

**OBSCURITY AND SELF REALIZATION IN KIRAN NAGARKAR'S
"THE EXTRAS"**

Kamalakar Baburao Gaikwad

Assistant Professor in Communication Skills
SIES Graduate School of Technology,
Nerul, Navi Mumbai

Abstract

Kiran Nagarkar is one of the most renowned novelists on the literary canon of Indian Writing in English. He has been emerged as powerful and creative novelist who has contributed Indian Fiction with his unique depiction of sufferings and humiliation of the ordinary human beings. This paper investigates into Kiran Nagarkar's novel The Extras with the purpose to portray Obscurity and Self Realization of the downtrodden people. The paper shows Kiran Nagarkar's attempt to reveal the tragic situations of the ordinary people, their craze to pursue their dreams despite of hurdles, oddities in life, willingness to achieve the desired target and adjustment with situations.

Key words: Obscurity, setbacks and failures, sufferings of protagonists, conflicts of their lives, glitz, glitter and glamour of Bollywood and Western rock music.

Following the legacy of Mulk Raj Anand, Kiran Nagarkar too documents the vulnerable reality of the poors and the downtroddens in Indian society. His contribution in Indian English Writing is remarkable with his outrageous writing. He gave the new dimensions to the Indian English Literature which has been never portrayed by any other Indian writer. He exposed the hidden reality of common human beings who were suffered and humiliated under the burden of class structure. He becomes the spoke person for the non conformist individuals who are exploited and remain unsettled in the society. He severely attacks on the insensinsitive society which harass and oppress the poor and downtroddens mercilessly.

Kiran Nagarkar is the author of the critically acclaimed novels Seven Sixes Are Forty Three, Ravan and Eddie, Cuckold (for which he won the Sahitya Akademi Award) and God's Little Soldier and The Extras. His first book, Saat Sakkam Trechalis, written in Marathi and translated into English as Seven Sixes Are Forty-three, is considered a landmark in post-independence Indian literature. Nagarkar has also written several plays and screenplays, both in Marathi and English.

Kiran Nagarkar is a wonderful story-teller, and a keen observer. His story tumbles out in torrents; the dark, humorous prose of Ravan and Eddie (1975) seems to have evolved through the years into something more compassionate, but no less funny, meandering through whimsical

riffs, whereas *The Extras* is a rambunctious celebration of life. It is a quintessential Mumbai novel.

He published his novel *The Extras* in 2012 which is a sequel to *Ravan and Eddie* that traces the adult lives of Ravan and Eddie as extras in Bollywood. This novel is shameless, shocking, hilarious and yet sensitively portrayed. It is written in colloquial and accessible language. *Ravan and Eddie*, is the story of two boys born and raised in a Bombay chawl. Precluded from ever being friends by an incident in early life (Eddie's father saved the baby Ravan from falling to his death and in doing so lost his own life), the two boys, lead parallel lives; both are unsuccessful at school, become enamoured of films, and learn martial arts.

"The extras", a satirical novel where the heroes are in the Rabelaisian sense, is located in Bombay in the 1960s and 1970s, in a city that could hardly be contradictory. When *The Extras* opens, Ravan and Eddie are on the cusp of adulthood. Ravan has a brief career with a wedding band before becoming a taxi driver; Eddie balances a job in a speakeasy with a band of his own. In time, both are drawn towards Bollywood, and they meet and form an uneasy alliance as extras or sub-artistes in the movies.

As a sequel to *Ravan and Eddie*, *The Extras* mimics much of the style of the earlier book. Nagarkar highlights on the droll and scattered aspects of Bombay life. Here is the careful, almost too obvious parallel structuring of the main characters' lives. If Ravan lies to his mother about his job with a band, Eddie pretends to be a car mechanic. Ravan is taken in by a conman who offers him a passport and a Dubai visa; at the airport he learns that Eddie has suffered the same fate. With rather excessive symbolism, Nagarkar has these aspiring movie stars dance as mirrored, chromatic opposites in an item number featuring Helen and titled *Black or White*.

The author takes things further by providing counterpoints to events from the previous book aspects of Eddie's relationship with the Auntie who runs the speakeasy, and Ravan's entry into Catholicism will seem very familiar.

The Extras is subtitled **ing Ravan & Eddie*. This brings up a recurring theme of the book is Ravan and Eddie, the stars of their own story, or are they merely the extras of the title? A conversation with a fellow extra late in the book brings the question up again.

Kiran Nagarkar asks the readers, *Is she still Mega-City Moloch and at the same time, life and death, light and darkness, stench and fragrance?*

Kiran Nagarkar follows his protagonist in the pursuit of their dream. The characters in *The Extras*, Kiran Nagarkar's sequel to his 1995 novel *Ravan & Eddie*, are a collection of oddities particular to Mumbai and the author describes them all perfectly. Two young men, a Hindu, a Christian, grow in the chawls, unsightly multi-storey apartment buildings in Bombay. Ravan works as a lowly taxi driver and Eddie earned his rupees with alcohol smuggling and illegal working in a pub.

Each person has a distinct voice; crafted out of the way Nagarkar makes them use the English language. *The Extras* is with full of fun because of the storytelling. Rather than being realistic and logical, everything in *The Extras* seems to be tilted towards the absurd. For better and for worse, that seems to sum up life in Mumbai both in reality and fiction. Ravan (actually Ram) Pawar and Eddie Coutinho still live in the same chawl but are now young men who must make a living in Mumbai. After some detours, including encounters with a nymphomaniac, a gangster and the police, Ravan ends up driving a taxi while Eddie works as a mechanic. Both of them also go to the same acting class and join the crowd of hopefuls that want a break in the

movies. After a few months, without consulting one another, both Ravan and Eddie adjust their ambitions and try to get jobs as extras, rather than cling to hopes of being noticed as potential heroes. Their first assignment has them shimmying with Helen. But life and Bollywood being what it is, there are still numerous obstacles in Ravan and Eddie's paths.

He took high-spirited follow-up to his 1975 *Ravan and Eddie* in which he depicted the continuing adventures of Ravan Pawar and Edward Coutinho who turn out to be sometimes bawdy, sometimes implausible, and almost always engaging. Nagarkar uses every variety of humour, whether it is verbal, farcical, dark—to tell a riveting story. The Asian Age comments that.... *Ravan and Eddie are back! and they are bigger, brasher and guaranteed to have you laughing louder than ever.*

Ravan Pawar, a lowly taxi driver, and Edward Coutinho, bouncer-cum-bartender at an illegal bar, the two mortal enemies, both growing up in the chawls, the four- to five-story tenements Bombay, and in the city of movie, stars named Bombay who are electrified by the glitz, glitter and glamour of Bollywood and Western rock music. They dream of strutting down the road to super-stardom. But they cannot rise from their dusty CWD chawl to the glittering heights of international fame. Their attempts to escape the confines of their origin and in the music, and finally to gain a foothold in the film industry are accompanied by setbacks and failure. While Ravan is cheated with his wedding band regularly out of their pay, and Eddie, who founded together with his gorgeous girlfriend Belle the Anglo-Indian "Bandra Bombshells," not much more successful. Yet they are uncontrollable in the confidence to realize their dreams. Shameless, shocking, uproariously funny and perceptive portraits Nagarkar his protagonists and drives them at an incredible speed through the city. Their life is extreme complicated. Even their love lives hang by a thread. Eddie, secure in having got Belle, the Anglo-Indian girl of his dreams, must now figure out how to overcome prejudice from both their families and his own apathy, in order to keep her. And Eddie's sister Pieta, the object of Ravan's adoration, is completely oblivious to his existence - until he saves her life. Complete with a cast of soul-searching drunks, a nemesis called Three Point One, and nymph-like damsels in distress, *The Extras* is much more than a book about Bollywood or Bombay. It is the engrossing tale of a near-epic struggle against obscurity and towards self-realization; and is outrageously exuberant in the telling, and touching in its depiction of the large and small tragedies that shape our lives.

One of the major shifts in *The Extras* is that the impersonal essays peter out, to be replaced with more personal accounts of the city in the form of letters from a powerful criminal with whom Ravan has become embroiled.

Their tentative friendship is expertly done there are no sudden revelations of blamelessness on either side, it is entirely organic. The Bombay of the late 1960s is fully alive, corrupt, chaotic, horrifying, violent, but also full of unexpected kindnesses. Nagarkar rarely romanticizes the city, but observes it in loving detail until the city itself is as big a presence as the main characters. We move from grim scenes of botched abortions in the red light district to comic set pieces, including one in which a character attempts to hide his venereal disease from the family visiting him in hospital.

One of the strengths of *Ravan and Eddie* was that it did not give its characters the story of protagonists, which allow the central conflicts of their lives to go unresolved. This is *The Extras* biggest departure from the previous novel. Here, Ravan and Eddie may be naïve, ignorant and prone to failure, but they can also be extraordinary. The latter half of the book is pure Bollywood

An International Multidisciplinary Research e-Journal

the meteoric rise to fame, a partnership involving a Hindu, a Christian and a Muslim; one of the characters may, even, in the face of religious difference and family opposition, get the girl in the end. Eddie stubbornly declares that they can, at least, be the stars of their own lives and in this book not named after them; Ravan and Eddie come into their own. Nagarkar asks the readers-

Is it an attempt to write a negative travel guide for India-loving Europeans and Americans? Even a social analysis? Provide a forum for the intricate and nested world of Indian sing-song film, or simply combine intricate love stories in a book?

Nagarkar takes a comprehensive look at his compatriots, they sometimes engaged in a gloomy light, showing their strengths and weaknesses, and describe the culture that combines so much. But he exaggerates. Not only in terms of film. Even when it comes to describe the world of the gods, the properties that make up the Indian taxi driver and the quirks that seem else to care for people in the Indian subcontinent. The author criticizes on caste system, education policy of India, high level of violence, strong control of the Indian Mafia and their corruptible followers. Nagarkar writes as nice as evil. It combines what he ascribes his home city of Bombay, to be both good and bad. Nagarkar writes sensitive, and is not afraid incursions back. He quotes,

Ravan did for love of Eddie's Catholic sister, do not convert to Christianity, or he was preparing to be baptized. It was simply forgotten in the next chapter. Nevertheless, a good attitude.

Nagarkar has consummate skill with which he has interwoven fact and fiction into a seamless narrative that not only grips the reader but gives a deeper insight into the lives of those struggling against unimaginable odds. He has managed to convey how Bollywood has shaped lives- by blurring the harsh contours of existence- unshackled the unconscious and transformed the darkness of real life into glittering and hopeful life. It showcases the author's profound knowledge of Mumbai and its people. The author is deliberately deploying a raised hyperbolic language to reflect the hyper reality of the protagonists.

In *The Extras*, Kiran Nagarkar leads the reader through a maze of a plot, using both humour and pathos, with rigorous language, to draw a picture both terrifyingly real and blisteringly funny.

Ravan (actually Ram) Pawar and Eddie Coutinho still live in the same chawls but are now young men who must make a living in Mumbai. After some detours, including encounters with a nymphomaniac, a gangster and the police, Ravan ends up driving a taxi while Eddie works as a mechanic. Both of them also go to the same acting class and join the crowd of hopefuls that want a break in the movies. After a few months, without consulting one another, both Ravan and Eddie adjust their ambitions and try to get jobs as extras, rather than cling to hopes of being noticed as potential heroes. Their first assignment has them shimmying with Helen. But life and Bollywood being what it is, there are still numerous obstacles in Ravan and Eddie's paths.

The Extras has some charming bits as well as sections that seem self-indulgent and unnecessary. The novel meanders and darts through events, slowing down sporadically to catch its breath. "Aunty's bars" (permit-less drinking joints), wedding bands, a jigsaw-puzzle of a chawl—Nagarkar is at his best when he writes about the world of Mumbai's middling, struggling set. His irreverence is delightful and he doesn't shy of taking the occasional pot shot at the country's political establishment. Interspersed in the novel are little essays about different

aspects of the city. In the latter half, the essays are replaced by letters written by a gangster in exile. Some of these are fun; a few seem entirely superfluous, like the poems penned by an extra that show up in the latter half of the novel.

It isn't just postcolonial politics but it is a sincere attempt of realism and credibility. Take for instance, Ravan, As a Marathi boy who grew up in a Mumbai slum and the son of a woman who makes tiffin for labourers, Ravan is unlikely to speak or think in English.

Yet, just as he had in *Ravan & Eddie*, Nagarkar uses English with wicked fluency, fashioning it to match the rhythm and tones of the languages heard on the streets of Mumbai. Nagarkar's language stands out because he doesn't use non-English words to craft his illusion. Nagarkar concludes the novel by quoting the remarks, *Extras are nothing. Zero numbers or to put it to question with Eddie's words, what makes life meaningful if it is only "the sum total of zero?"*

Thus Kiran Nagarkar has revealed the obscurity and self realization of the extras who are the real sufferers in society. Their life becomes miserable even if they have equal amount of potential as the real heroes or heroines have. But they remain ignored due to their status and poverty. They highly get disturbed by society at a greater extent which hampers on their identity. Nagarkar appeals and becomes the mouthpiece of the protagonists and asks in a convincing manner: "Are we really the extras in the movie called life?"

Works Cited:

1. Nagarkar, Kiran. *The Extras*, New Delhi: Harper Collins, India, 2012.
2. Likhmani, Yasmeen. Ed. *The Shifting Worlds of Kiran Nagarkars Fiction*, Indialog publications, New Delhi: 2004. ISBN 81-87981-59-8
3. Sanga, Jaina C. (2003). *South Asian novelists in English: an A-to-Z guide*. Greenwood Publishing Group. ISBN 0-313-31885-9.
4. Priyamvada, Gopal. *The Indian English Novel: Nation, History and Narration*. Paperback, June 29, 2009.
5. Paranjape, Makarand. 2009. *Another Canon: Indian Texts and Traditions in English*. Anthem press. pp.130-147.
6. Paranjape, Makarand. 2009. *Another Canon: Indian Texts and Traditions in English*. Anthem press. pp.130-147.
7. Bhabha, Homi. K. *The Location of Culture*. London : Routledge, 2007. Print.
8. Bharucha, Nilufer, Vrinda Nabar., ed. *Mapping Cultural Spaces*. New Delhi: Vision Books, 1998. Print.
9. Choudhury, Amit. Introduction. *The Picador Book of Modern Indian Literature*. London: Picador, 2002. xvii - xxxiv. Print.
10. Jameson, Fredric. "The politics of theory: Ideological positions in the postmodernism debate". Ed. David Lodge. *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*. N. Delhi: Pearson Education, Inc., 2007. 366 – 377. Print.
11. Wiemann, Dirk (2008). *Genres of Modernity: Contemporary Indian Novels in English*. Rodopi. pp. 131–156. ISBN 9042024933
12. Viney Kirpal (ed.), *The Postmodern Indian English Novel*, Allied Publishers, 1996
13. Nilufer E. Bharucha and Vilas Sarang (eds.), *Indian English Fiction 1980- 90: An Assessment*, B.R.Publishers, Delhi, 1994