



Multiculturalism in Kiran Nagarkar's Ravan and Eddie



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Abstract :

Kiran Nagarkar is an Indian novelist, playwright, film and drama critic and screenwriter both in Marathi and English. He is one of the most significant writers of postcolonial India. He is a brilliant storyteller and an excellent stylist. He has written five novels including Seven Sixes are Forty Three (1880), Ravan and Eddie (1994), Cuckold (1980), God's little Soldier (2006), The Extras (2012). His novels have been translated into German, French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese as well as Marathi. Ravan and Eddie remains one of the finest books written with Mumbai as a multiculturalism city. It is uproarious, funny, outrageously irreverent and actor, a living being.

Keywords : Multicultural issues, life in Chawl, Hinduism, lifestyle, Nagarkar's view

Research Paper :

Ravan and Eddie is one of the waitlist, bawdiest, most perceptive novels in contemporary Indian English literature. Ravan & Eddie tells the story of two boys, one Hindu and the other Christian. They live in the same CWD Chawl in Mumbai's Mazagaon area. The era is 1950s. India has just won its independence. Goa is still under Portuguese rule. Religious and caste-

based divisions are very much a part of the day-to-day lives of everyone in the chawl. The Hindus do not talk to the Christians and vice-versa. Language is being the chief barrier.

Eddie knows little about the incident that killed his father, except for the watered down version that says : Ravan killed your father. He is bad at studies and hates his sister. Trouble is his life partner. He stays away from Ravan. The unthinkable, however, happens when he joins the Hindu Sabha (the RSS). Not only does he do well as a scout, he excels (Ravan is an early drop-out). No other Hindu kid can match his knowledge about the Bhagvat Gita and Mahabharata. When his mother comes to know of this, she drags him to the church to get him exorcised. Suffice it to say, nothing changes.

Ravan on the other hand is curious about everything Christian—especially the girls. Their skirts, lipsticks, make up, language and lifestyle. He is of the curious kind. But he just cannot figure out why people refer to him as the murderer of Eddie’s father. How could he have killed a man when he was barely a year old?

Life in the chawls is a perpetual melodrama in itself. Large, mostly unhappy middle-class families packed in one building—not by choice of course. Hence, there is a lot of scope for fights and quarrels over the slightest of things. Water is not a matter of quarrels, but full-fledged war. It turns housewives into warriors and water containers into missiles and canons. Like in a small village, everyone knows everything about everyone else.

“It was of course religion that was the source of all the differences between the two communities. Hindus go to temples as and when they felt like it. Catholics one and all, go to mass on Sundays.”

Kiran Nagarkar’s knowledge about the lives of the chawl and the chawl-dwellers is amazing. In fact, there would be very little to be said in the story if the chawl was removed from the plot. And Nagarkar sees to it that the reader gets a full tour of the minutest details of the chawl—right down to the maker of the flush in the common toilets. Another thing that gets a lot of attention from Nagarkar is the intimate rendering of the sexual side of the chawl-dwellers. He gives a no holds barred description of the women, especially Parvati-bai.

Several interesting characters appear, play their part, and move out. Nagarkar uses them as a means of providing the minute details of the life in the chawls. And he does well.

Kiran Nagarkar’s knowledge about the Bombay chawls and the lives of chawl-dwellers is amazing. As for the plot of the novel, there is hardly a concrete one, which could be considered the foundation of the novel. However, what lifts the novel is the collection of several humourous sub-plots, brief stories about Ravan, Eddie and many other characters in the chawls (and otherwise) conjoined with the bawdy narrative by Nagarkar. Kiran Nagarkar

sees to it that the reader gets a full tour of the minutest details of the chawl—from the dimensions of the room to the social topography of the rooms and right down to the maker of the flush in the common toilets. The book provides a very insightful look at life in the Chawls. Covering a vast scale of subjects, ranging from out-of-work husbands to the caste system, the water wars to sexual abuse and many more, Nagarkar's narration of the life and matters of chawls never makes the reader feel that he is trying too hard to make it believable. The choice of words, the conversations, the language, the issues among the day-to-day lives... everything makes perfect sense in his descriptions, everything is believable. Nagarkar, sometimes, breaks off the chronological narration to provide insightful and absolutely hilarious comments on many aspects of the social lives of the people of Bombay chawls. The *Meditation on Neighbours* stands out among them with a very accurate elaboration of the differences between the Catholics and Hindus living on different floors of the chawls. *Harangue on Poverty*, *A Digression on Afghan Snow*, *The Great Water Wars*, *The History of Romantic Comedies in Hindi Films*, and *The Shortest Survey ever of the Portuguese Adventure in the Old World* are other such digressions; each of which is a good piece of writing in its entirety.

Religious and caste-based divisions are very much a part of the day-to-day lives of everyone in the chawl. The social divide among the Hindus and Christians is clearly evident; with Hindus occupy the bottom four floors of the chawls and Christians residing in the topmost fifth floor of each chawl, having as little interaction and friendship as possible, barring a single exception. The religious rebellion is very much evident in Nagarkar's words, where he sarcastically comments on Catholicism as well as Hinduism and their individual idiosyncrasies. The commentary on Sabha (RSS), confessions in Christian church are some of these hard hitting pieces which shows us the varied colours of religious diversity in India.

Nagarkar's style of story-telling is something that interests the reader to the core. I think it has got something to do with the Indian ink which makes the authors from the peninsular region of the Indian subcontinent excellent story writers. His engrossing narrative flair is what keeps the reader mesmerized despite lacking a great story-line. It is after 330 pages of sheer hilarious encounters of Ravan and Eddie that I realized I did not want it to end. A book that I realized I wanted to be much longer in length. Even though the ending seems a bit abrupt, this seems to be one of the very few dints in the armour of Nagarkar's writing. The way this novel has ended reminds me of Bollywood movies. A suicide and the corpse hanging in the chawl, with promises of a much bigger, perhaps much more adventurous, sequel of the story in the form of *The Extras* which has just released in January this year. I

look forward to reading it along with his other works, *Cuckold* and *Seven Sixes are Forty Three*. Then perhaps I could have a look at his Marathi plays too, for which he is famous for. And not to forget, the movie on *Ravan and Eddie* by Dev Benegal, rumoured to be releasing later this year.

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