

VERSATILITY IN KIRAN NAGARKAR'S NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE

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Abstract:

Kiran Nagarkar, one of the most significant writers of post-colonial India, in his narrative, unfolds multi-layered perspective, revealing a complex and intricate literary landscape. One of the most prominent figures in contemporary Indian literature, Kiran Nagarkar elevates his novels beyond mere fiction to enduring classics with a timeless quality. His works are marked by remarkable diversity, exploring a spectrum of values and cultural contexts while employing a variety of fictional techniques. This analysis explores the nuanced aspects of Nagarkar's narrative techniques, including the utilization of present tense, autobiographical modes, engaging novel openings, epilogues, strategic use of the second person pronoun, shifts between first and third-person perspectives, and the incorporation of idiomatic expressions. These meticulously orchestrated techniques enhance the depth of his storytelling, warranting careful examination and scholarly investigation. Central to Nagarkar's exploration is the psyche of his protagonists, as he intricately unravels their relationships and delves into introspection. The narrative perspectives and the persona's voice are projected with finesse, weaving a tapestry that mirrors the author's subjectivity. Through skilful digressions, Nagarkar adds layers of meaning, while frequent dialogues infuse vitality, making his works intellectually stimulating and inherently captivating.

Key words: Narrative Technique, interplay of past with present, multidimensional perspective, unobtrusive narrative, apprehension of reality.

Among Nagarkar's notable novels are "Saat Sakkam Trechalis" (1974), translated into English as "Seven Sixes Are Forty Three" (1978), "Ravan and Eddie" (1995), and "Cuckold" (1997), "God's Little Soldier" (2004) and "The Extras" (2012) each enrich Nagarkar's storytelling, demonstrating his writing skill in navigating narrative intricacies and societal critique. Despite his substantial literary accomplishments, it's found to be unfortunate that his literary work is somewhat undervalued, highlighting the necessity for a more thorough appreciation of his influential contributions to English literature.

Kiran Nagarkar's narrative skill is distinguished by precise and insightful observations on human behaviour, spirituality, religion, and the complexities of political and social morality. His narratives avoid coarseness, opting instead for sensuous prose that aims to provoke a deeper understanding of human desires. Nagarkar's artistry lies in imbuing his stories with multiple layers, blending philosophical, historical, and spiritual dimensions. An exemplary instance of this mastery is found in his novel "Cuckold," a historical novel set in the Rajput kingdom of Mewar, India, where various tones and styles converge seamlessly. The narrative voice shifts from vivid and provocative satire aimed at those who limit historical fiction to mere period pieces, to scenes of absolute realism, and culminates in breathtakingly beautiful and serene descriptions of landscapes.



Kiran Nagarkar distinguishes himself through his adept blending of history with action, nuanced character studies, and profound philosophical reflections throughout his novels. This synthesis results in a compelling and immersive reading journey, where readers are drawn into the unfolding narrative while also encouraged to reflect on the profound layers of meaning woven into his storytelling. He skilfully intertwines past and present perspectives, providing readers with a dual lens through which they can perceive historical events in a contemporary context. This narrative technique expands our current understanding by offering insights and comprehension gleaned from historical contexts.

In his novel "Cuckold" (1997), Kiran Nagarkar transports readers to 16th-century Mewar, immersing them in the political and social dynamics of that era. This historical setting contrasts with "Ravan and Eddie" (1995), where Hindu and Christian boys from the lower class navigate life in a contemporary urban chawl system. The juxtaposition of these two distinct time periods and social environments not only deepens the narrative but also prompts readers to draw connections and parallels between the past and present. Nagarkar skilfully integrates these different temporal and social layers, enhancing the reading experience and providing a nuanced understanding of the complexities inherent in both historical and modern contexts.

In Nagarkar's writing, the narrative perspective and the persona's voice are pivotal elements. As Burger aptly states, "Perspective makes the single eye the center of the visible world. The center shifts and changes as the perspective changes," highlighting the dynamic nature of perspective in storytelling. Nagarkar adeptly employs narrative perspectives to facilitate a multifaceted exploration of the story. The persona's voice, whether first-person, third-person, or another narrative style, acts as a lens through which readers perceive the events and characters. This shifting perspective enriches the narrative by revealing different aspects of the story and its characters. Nagarkar's manipulation of narrative perspective creates a nuanced portrayal of central themes and characters, contributing to the depth of his storytelling. It enables readers to engage with the narrative from diverse viewpoints, fostering a deeper understanding of the complexities within the narrative world.

In "Ravan and Eddie," Kiran Nagarkar employs a third-person narrative style to depict the events of the storyline. The central characters, Ravan and Eddie, are depicted as action-oriented individuals primarily dedicated to honing their physical skills and mastering specific activities. While they are portrayed as non-intellectual and non-introspective, the narrative underscores their deep passion for music.

In contrast, "Seven Sixes Are Forty-Three" adopts a first-person narrative style. Protagonists such as Kushank Purandare and others openly reveal their personalities, loneliness, desires, and uncertainties. This narrative technique enables a profound exploration of the characters' inner lives, encouraging introspection and self-examination.

Description of characters' psyche is an important factor in the novels of Nagarkar. 'Seven Sixes are Forty-Three' goes profound in this description. It is widely accepted that the idiosyncratic characters are defeated individuals in social milieus well as in their individual capacity. They are neurotic or abnormal in their behaviour, and thus, a misfit in social relationship, and they prefer living in their own world. Had it not been the case, it would not



been relevant for the narrator Kushank Purandare. Nagarkar highlights the cultural transformation into modernity in terms of extra marital relationship. Kushank having read certain books and seen films, recalls his self-respect and makes self-assessment in his own words, as, "*I will be damned if I am going to play the other man. And anyway, I hate playing Platonic fiddles to anyone.*" (p 45) He thus feels a sort of remorse as well as frustration of his love for Aaroti, who has reached the stage of a married and happy family life.

This idea of choice, at philosophical level in relation to psychological studies on human existence, has been well interpreted by a world-famous philosopher Jean Paul Sartre, as "*Everything is choice.*" Sartre feels that man is free to make his own choices and is condemned in the truth that he is free. All that man does in his life is for the sake of existence. What man needs to know is to find himself again and to understand that nothing can save him from himself, not even valid proof of God, the existence of God? In this sense, the existentialism is optimistic; it is a doctrine of action, and it is only by self-deception. It should not be misunderstood that man is responsible for what he is. As an impact of existentialism, every man is in possession of himself as he is and carries on his own shoulders the responsibility of his own existence. Existentialism gives birth to the subjectivity and individuality of human existence.

In "Cuckold," Nagarkar employs a fluid transition between the protagonist's viewpoint and the narrator's perspective. Both Maharaj Kumar and the Princess are portrayed as highly sensitive individuals deeply concerned about potential adversities. By utilizing first-person narration, Nagarkar emphasizes introspection and self-examination, delving into the characters' psychological intricacies and sensibilities. This narrative approach enables Nagarkar to intimately explore the protagonists' inner worlds, establishing a profound link between their experiences and the author's own insights.

The transition from third person to first person narration enhances the complexity of Nagarkar's works, offering multiple perspectives for readers to immerse themselves in the narrative. In "Ravan and Eddie," the third-person narrative occasionally gives way to first-person segments, such as when Eddie overhears his grandmother encouraging his mother to remarry. These shifts enrich Nagarkar's storytelling, adding layers of depth and complexity that create a rich and intricate reading experience.

Kiran Nagarkar utilizes deliberate authorial intrusions as a unique narrative technique, intentionally interrupting the story to prompt readers to reflect on ethical, social, and cultural matters. These intrusions, often presented as digressions, introduce compelling elements that enhance engagement with the novel.

He simultaneously employs exuberant humour and wit, effectively anchoring the central narrative while utilizing digressions as a vehicle for his own subjectivity. In a sense, these digressions mirror second-person narration, where the narrator steps out of the storyline to directly engage with readers. Nagarkar adeptly integrates diverse topics within these digressions, including the Indian obsession with fair skin, the loss of human dignity in chawls, and reflections on language. These elements are seamlessly interwoven into the fabric of the narrative itself, enriching the reading experience and inviting readers to delve into the broader



social and cultural contexts explored by the author.

Kiran Nagarkar intricately integrates reflective moments into his characters' lives, offering glimpses into their circumstances and lifestyles. An example of this is the parallel paths followed by two boys, each navigating their own journeys yet converging toward a common destination. Nagarkar focuses our attention on the dreams and visions of Ravan and Eddie. Ravan, in particular, experiences two significant dreams: one where he imagines himself as Krishna playfully interacting with the Sarang girls, and another where he envisions himself floating freely with a kite. These dreams provide fresh insights into Ravan's character. In contrast, Eddie grapples with the challenge of fabricating stories for Father Agnello and confessing forbidden acts, while both boys confront the impact of encountering Shobhan, who tragically took her own life. This struggle intertwines sinuous grace, haunting beauty, and a quest for power and harmony.

Moreover, the intricate use of pronouns later in the narrative suggests a nuanced approach to character portrayal, evident in Nagarkar's novel "Cuckold." The princess is alternately referred to as both "she" and "I," enabling readers to delve into her thoughts through first-person insights. Conversely, Maharaj Kumar is described using "he" and "you," shaping the narrative to offer insights into both his viewpoint and his relationship with the princess. These authorial choices reflect Maharaj Kumar's perspective in the storytelling, adding to the multi-layered complexity of character perspectives within the narrative.

The integration of free indirect speech stands out as a significant narrative technique in Nagarkar's writing. This approach effectively blurs the distinction between third-person and first-person chapters, aligning them more closely. The narrator's objectivity intertwines with the characters' perspectives, enabling a smooth shift from third person to first person.

This narrative approach demonstrates the protagonist's voice seamlessly blending with that of the narrator. The narrator articulates thoughts while considering the character's viewpoint, presenting the protagonist's narration through the narrator's voice. Occasionally, this technique merges both the protagonist's and narrator's thoughts, creating a layered and nuanced narrative that offers readers simultaneous insights from multiple angles. This fusion of perspectives enriches the depth and complexity of the storytelling, offering readers a more immersive and multifaceted reading experience.

In Nagarkar's novels, the narrator's perspectives mirror the emotions and sentiments of the characters. Throughout his works, Nagarkar directly addresses readers, prompting them to engage thoughtfully and perceive the protagonists from both external and internal viewpoints. His writing is characterized by humour and wit, demonstrating a special talent that imbues his novels with exceptional vitality and a distinctive form of dark humour. Despite their comedic elements, Nagarkar's narratives affirm life. Humour, especially, serves to create a sense of detachment between the events and the characters.

For example, in "Seven Sixes Are Forty-Three," detached humour is exemplified through the character of Kushank Purandare, who, during his hospital stay, makes astute observations that inject a touch of lightness into the narrative.



In "Cuckold," Kiran Nagarkar employs a narrative strategy where Maharaj Kumar's wry reflections and self-deprecations create different levels of emotional distance from the readers. This consistent tone serves as a cohesive thread throughout the novel, echoing the protagonist's thoughts, emotions, and behaviours. The tone also serves as a conduit for wit and humour, bridging the gap between the author's real-life persona and both the authorial voice and the protagonist.

Furthermore, Nagarkar employs another narrative technique: the ironic use of epigraphs. Presented exclusively in the third person, these epigraphs serve to diminish the gravity of the issues addressed in the story. Nagarkar adeptly channels the protagonist's feelings and perspectives through these epigraphs, often expressing both the narrator and the author in their distinct voices. The irony within the epigraphs serves as a juxtaposition to the intensity and seriousness of the themes explored in the narrative, thereby enhancing the complexity and depth of the storytelling.

Nagarkar also integrates songs within third-person chapters, deeply engaging with arguments and conflicts. These songs, featured in chapters 8, 12, and 25, enrich the narrative's texture. In chapters 15 and 24, the songs shift to the first person, offering insights into the narrative's meanings. Notably, Maharaj Kumar's final song at Bruhannada's funeral pyre is from the Gita, maintaining a solemn and restrained tone that reflects the profound paradox of life and death accepted in tradition. In contrast, the princess's songs serve as supplements and a way to reflect on life.

The soul is never born, it does not ever die; Never having come to be, it will never cease to be Unborn, immortal, perennial, the pristine soul Survives even after the body is slain. (546) The use of letters is another significant technique in Nagarkar's novels, as seen in "Cuckold." Letters diary entries propel the narrative forward, the eyes of Maharaj Kumar, offering variety in presentation to characters through t Letters from characters like Kausalya, Leelavati, Mangal, Rana, and excerpts from Babur's diary contribute to the multifaceted storytelling.

"I'm leaving, Prince. There is no place in Mewar for a murderess, nor even a failed one. But neither can I stand by and watch your fall. I pray that you'll prove me wrong. Your servant, Kausalya." (600)

Kiran Nagarkar's storytelling technique showcases his natural prowess as both a storyteller and a thinker. His vibrant talent and unique stylistic approach mark him as a true innovator. Nagarkar blends a keen storytelling instinct with an expansive imagination, tackling diverse contemporary themes and consistently aiming to provoke unconventional enjoyment in his narratives. His universal perspective, paired with his narrative brilliance, captivates readers across his body of work.

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