Interconnected Structures of Domination and Marginality in Kiran Nagarkar's Ravan and Eddie Trilogy

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***Abstract*—Kiran Nagarkar is known for portraying ordinary people and their struggles in a realistic and often humorous way. His Ravan and Eddie trilogy Ravan and Eddie (1995), The Extras (2012), and Rest in Peace (2015) presents the difficult lives of people living in the CWD chawl in Mumbai. The trilogy brings out the effects of poverty, religious differences, gender inequality, and social divisions on everyday life. The study examines the interrelationship of these forms of oppression through bell hooks' cultural criticism, interconnected domination, marginality, radical openness, and yearning. The lives of Ravan, Eddie, Parvati, Violet, Pieta and others show how those from marginalized communities try to live with dignity, acceptance, security and a better life. It is the very social conditions that keep them at the margins that also shape their dreams of Bollywood, education, social status and economic betterment. At the same time, the friendship and cultural exchanges between Ravan and Eddie challenge the rigid boundaries created by religion and society. Nagarkar's trilogy therefore shows that poverty, religious conflict, and gender inequality cannot be understood separately. It also suggests that crossing social boundaries and recognizing shared human experiences can create possibilities for resistance and change.**

***Index Terms*—Domination, Interconnectedness, Marginality, Yearning, Resistance, Class.**

I. INTRODUCTION

Indian English literature has been engaged in a long tussle with the complex, heterogeneous and often difficult realities of postcolonial life. Kiran Nagarkar stands out here for his rebellious writing. A master of dark humour, Nagarkar takes an honest look at life on the edge of the city and a bold look at religious extremism, deconstructing the power structures that define modern Indian life. Nagarkar, as a bilingual writer, resists the exoticising gaze of the Western reader, choosing raw realism over romanticised nationalistic narratives. One of his most seminal achievements, the Ravan and Eddie trilogy, is a profound, multivalent exploration of how individuals negotiate, internalise and sometimes subvert the oppressive structures defining their material and spiritual existence. To appreciate the complexity of Nagarkar's stories, a theoretical framework that considers the interconnected nature of systemic oppression is needed. Feminist theorist bell hooks offer a powerful lens for cultural criticism. Her reflections on the interdependence of systems of power, the revolutionary power of human "longing" and the potential of marginalisation to act as both a trap and a site of resistance fit perfectly with Nagarkar's themes. Both hooks and Nagarkar are keenly interested in the functioning of power, and in how those on the margins find new ways to live or are tragically caught in the grip of dangerous, rigid ideologies. This extensive report provides an exhaustive analysis of the Ravan and Eddie trilogy via a bell hooksian cultural critique. The analysis shows how Nagarkar's protagonists are trapped in an interlocking matrix of class, caste, religion and gender through systematic application of hooks' theoretical anchors. It also considers how Nagarkar's own cultural production serves as a visionary critique, pointing to new ways of thinking and being, but also demands an interrogation of its own limitations concerning gender and the male gaze.

II. AIM OF THE STUDY

The main aim of this study is to critically analyse the structural mechanics of power, oppression and resistance in Kiran Nagarkar's Ravan and Eddie

trilogy. Linking postcolonial Indian literature with African-American feminist theory, the study aims to examine the ways in which class poverty, religious communalism and patriarchal hegemony intersect to shape the psychological and social terrains of the protagonists in Nagarkar's works.

III. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The objective of this study is to offer a sophisticated, theoretical understanding of postcolonial identity and systemic marginality. Nagarkar's works have often been appreciated for their dark humour and satire on urban Indian life. There is a need to systematically analyse the theoretical basis of his social critique. This study seeks to underscore the universal paradigms of domination and the shared human quest for emancipation and, ultimately, to offer a comprehensive lens for understanding how literature can be employed as a tool to dismantle essentialist identity constructs.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative literary analysis based on a close reading of primary texts—Kiran Nagarkar's Ravan and Eddie trilogy (1995-2015) and is supported by secondary critical literature and theoretical texts. The analytical framework draws on selected excerpts of bell hooks's cultural criticism, especially her notions of interconnected domination, anti-essentialism, yearning, and radical openness. The methodology considers literary works not simply as fictional amusement, but as critical representations of the human condition, which reveal social, political and economic issues. The study deciphers the ideological arguments in Nagarkar's fiction by systematically applying hooks' sociological and feminist concepts to the narrative structures, the character trajectories and the spatial settings of the novels.

V. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

To effectively analyse the socio-political landscapes of Kiran Nagarkar's fiction, this study anchors its methodology in the cultural criticism of bell hooks. Her theoretical interventions provide a multi-dimensional framework to comprehend the workings of power, oppression, and resistance. The framework is based on four critical pillars:

1. Domination is interconnected: hooks say that systems of oppression racial, gender, or class don't function in isolation. She calls for an inclusive view, saying cultural criticism should "contribute to the effort to end domination and oppression in all its forms." If this interdependence is acknowledged, one cannot change one aspect of the system without changing the whole" (p. 218).
2. The Power of "Yearning": Hooks moves beyond simple critique to identify "yearning" as a profound political and affective force. She calls it a "passionate collective longing for peace and justice" that cuts across lines of race, gender and class. When a marginalised group is able to connect "personal passion and political quest," longing becomes a collective, revolutionary force, transcending the individual desire.
3. Chosen Marginality and Radical Openness: Spatial and social margins are frequently viewed solely as sites of deprivation. But hooks draw an important distinction between "the marginality forced on us by oppressors and the marginality we choose as the site of resistance and a site of radical openness." This chosen margin is people of the whole but outside the main body, giving them an "oppositional world-view" and their own unique epistemology to look "both from the outside in and from the inside out." This theoretical framework aligns with the thematic preoccupations of Kiran Nagarkar, who is constantly negotiating the boundaries of interlinked oppression, religious essentialism and the desperate craving for agency through the characters in his novels.

VI. KIRAN NAGARKAR: LIFE AND WORKS

Kiran Nagarkar (2 April 1942–5 September 2019) was one of the finest bilingual writers of post-independence Indian literature. A novelist, playwright, screenwriter, journalist, and cultural critic, he wrote in Marathi and English, and was known for his fearless engagement with questions of identity, religion, politics, history and social inequality. Nagarkar was born in Bombay (now Mumbai) and received his bachelor's degree from Pune University in 1964 and

his master's degree in English Literature from the University of Bombay in 1967.

Before becoming a full-time writer, he was an advertising copywriter for almost fifteen years, and in that time many of his campaigns (done with the poet Arun Kolatkar) were much admired. His experience of the city of Bombay and the heightened curiosity these experiences sparked about history, mythology, cinema and contemporary politics deeply influenced his literary imagination and thematic concerns in his fiction. Nagarkar was an uncompromising public intellectual who fought communalism, authoritarianism and cultural orthodoxy, and promoted pluralism, individual freedom and democratic values throughout his career.

He died on 5 September 2019 in Mumbai of a brain haemorrhage. His literary career began with his Marathi novel Saat Sakkam Trechalis (1974), which is a milestone in modern Marathi fiction for its experimental narrative technique and innovative use of language. His first novel in English, Ravan and Eddie (1994), a satirical yet compassionate account of life in a Bombay chawl, announced him as a major new voice in Indian English literature. He published a celebrated historical novel based on the life of Meerabai's husband, Cuckold, in 1997, which won him the Sahityā Akademi Award in 2001. His later works God's Little Soldier (2006), The Extras (2012), Rest in Peace (2015), Jasoda (2017) and The Arsonist (2019) continue to examine the themes of communal violence, religious extremism, urban existence, political intolerance and the complex nature of contemporary Indian society.

He was also the writer of groundbreaking plays like Bedtime Story, Kabirache Kay Karayche and Stranger Amongst Us, questioning mythology, history and power through experimental dramatic forms as well as fiction.

Nagarkar's contribution to Indian literature is to marry literary innovation with sharp social criticism. His fiction is always engaged in the intersections of class, religion, gender, language and ideology in its articulation of the lives of ordinary people within the framework of various forms of domination. His works show that social issues are not always black and white. They combine multiple perspectives, fragmented identities and hard choices that people must make. Nagarkar mixed satire, irony, realism and philosophical reflection and emerged as one of the foremost writers of postcolonial India. His work has been honoured with the Sahitya Akademi Award and the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany, among other awards, and his writings continue to figure prominently in literary theory, cultural studies, postcolonial criticism, and contemporary Indian literary scholarship.

Ravan and Eddie is a comic yet tragic coming-of-age story set in the years after Indian independence, in Central Works Department (CWD) Chawl No. 17 in Bombay's Mazagaon area. The novel is about two boys - Ravan, a Hindu Maratha and Eddie, a Goan Catholic. The story's inciting incident is a dark, absurd tragedy. Eddie's father, Victor Coutinho, has a heart attack trying to save baby Ravan, who has fallen accidentally from a balcony. This accident turns Ravan into a "killer" in the eyes of Eddie's mother, Violet, and starts a lifelong feud. The novel, and its sequels, The Extras (2012) and Rest in Peace (2015), follow the intertwined lives of the boys as they deal with extreme poverty, communal tensions, the everyday struggle for survival, their mutual obsessions with Hindi cinema, martial arts and upward mobility, and their tragic end.

VII. CULTURAL CRITICISM AND THE INTERCONNECTEDNESS OF DOMINATION

One of the founding pillars of bell hooks' theoretical architecture is the recognition that systems of oppression do not exist in a vacuum; they are mutually reinforcing. As she explicitly articulates:

"As a critic, I hoped to use cultural criticism to aid in our effort to end domination and oppression in all its forms. This focus allows for an inclusive standpoint where one is not required to choose gender over race or vice versa..." (12)

In Kiran Nagarkar's trilogy, this interconnectedness is not merely a theoretical abstraction; it is the evident, lived reality of his characters. In these three novels, oppression usually comes from many different sources. The oppression appears in everyday life through poverty, religious conflict, and violence against women.

In Ravan and Eddie, these problems are closely related to the everyday life of the inhabitants of the Central Works Department Chawl, where their living conditions are symbolic of the social and economic problems they are confronted with. Built to pack in as

many factory workers as possible for the lowest cost, the building forces large families to cram into tiny rooms. Nagarkar paints a vivid picture of this crushing lack of space:

"Each room was twelve feet wide and twenty-four feet deep with a wooden partition separating the drawing-room-cum-study, library, playpen or whatever from the kitchen... Each room was home to one family, nuclear or extended. It is uncommon to have only two people staying in a single long, partitioned room. The average is between six to eight."(Ravan and Eddie, p. 66)

On top of this extreme poverty, the building is divided by religion. Hindus live on the bottom four floors, and Catholics live on the top floor. Even though both groups are equally poor and neglected by the city, sharing the exact same public bathrooms and water taps, the Catholics look down on the Hindus. Because class and religion are tangled together, the residents are oppressed by the government's failure to help them, while also oppressing each other based on religion.

In this claustrophobic, rigid setting, Nagarkar is able to use the physical structure of the chawl as a metaphor for systemic entrapment. This spatial configuration functions as a permanent, coercive force that shapes the social interactions of the residents, making them internalise their marginalisation as an inescapable condition of their existence. The battle for existence is therefore not simply a struggle for material resources but a desperate bargaining between big ideological differences that pit neighbour against neighbour, thereby destroying any chance of united opposition against the systems that oppress them.

VIII. THE INTERSECTING MATRIX OF PATRIARCHAL VIOLENCE

Patriarchal oppression is deeply embedded in the working-class domestic space. Women like Ravan's mother, Parvati, and Eddie's mother, Violet, face constant harassment and unfair expectations from men. Parvati, for instance, learns the hard way that the men in her life are entirely useless. When she is running her small food business to keep the family from starving, her husband, Shankar, does absolutely nothing to protect her from abusive customers. She realises she is completely alone:

"If the client grew abusive and violent, Parvati would look to her husband for help. That was in the old days, but her foolishness became obvious to her soon enough. She understood that there was always help at hand. Its beginning, middle and end was herself, Parvati."(Ravan and Eddie, p. 41)

Even worse, when Shankar openly brings his mistress into their tiny home pretending she is his sister Parvati is forced by the rules of society to simply endure it to avoid public shame. She sets up a schedule for her own husband's affair, telling them,

"Tea will be served at seven in the morning Whatever brother and sister wish to do at that time is your private affair."(Ravan and Eddie, pp. 214-215).

She maintains the household system even though it completely crushes her. hooks point out that unfair systems often force the victims to enforce the very rules that hurt them. We see this heavily with Violet. When Violet catches her son Eddie simply reading a book about Hindu myths, she doesn't just scold him; she violently attacks him, driven by a deep religious fear:

"Where did you get this satanic book? Did that Hindu boy, the devil himself, give it to you? She was beating him like a woman possessed, slapping him, boxing his ears, pulling his hair. It is a passage to hell lined with thirty-three million Hindu gods and goddesses..." (Ravan and Eddie, p. 116)

This same mother, who works so hard to protect her son, completely abandons her intelligent daughter, Pieta. Even though Pieta is smart and wants to be a doctor, Violet refuses to pay for her schooling so she can hoard money for her failing son, Eddie. Violet sacrifices her daughter's future just to protect her son's traditional male privilege:

"No, there was no way she was going to let Pieta enrol for a medical degree. Someone had to keep her feet on the ground. Too bad it had to be her mother. Pieta cried till her whole face was swollen. She argued, she begged, she wept, she sulked. She threatened to leave home. No one, neither Granna nor Eddie, spoke up for her. Violet stood her ground... As a matter of fact, she had become almost invisible." (The Extras, pp. 126-127).

This is a chilling moment in the workings of patriarchal bargains in marginalised communities. In actively suppressing her daughter’s ambition to maintain her son’s entitlement, Violet internalises the very misogynistic structures that make her own life

precarious. This is a typical example of how mothers in circumstances of dearth are often obliged to serve as custodians of their children's future and, in the process, unwittingly maintain the cycle of gender inequality that hampers the autonomy of the next generation.

IX. THE ARCHITECTURE OF "YEARNING": PERSONAL PASSION AND POLITICAL QUEST

bell hooks identify the shared desire for a better world as "yearning," a powerful emotional force that holds the potential to unite oppressed people in a revolutionary quest for liberation. She explains, "Yearning is the word that best describes a common psychological state shared by many of us, cutting across boundaries of race, class, gender, and sexual practice". For those marginalised groups that have been silenced by master narratives of oppression, hooks argues that this deep yearning is ultimately "the longing for critical voice" (hooks 27).

In Kiran Nagarkar's Ravan and Eddie, the characters deeply experience this longing, desperately wanting a better life and a way to escape their cramped building (the chawls). Their desires are often shaped and limited by the same social forces that keep them oppressed, so they do not develop into a shared form of resistance.

Ravan and Eddie's dream is of being accepted and acknowledged in the glitzy world of Bollywood. But they are shaped by the commercial culture in which they swim. They do not speak for themselves, nor are they assisted to question their situation, but the industry benefits from their bodies and labour. As such, they continue to live at the margins of society and have difficulty achieving real recognition. hooks describe this tragic phenomenon of marginalised people not actively challenging the political system, but choosing to "hide in desire, in that narcissistic space of longing where difference--rather than becoming the new site for resistance and revolution, for ending domination--becomes the setting for high spectacle, the alternative playground" (hooks 163)

This commodification effectively traps the characters into a cycle of individualism. Their yearning is diverted from recognising their shared socio-economic reality by being channelled into the pursuit of fame and recognition within the industry that exploits them. Their concerns shift from collective liberation to a fleeting optimism of social mobility, which, in a peculiar way, keeps them marginalising themselves, always chasing inclusion within an exclusionary power structure.

X. CO-OPTING YEARNING: BOLLYWOOD AND LINGUISTIC HEGEMONY

At the heart of Kiran Nagarkar's Ravan and Eddie lies a profound, collective psychological state that transcends individual ambition. This state is best defined by bell hooks, who argues that this longing is a fundamental reaction to the silencing of marginalised voices by dominant, oppressive structures. As hooks observes:

"Yearning is the word that best describes a common psychological state shared by many of us, cutting across boundaries of race, class, gender, and sexual practice. Specifically, in relation to the post-modernist deconstruction of 'master' narratives, the yearning that wells in the hearts and minds of those whom such narratives have silenced is the longing for a critical voice." (hooks 27)

This craving is not abstract for Nagarkar's characters, but a desperate, real need to be seen and validated in an industry, Bollywood, that treats them as disposable labour. The desire for a better life is corrupted by the glitzy, false world of Bollywood and the ghosts of British colonialism. Residents see each other as competitors, not teammates. A good example of this is the frenzied obsession with learning English. They feel a deep shame about their native languages. The only magical way to succeed is to know English. Nagarkar points out how this creates a permanent divide:

"Ask any one of them, in an unguarded moment, and he'll tell you that he would give his right hand, make it his left, to be able to speak like the people from the top floor. Because there are only two kinds of people in the world. Those who have English and those who don't. Those who have English are the haves, and those who don't are the have-nots." (Ravan and Eddie, p. 176).

The residents truly believe the lie that changing their language will change their entire physical and social standing in the world. As the book notes,

"English makes you tall. If you know English, you can wear a 'suit-boot,' do an electrician's course or take a

diploma in radio and refrigeration technology." (Ravan and Eddie, p. 177).

This yearning is also hijacked by dangerous religious groups. When young Eddie seeks a place to belong, he is drawn into the Hindu Sabha (the RSS), where a leader named Lele Guruji twists the boys' natural desire for community into violent religious nationalism, telling them:

"Our Sabha desperately needs new blood. Go into the world and light fires, the fires of Hinduism. Jai Hind." (Ravan and Eddie, pp. 19-20).

Instead of being taught how to improve their community, the boys are taught to hate each other and to dream only of personal wealth. Religious bigotry and capitalist greed destroy their shared desire for a good life, so they can't come together to truly make a difference.

XI. MARGINALITY AS A SITE OF RESISTANCE AND "RADICAL OPENNESS"

The peripheral social location produces a different oppositional epistemology, as bell hooks argues. This means that people forced to live on the edges of society are not just deprived; they also gain a certain critical perspective that allows them to see and question the failures of the dominant power structures. The chawl of the trilogy is a panopticon, a place of perpetual surveillance and psychological claustrophobia, where privacy does not exist, and neighbours watch each other. The claustrophobic nature of this space is an inevitable consequence of the structural neglect built into state-led urban planning that mandates the confinement of working-class citizens to underfunded and inadequate spaces. Thus, the lack of infrastructure and basic resources creates a veritable battlefield for daily domestic chores and a hostile contest among marginalised residents for essential resources like water, demolishing any potential for community solidarity.

The lack of water causes literal physical fights, pitting neighbours against each other in a desperate scramble to survive. Nagarkar describes this beautifully and tragically:

"They should have killed for water, the men and women of CWD chawls. People have been known to kill for less: religion; language; the flag; the colour of a person's skin or his caste... Frictions have festered; attitudes hardened and prejudices led to Pavlovian reflexes of bellicosity and at times it's been touch and go." (Ravan and Eddie, pp. 67-68).

But even under this pressure, Ravan and Eddie can sometimes use their status as outsiders to their advantage. Because they are young and curious, they cross the strict lines their parents drew. Ravan becomes fascinated with Catholic culture, and Eddie learns Hindu epics. By mixing these cultures and refusing to stay in their lane, they naturally fight back against the strict, dividing rules of their community, showing exactly what hooks meant by "radical openness."

XII. SUBVERTING THE TEMPORAL AND SPATIAL "US AGAINST THEM"

Nagarkar points out that Hindus and Catholics live perfectly normal lives together during the week, sharing the exact same struggles. But suddenly, they act completely different on the weekend because of an invisible set of rules:

"Religion was the source of all the dissimilarity between the two communities. Hindus went to temples as and when they felt like it. Catholics went to Mass on Sundays. For Ravan, it was Sundays that alienated Hindus from Catholics... But, on Sundays, God turned His back on the Hindus."

By showing how these two groups actually share the exact same poverty and dreams, the story proves that the "us vs. them" mindset is totally made up.

XIII. INTERROGATING THE VISION: GENDER, THE MALE GAZE, AND THE LIMITS OF RESISTANCE

However, some critics feel Nagarkar's books still display a slight male bias. Women characters like Pieta, Parvati, and Asmaan are victims of systemic violence. Women in such films are often used as a plot device for male psychological development or to create dark satire. While the books clearly expose sexism, they don't always give the women the same chance to break free as the men. The men are allowed to fail upwards, while the women are repeatedly crushed. Still, Nagarkar's broader message echoes hooks': he challenges readers to embrace human complexity, to reject blind faith and to confront the inequities of the world we live in. He demands that we

look at the painful realities of women like Asmaan and realise that society is fundamentally broken.

XIV. CONCLUSION

The Ravan and Eddie trilogy gives us a brilliant, hilarious, and ultimately heartbreaking map of modern Indian society. By looking at it through bell hooks's ideas, we see a deep reflection on power, survival, and the lies we tell ourselves to get through the day. The books make it clear that you can't separate poverty from sexism or religious hatred; they are all tied up in a tight knot. Even under the crushing weight of these unfair systems, the characters find small moments of freedom by mixing cultures, telling jokes and living on the absolute fringes of society. Ultimately, the story is a plea to stop accepting the unfair rules handed down by our parents, and to fight together for a fairer world.

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