
Gender Inequality and Male Hegemony in Kiran Nagarkar's *Seven Sixes Are Forty Three*

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Abstract

Gender discrimination is subject to the history of this whole universe. In the male dominant society the ratio of facing gender bias and patriarchy may differ but no one in this universe is untouched by this fact. Male hegemony has always been inspected as a dominant figure throughout every corner of society and women's from their very birth are taught and pressurized to follow this cultural biased gender inequality. Without trying need and importance to understand that society is incomplete and baseless without women and no society or country can ever progress without the active participation of women in its social, cultural and economic activities. The main cause of gender discrimination arises due to deep rooted desire to gain power and feeling insecure of others because the male dominated society deliberately constitutes the policies and regulation forcing women to stay in four boundaries of home and remain stereotype and weak as compared to men.

Keywords- Gender, Patriarchy, Hegemony, Identity

Kiran Nagarkar is one of the renowned figure especially for his writings in English language in Indian English literature .He is one of the courageous and creative writer to paint the realities prevailing in Indian Society especially the condition of women's and prevailing Gender discrimination in India. His work is content with themes like existentialism, extremisms, Psychological Abuses, domestic violence, forced sex, identity- crisis etc. In India women are looked down upon, and treated as second class citizens. They don't have courage to speak up because of the kind of environment they're born and brought up in, to follow the patriarchal system in which they're taught to stay silent and compromise with subsistence.

According to Beauvoir, two factors explain the evolution of women's condition: participation in production and freedom from reproductive slavery. Beauvoir writes that motherhood left woman "riveted to her body" like an animal and made it possible for men to dominate her and Nature. He further adds that men oppress women when they seek to perpetuate the family and keep patrimony intact.¹ Thus, even in the 21st century women continue to be burdened by their very womanhood. They continue to be suppressed, subordinated and discriminated in numerous ways, and are still taken as second class citizens or sometimes even for granted. With modernization and urbanization, the violence against women has got increased in many forms resulting in the form of increase in dowry deaths, domestic violence etc.

Indian English literature originated as a necessary outcome of the introduction of English education in India under colonial rule. In recent years it has attracted widespread interest, both in India and abroad. It is now recognized that Indian English literature is not only art of commonwealth literature but also occupies a great significance in the world literature. Fiction, being the most powerful form of the literary expression today, has acquired a prestigious position in Indian English literature .In Indian English Literature many women writers arouse like Ruth Pawar Jhabvala, Kamala Makarandya, Anita Desai, Kiran Desai , Shobha De etc. There is a long list of women writers which can be added on but in the Later period male writers also started showing interest in this field of gender inequality and raised the voices of women through their writings.

In this particular research paper my aim is to glance the work of Sahitya Academic Award winner Kiran Nagarkar *Seven sixes are forty three* in which he had demonstrated the female protagonists in an authentic style .The novel is an translation of authors marathi experimental novel *Saat Sakkam Trechalis*. The English translation of novel proved an avant grade experiment having some autobiographical element in it .He had painted different shadows of women in his novel through her female protagonist Pratibha, Chandni, Prachinti ,Arotie etc to show gender discrimination, domestic violence and male hegemony through his work "Seven Sixes Are forty three". He focuses and raises the issues from common class women to Rajputana gentle ladies. His text bravely discusses women who are victimized, pressurized and looked down on the basis of gender. The trauma of bearing the force and

pressure of patriarchal system which have been rooted in them from their very birth onwards. One can conclude that Nagarkar has immense power in him to draw attention of his readers to the fact that how in one manner or other women's are humiliated, exploited and are ill treated.

Before moving further we must first try to understand the definition of gender inequality and its comparison with her neighboring countries as Kiran Nagarkar discusses male hegemony and gender discrimination on basis of historical context.

Gender inequality is the idea and situation that women and men are not equal. Gender inequality refers to unequal treatment or perceptions of individuals wholly or partly due to their gender. It arises from differences in gender roles. Gender systems are often dichotomous and hierarchical. Gender inequality stems from distinctions, whether empirically grounded or socially constructed."India ranking remains low in gender equality measures by the World Economic Forum, although the rank has been improving in recent years. When broken down into components that contribute the rank, India performs well on political empowerment, but is scored near the bottom with China on sex selective abortion. India also scores poorly on overall female to male literacy and health rankings. India with a 2013 ranking of 101 out of 136 countries had an overall score of 0.6551, while Iceland, the nation that topped the list, had an overall score of 0.8731 (no gender gap would yield a score of 1.0). Gender inequalities impact India's sex ratio, women's health over their lifetimes, their educational attainment, and economic conditions. It is a multifaceted issue that concerns men and women alike.²

On account of this, we can say that gender discrimination take place when one gender is treated superior to other and has been given power to suppress the other just because of biological male chromosome present in him. Through his novel "Seven Sixes Are forty three" Nagarkar has tried to raise the issue of self- immolation through his this piece of writing and had tried to show why women like her protagonist "Pratibha" has been forced to follow the path of self immolation .The term self immolation means act of killing oneself, destruction especially by fire it came in use from 1960's onwards and it has been practiced for many

centuries in India, for many reasons like, political protest, devotion, and renouncement. Even Rajputs known for their warrior spirit followed this system of self immolation.

The novel *Seven Sixes Are Forty Three* is knitted in such sense that it opens with scene of domestic violence and patriarchal hegemony. We see that Ajit, Pratibha's husband comes home late night heavily drunk. As Pratibha, see him she gets feared and worried and quickly closes the door so that her neighbours could not catch the abuse and violence taking place in her house so that her husband image does not get harmed. But on the other hand his husband acts like a beast and take her as a door mate. When Ajit's mother try to say something to him he starts slapping her and than his wife Pratibha harshly feeling himself the most powerful person on this earth.

But to the surprise neither her mother nor Pratibha react to it and become silent bearer of all unlawful activities. More surprisingly Ajit's mother also did not ask Ajit to stop his cruelty and brutality taking place in front of her eyes at her own house. Instead, she takes Ajit behavior to be normal as he is part of patriarchal hegemony and it permits him right to do anything and cross any limit and abusiveness. Unfortunately they are not aware of the unnecessary and needless violence Pratibha and her mother in law were bearing as they have assumed it to be part of their life and culture of their society turning meek and mute towards Ajit dominating behavior.

In male hegemony the Patriarchs stand for Father's right, the right of ownership over the seed. He is considered an institution, a mind setter, hegemonic mastering economic, cultural, political and intellectual decisions of life. As discussed earlier in epics and folk tales man has not only be considered as master but also protector and bread earner. The word 'husband' in English and 'Pati' in Hindi means 'Protector' and 'Owner or Master'. The languages themselves are male-centered which is proof enough of the patriarchal approach in almost all the cultures in the world. While, women had to play subordinate and even submissive role.

Moving further in the novel we see that Pratibha although feels torn out in the story but still she tried to share her feeling with Ajit but instead Ajit insults her and broken Pratibha

starts muttering, “You hit me once more and I will set myself to fire .I am fed up. I ‘ve had enough, I don’t want to live anymore. I don’t care what you do. I just don’t care anymore.”³

Instead of understanding the feeling of his wife feelings he turn more bitter towards her and provoke her in his dominating kingly voice showing his male power to her, “why you whore !Are you trying to threaten me? So who’s stopping you, you stupid bitch? Go on and do it if you have the fucking guts .What are you waiting for? ⁴ Later on, Pratibha poured a bottle of kerosene over herself, muttering, ‘ I will teach you a lesson, just wait, you” ll be sorry.⁵

These words prove meaningless in front of Ajit resulting in tearing Pratibha’s remaining hope and burn herself still with hope that Ajit will save her and start valuing her but once again cruelty of Ajit the male dominant character shows his shameless behavior .Pratibha kept yelling save me but Ajit proved to be silent watcher of the incident . He did not try to help Pratibha letting her die. He behaved like stone in front of her. Pratibha was burnt very badly and was taken to hospital to the surprise she still kept on asking doctor that she wants to live, she wants to live not for herself but for her husband, her children and her in laws presenting the quality of tolerating and dedicated wife, mother and daughter in law towards her husband. “I want to live doctor, I want to live” You will save me won’t you? They need me my children and my husband .He needs me too .You don’t know do you, that he had lost his mind and I made him all right again.”⁶

Still, Nagarkar shows the brutality faced by Indian women through Pratibha she dies after being admitted in hospital for three days and before she dies she gave statement to police that he himself has committed suicide and no one is responsible for her condition saving Ajit her wild and cruel husband. Once again showing the deep rootness of male hegemony in the culture and women the silent observer of it. On this issue, Adelman has written women are given physical torture deal with the body such as isolation, sexual violence, physical violence and mental torture to the mind such as emotional abuse. Mystified image of women has led women to stereotype image in the society as Kiran Nagarkar’s women characters are psychologically infected that they are inferior to the male power. They feel that women have to serve man because they are the lords of all the consequences. But

unfortunately this is the condition of women not only in the lower marginalized society but also in upper.

The marginalized class feminine gender is not even aware what violence is and in what different kinds can it take place only hitting or beating is not violence. If we try to understand the definition of violence than we find violence is not only the intentional use of physical force or power used to threaten against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal development, or deprivation. Indian law consider act of domestic violence towards women as an illegal act as it affects not only the physical state but its consequence affect can be seen in mental health also

Nagarkar shows in *Seven Sixes are Forty three* that how women pay regards to the male partners, though they lack the sense of respect, sacrifice and dedication towards them. One more specific point is to be note down in the novel that old and experienced women of the society has accepted this gender discrimination. They have mentally prepared themselves that whatever they get from dominant male society is okay for them and is sufficient.

Michael Foucault on this has observed, “Conventionally, the figure of the mother spells silence. The mother, socially constituted as the place of nature within culture, as the matrix out of which the child’s subjectivity is developed, and as the other’s desire, assume a marginal position in culture, perpetually alienated from her own subjectivity. As Pratibha’s mother in law calmly and silently accepts the Pratibha’s death.

When another silent victim khushank approaches Ajit’s mother to intimate her about Pratibha’s death instead of mourning on her death or dropping a tear shockingly she accepts its silently and being a lady also she fails to feel the pain which Pratibha has gone through. On, the contrary she supports her son and blames Pratibha for everything and instead curses her for everything bad that had taken place and instead she adds that her untimely death is God’s revenge to her for drawing distance between her and her son Ajit adding

“So be it, Tormenting an old women”⁷

“God is always fair, that’s what I say”⁸

Simone de Beauvoir in her highly appreciated and path-breaking work *The Second Sex* tells that marriage is the destiny tradition or social myth offered to women by society.

Finding a suitable match for their daughter is the sole concern of many parents in our society. This task of finding a suitable match is so inherent in the Indian culture that it is believed that a girl's life begins and ends with marriage. Similarly, the 'sati-savitri' and 'patiparmeshwar' syndrome is also deeply rooted in Indian psyche. As, the root word patriarch means "rule of father". Thus, even in the 21st century women continue to be burdened by their very womanhood. They continue to be suppressed, subordinated and discriminated in numerous ways, and are still taken as second class citizens or sometimes even for granted. With modernization and urbanization, the violence against women has got increased in many forms resulting in the form of increase in dowry deaths, domestic violence etc.

However, in the canvas drawn by Nagarkar almost all women's are subjected to violence and are ill treated showing how even after marriage women's are not safe and respected ,i.e. even the institution of marriage does not provide them right to privacy or respected position saving them from patriarchal forces. We can conclude that Nagarkar wants to speak and write the voice of post independence women. He wants to open up a window into the multicultural world of her characters and entertains a passionate desire to tell an honest and moving story. He had explored a world subsisting within the world and located the fragmentation of the protagonists' identity. He deals with the social issues of gender inequality, discrimination on the basis of caste, colour, religion but basically is a writer of individual values. A reader can see there is always a conflict between social values and individual values in society but at last male Hegemony has to be followed.

The gender conflicts have gone so far that the male psychology not only snatches the rights of women but demean their human position as well making them so weak that they are ready to sacrifice themselves to serve the ego for their men and family .The novel actually raises question on the development of Indian culture and the traditions which are being followed blindly. Just treating women as a toy and playing with it whenever and however one feels like as this is the system of gender biased male dominant society. Nagakar through his straight forward his style of writing is trying to de mythify these social myths based on gender inequality and is forcing female characters to face any challenge and struggle for survival of their own and their respect.

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