

# Marginalisation of Woman in Kiran Nagarkar's *Seven Sixes are Forty Three*

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**Abstract:** Kiran Nagarkar, a prominent Indian novelist, made a notable entry into the literary world with his debut novel, "Seven Sixes are Forty Three." Originally composed in Marathi in 1974, this work transcended language barriers, finding translation in over forty languages and becoming a trailblazing contribution to post-colonial Indian English literature. While it garnered mixed reviews from critics, Subha Slee's English translation broadened its international reach.

"Seven Sixes are Forty Three" is a rich tapestry of themes, exploring love, pain, suffering, loneliness, and death. It keenly examines the prevailing gender discrimination in Indian society, shedding light on the unequal treatment between men and women. The novel also delves into the complex status of women within this societal framework, all while employing a unique narrative style infused with dark humor.

This research paper aims to dissect the novel's themes of gender discrimination and the pervasive influence of the patriarchal system on its female characters. Drawing inspiration from Simone de Beauvoir's seminal work, "The Second Sex," the paper will analyse the various cultural, economic, societal, and educational challenges faced by women in the novel. Through this lens, it will explore how these challenges hinder the pursuit of a fulfilling life for the female characters.

This research seeks to unravel the layers of "Seven Sixes are Forty Three" by Kiran Nagarkar, offering insights into the intricate web of gender discrimination that shapes the lives of its female protagonists. This analysis contributes to a deeper understanding of the novel's societal and cultural commentary, making it a valuable addition to the discourse on literature and gender dynamics in India.

**Key words:** Gender Discrimination, Marginalisation, Society, Exploitation, Male Dominance, Suppression, Oppression, Patriarchal Society, domestic violence.

## INTRODUCTION

India is renowned for its rich cultural heritage, strong familial ties, and deeply ingrained social structure.

However, at the core of this intricate societal tapestry lies a deeply entrenched patriarchal system that exerts significant influence, often to the detriment of women. In this patriarchal society, men typically hold positions of power and dominance, and this hierarchical structure extends its reach across various aspects of life. It establishes rigid norms and expectations regarding gender roles and responsibilities. Women are traditionally designated roles such as homemaking, childcare, and maintaining the household. These roles, while valuable, often confine women to specific domestic spheres, limiting their autonomy and agency. One of the most pervasive consequences of this patriarchal framework is the curtailment of women's ability to make choices about their education, personal relationships, personal growth, and professional pursuits. They frequently find themselves without the decision-making power that should be their right. The patriarchal system tends to prioritize broader societal and family interests over those of women, perpetuating a cycle of subjugation.

Unfortunately, these dynamics result in various forms of exploitation that women must contend with. Whether it's limited access to education, unequal pay in the workplace, or restricted personal freedoms, the effects of patriarchal values reverberate through the lives of countless women in India.

Addressing these deeply entrenched issues requires not only legal and societal reforms but also a cultural shift that values gender equity and empowers women to make choices about their lives and futures. While India's cultural heritage is indeed a source of pride, progress toward greater gender equality is a necessary step forward in its ongoing evolution.

The marginalisation of women is a recurring theme in many Indian novels, reflecting the complex societal dynamics and gender issues prevalent in India. Few of the common themes in which this theme explored are: limited opportunities, patriarchy, arranged marriages,

violence and discrimination, social expectations, challenges of tradition, intersectionality, and motherhood and sacrifice. These themes collectively underscore the multifaceted nature of women's marginalisation in Indian society. Indian literature plays a vital role in raising awareness of these issues and promoting discussions about gender equality and women's rights.

Domestic violence is a pervasive issue in Indian society which plays a major role in marginalisation of women. It has been a recurring theme in Indian literature. Many authors have used their works to shed light on the various aspects of domestic violence, its cause, consequences, and the societal attitudes that perpetuate it. When it comes to Indian literature, many Indian writers provide realistic portrayals of domestic violence by illustrating the physical and emotional abuse suffered by victims. Literature often delves into the gender dynamics that underlie domestic violence. Novels may depict how families sometimes prioritise societal reputation over the well-being of the victims. Indian literature plays a vital role in raising awareness, fostering discussions, and advocating for change through its nuance portrayals of domestic violence. It provides a platform for addressing this critical issue and its multifaceted dimensions within Indian society.

**Kiran Nagarkar:** Kiran Nagarkar was a distinguished bilingual Indian Novelist, playwright, and screenwriter. He was one of the significant postcolonial writers. Kiran Nagarkar was born in Mumbai on 2 April 1942 in a middle class Maharashtrian family. He has made major contributions in the literary field with his diverse works. His works candidly portray the evils of society. He is well known for mirroring the social, cultural and religious nuances of Indian society. He has written many notable works such as, *Seven Sixes are Forty Three*, translated from Marathi version *Saat Sakkam Trechalis*, *Ravan and Eddie*, *The Extras*, *Rest in Peace*, *Cuckold*, *God's Little Soldier*, *The Arsonist*. Each of the novels of Kiran Nagarkar are different from each other in tone, style and themes. His novels have been translated into many languages such as French, German, Spanish and Marathi. His work *Cuckold* in 2001 has won him Sahitya Academy award- highest Indian literary award. He was ranked twelfth in the of the 'Best thirty authors' along with Gabriel Marquez, Nadine Gordimer and Salman

Rushdie in a survey conducted by Litprom- the Prestigious German Society for the promotion of African, Asian and Latin American literature, and his work *God's Little Soldier* was included in the list of Litprom's 'Thirty Best Books'. He was awarded the order of Merit of the federal Republic of Germany 2012. His works present an extensive and sensible analysis of Indian patriarchal society.

Kiran Nagarkar has completed his studies from Fergusson College, Pune and S.I.E.S College in Mumbai. Nagarkar has spent majority of time in these two cities, he is very much aware of the social milieu of these two cities. Because of this we can see that the majority of his novels are set in Mumbai. He started writing his *Ravan and Eddie* in Marathi but later on completed it in English. After that he started writing his novels in English. In his novels he presents diverse Indian traditions, issues and beliefs. His novels are well known for having innovative technique. His writing style appeals readers from all over the world. He rightfully reflects the plight of women in lower middle class society in his novel *Seven Sixes are Forty Three*. The novel is an important channel through which readers can view the state of women and their secondary status in the patriarchal society. Kiran Nagarkar grew up in a middle class family which makes him well acquainted with the various problems faced by the people. His works hold a mirror to uncomfortable truths of the society. In his works he shows how women are violently attacked by men with or without reasons, how they are exploited and have no power in taking decisions for their own life.

His work *Seven Sixes are Forty Three* shook the form of Marathi fiction. The story is not written in a logical manner. In style and tone it matches the European style of writing. The book was known for its unique narrative style. It was originally written in Marathi in 1974. It was translated in over forty languages and became a path breaking novel in post-colonial Indian English literature. It received mixed reactions from the critics. It was later translated into English by Subha Slee. This book touches upon the various issues related to love, pain, suffering, loneliness, death, discrimination between males and females and the situation of female standings in Indian society. The novel has complex narration with dark humour.

**Feminist Philosophy-** Simone de Beauvoir and her work *Second Sex*: Simone de Beauvoir, a French

existential philosopher, writer, social theorist and feminist activist is well known for her significant work, 'The Second Sex'. It was published in 1949 and is considered as one of the foundational texts of modern feminist philosophy. It explores the ways in which women have been historically oppressed and marginalised in society. The book delves into the topics such as gender roles, patriarchy and construction of femininity. She explores how women's existence is often defined in relation to men, emphasising the idea that "one is not born, but rather becomes one". The central concept of the book is the idea of women being treated as the "other" in society. The book examines the notion of "womanhood" as a construct, exploring how societal expectations and stereotypes have shaped women's identity and roles. Simone de Beauvoir also provides a historical analysis of how women have been oppressed and their roles confined throughout history. She mentions how religions, philosophy, and societal norms have contributed to this oppression.

In *Woman's Situation and Character* (chapter 10, Part 2, Volume 2 of 'The Second Sex') Simone de Beauvoir says that male dominated society has imposed cultural norms that in turn hinder Women's progression. This can be very much seen in the novel *Seven Sixes are Forty Three*. The male protagonist of the novel Kushank Pandhare witnesses the problems of many women characters, when they are treated in an unjust manner by the male characters but he does try to stop it, rather he becomes the mute observer who watches the violence happening around him. The characters such as Chandini and Aaroti who are the love interests of Kushank Pandhare, become the victims of suppression when their family finds out the truth that they are in love with a boy, they make them discontinue their studies and force them to get married to another person. These women don't have the power to make their own decisions. In the case of Chandini, her father initially tries to brainwash her. He uses all his means to stop Chandini from getting married to Kushank.

Dominance of male authority: Simone de Beauvoir in her essay *Woman's Situation and Character* says "But, after all, to see things clearly is not her business, for she has been taught to accept masculine authority. So she gives up criticising, investigating, judging for herself, and leaves all this to the superior caste" -

p.104. Same can be seen in *Seven Sixes are Forty Three* where female characters such as Pratibha, Aarothi and Chandini accept the male authority. These women characters are treated as inferior to men and regarded as their property.

Domestic violence in the novel *Seven Sixes are Forty Three*: In the beginning of the novel we are introduced to a minor character Pratibha, who is the neighbour of Kushank Pandhare, She is a married woman who is frequently brutally abused by her drunkard husband Ajit.

"He came home drunk again. Like every other day. Prathibha shuts the door quickly after him. Whatever happened, however angry, terrified she felt, she would always shut the neighbours out of it all. The shame of it must be contained within these four walls, always." (pg. 1)

Belonging to a lower middle class family who stays in one of the chawls in Mumbai, she always becomes subject of domestic violence whenever her husband comes home drunk. She has accepted the male superiority and like many middle class housewives who don't want others to know what is going on in their family she too closes the door as soon as Ajit comes home. She wants her family matters to stay within four walls of the house, others should not come to know about her family problems.

"She cowered in the corner of the room while he swayed unsteadily in the centre, lurching out and slamming into her whenever he could make contact. At first it had been his mother. A sting slap across her face. Pratibha had liked that. Then it was Pratibha's turn. He would hit her whenever he flew into rage, with whatever came to hand, whenever he could lay his blows" (pg.1)

Whenever Ajit comes home drunk, Pratibha is extremely scared and stands in the corner of the room. He beats her whenever he is angry and hits her with whatever comes to his hand in a brutal manner. He felt a sense of satisfaction when he beat her. By removing all her anger and frustration on her he felt like a king and like he was the lord of the world. He does not feel pity on her for treating her so badly. He even beats his mother. Both Pratibha and her mother in law don't stand by each other when they are abused by Ajit. Prathibha's mother in law becomes happy whenever her son beats Pratibha and same goes with Pratibha, she likes it whenever Ajit beats his mother.

“Her voice came to him from her corner of the room, squeaky and high pitched. ‘You hit me once more and I’ll set fire to myself. I’m fed up. I’ve had enough. I don’t want to live anymore. You can look after Anil and Jyotsna. I don’t care what you do. I just don’t care anymore.’ And so on.” (pg.2)

When Pratibha could no longer bear the relentless physical abuse inflicted upon her by Ajit, she resorted to an extreme and tragic act of self-immolation as a desperate plea for help. In her moment of desperation, she threatened to set herself on fire, anticipating that Ajit would be shaken or frightened by her words. However, instead of responding with empathy or concern, Ajit cruelly dismissed her plea with laughter and taunts. He even dared her to follow through, mocking her courage.

In a heart-wrenching fit of anger and desperation, Pratibha, without fully comprehending the consequences, doused herself with kerosene and lit a match and held it to a corner of her saree. This impulsive act ignited a blaze that rapidly engulfed her. Shockingly, rather than rushing to her aid, Ajit callously abandoned her, leaving her to face the horrific consequences alone. Her neighbours break open the door and take her to hospital. Ajit’s mother was staying with her brother. When Khushank goes to her mother in law and informs her about Pratibha’s condition she is not concerned about Pratibha, instead she worries about her house catching fire. In a deeply unsettling turn of events, Ajit’s mother sided with him, casting blame on Pratibha. She tells him that Ajit was an innocent boy before he married Pratibha and accused her daughter-in-law of poisoning her son’s mind with malicious stories, depicting Pratibha as the architect of her own suffering. She framed Pratibha’s plight as a divine judgment, asserting that God’s fairness was beyond question. When Kushank asks her whether she will go with him to see her, she refuses. Pratibha after being abused by husband also doesn’t file complaints against him and tells the police that no one is responsible for her condition. Even though Ajit has never treated her well and brutally beats her, she he saves him. She later on tells doctors to save her, and she even in her dire state keeps worrying about her children. She dies after three days. Kiran Nagarkar through the story of Pratibha rightly shows the marginalised condition of women in India where they are constantly abused not only by men but also by other women. They care about their husbands

and children. They want to live for them, despite this they are not valued. Patriarchal society raises girls to accept domestic violence and injustice, when done to them, they think that it is their destiny. Even if they protest no one heeds.

The Katavate family is another example in the novel which shows domestic violence. Kushank tells the story of Kathavte’s family to the readers.

“Mr. Katavate, on the second floor, always felt it to beat his daughters at night. After ten. And he had many daughters.” (pg.31).

Mr. Kathavte, another character in the story, lives with his family on the second floor of the building in which Kushank lives. He is another typical male patriarchal figure in the novel who takes pleasure in torturing his family. He was called Bhau by his family. He had many daughters and three sons. When his sons were young he used to beat them too. When they grew he stopped beating them but he beats his daughters even when they are married. Narrator gives a clear description about how Kathavate beats his daughters. He used to beat his daughters in the night, he used to drag them along the ground. He beats them frequently in a brutal manner by kicking and slapping them and verbally abusing them. In one incident his daughter Meena requests him to stop beating her but he curses her and beats her more. She even threatens him that she will jump off the balcony if he hits her once more but even this threat goes vain and he tells her to go ahead and kill herself, he is not scared of her threats.

“‘ Bhau don’t’, Meena would move from A to F-sharp. From Kitchen to the front room. Then a pause, a little argument in raised voices. And then, ‘Have you no shame, you little hussy?’ without waiting for an answer, ‘You stupid, worthless girl, you bitch.’ slaps and kicks accompanied the words. A stick or leather belt. On to the balcony. ‘Don’t Bhau, don’t beat me, please.’ With every slap her father’s sense of high drama” (pg.32)

Like Pratibha, Kathavate daughters are also minor characters and only a few pages consist of their story but their story still plays a prominent role which depicts marginalisation of women where women are treated as weak and often are subjected to domestic violence. Even their threats and their requests are often taken very lightly. Male heads of both families take pleasure in beating the female figures of the family.

Victims of arranged marriage: In this novel one can explore the practice of arranged marriages. The characters such as Arothi and Chandini are not given choices to choose their partners. These two women characters who become the victims of Patriarchal society. Both are the love interests of Kushank. Arothi meets Kushank in college and they fall in love with each other. Arothi as shown in the novel is quite bold and even good in her studies. She stays in Pune with her brother and sister-in-law. They were her guardians. She never opposed them. Aarothi was good at studies and she used to get scholarships. She was not free to use her own scholarship money. Her father used to deposit it in the bank. This particular point shows the reader that women don't have financial freedom.

“Always on the top of her class. What do you do with your scholarship money? My father puts it into a bank account. Can you imagine it, my money and I can't lay my hands on it?” (pg.67)

Simone de Beauvoir in ‘Woman’s Situation and Character’ says that women have been taught from her childhood how she should live. Women since birth are taught to accept the fact that males are superior and she is inferior. The duties and responsibilities of man and woman are not destined by god. These roles have been made by patriarchal figures and legitimised by superstructure such as family and religion. Women accept these conditions and go on teaching others also about the same.

“Her square-faced sister-in-law recited to Aarothi her husband’s bedroom frolics. ‘I’m telling you all this for your own good. May be you will be married one day you’ll be married one day, your brother and I will certainly keep trying for you.’” (pg.68)

Aarothi’s sister in law used to always teach her how to impress her would-be husband in future to gain his love. Though Arothi used to not like this, she still used to listen to what her sister in law said. Arothi’s brother reads her diary in which she wrote letters addressing Kushank, he makes her discontinue her studies and is sent to Delhi to her father. Later on she is married off to someone else. Arothi’s discontinuation of study, her wedding and her future is decided by her family without taking into consideration her interests.

Similar fate can be seen with the case of Chandini. Khushank meets Chandini a year after getting separated from Arothi and falls in love with her. She wanted to get married to Khushank but when her father, a male patriarch, comes to know about her he

immediately comes from Indore to brainwash her by calling her love as puppy love. He tries all his means to persuade Chandini to break up with Khushank. As soon as Chandini completes her exams he takes her along with him back to Indore. He even writes a letter to Khushank later on by telling him that his daughter does not want to marry him.

‘My daughter does not wish to marry you. Even if she did, she would be helpless against my opposition. I’d advise you not to try to see her. Have the intelligence and wisdom to realise what is good for you.’ (pg 181) When Khushank goes to Indore to meet her she tells him how badly she was tortured at home. For days none of her family members spoke to her. Her father abused her. They even beat her black and blue. Her mother staged a fit against her. Her father emotionally blackmailed her by reminding her about his health problems. Her family uses almost all tricks and techniques to stop her from marrying Khushank.

Patriarchal expectations from women: Indian literature frequently examines the idealisation of motherhood and the expectation that women should prioritise their roles as mothers and caretakers over the individual aspirations. This can lead to a sense of sacrifice and unfulfilled potential. Many Indian women never pay importance to their health. Whenever they are sick they don't go to doctors immediately which later on takes a serious toll on their health. Prachinti, another minor character, Kushank’s mother, and Pratihba are the fine examples of this. Prachinti neglects her health and gives priority to her family that is her husband and kids. She had suffered for almost nine months because of her illness, she pretends to be strong in front of her husband and kids. Kushank’s mother is sick and hospitalised. Doctor said that she could live if she came with-in forty eight hours. Her condition is quite serious but she still carries her sense of humour till the end just to ease her family members. Even Pratihba when she is on her deathbed after her self-immolation, she says she wants to live and requests the same to the doctor. She is worried about her two young kids by thinking who will take care of them and she wants to live for them. All these three above examples give us the clear notion of Indian women who have been taught since their childhood what their priorities are like putting their families first even before their own wellbeing.

## CONCLUSION

To conclude one can say that *Seven Sixes are Forty Three* is one of the literary pieces of Kiran Nagarkar which can be viewed as a jibing commentary to the patriarchal society. It sheds light on the physical and emotional toll of such violence on women. The novel has portrayed how Indian women are living under the dominance of patriarchal society. It shows the subaltern conditions of women on whom various violence has been inflicted. The various injustice, low social power, and domestic violence are endured by many of the Indian women which is shown through multiple characters. Kiran Nagarkar various women characters like Prathibha, Chandini, Aarothi, and Kathavate sisters- Rekha and Meena represent all women irrespective of their family backgrounds, class, educational background, marital status and experience similar ill treatment by the patriarchal figures. They are continuously tortured and dominated by males. Their voices are totally overheard and their wishes are suppressed. Though violence against women is always considered a legal offence, the crime rate has not decreased as many women like Prathibha never file complaints against their abusive husbands and save them.

Marginalisation of women is one of the serious problems which exists in societies of all eras. Not only 'Seven Sixes are Forty Three' but other novels of Kiran Nagarkar also cover a wide range of themes, these are common elements related to the marginalisation of women. His writings often provide a lens through which readers can explore the complexities of gender dynamics and societal expectations of India.

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