Kushank finally in a state of confusion and dilemma might have uttered the quoted statement that people don't know who he was and they only know that he was nothing. Thus in an identity crisis, He lost his voice in history forever.

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