

Delineation of Male Characters: A Meninism Perspective in Kiran Nagarkar's *Jasoda*

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Abstract—Gender norms have been examined as a women's issue in the 21st century. While the position of men is always problematic, they appear to be the cause of the protagonist's hardships in fiction. The intersection of patriarchy in fiction demeans mature male characters and asserts that males are the source of oppressive hegemonic masculinity. The modern society must recognise neglected masculine characters in literature. The primary objective of this paper is to highlight the neglected gender in society and literature. Meninism is underrepresented and functions in isolation, even in literature, and this must be acknowledged. The female characters in *Jasoda* by Kiran Nagarkar are powerful, independent, and supportive, but the male characters are hegemonic and dominant. In novels that focus on women, the male position of privilege is emphasised while the expectations he carries go unacknowledged. Despite increased freedom in society, gender equality is affected by societal misunderstandings about meninism. Gender equality focuses on the oppression of women, while society ignores the suffering of the other gender. This study is an attempt to express the unspoken grief of masculine identity in women-centric literature.

Index Terms—gender studies, meninism, gender inequality, feminism, modern society

I. INTRODUCTION

The men's movement emerged as a social movement in 1960s and 1970s, particularly in Western countries, and is made up of men and their supporters who focus on gender issues and engage in activities ranging from self-help and support to lobbying and activism. The men's movement is made up of a number of movements with diverse and generally conflicting ideals. Important aspects of the men's movement include masculinism, the pro-feminist men's movement, the mythopoetic men's movement, the men's rights movement, and the Christian men's movement, most notably exemplified by the Promise Keepers. Many men's organizations, such as the National Coalition for Men, were founded in response to second-wave feminism beginning in the 1970s. Although the term meninism is relatively new, many of the beliefs it represents are old. Meninism as a term is a twitter originated movement, initially began with sharing jokes that feminists found insulting. Supporters, though, argue that it has evolved into a platform for men to voice their struggles with masculinity. Meninism is an aspect of identity both psychologically critical and socially essential. It examines what it means to be a man in contemporary society. According to urban dictionary, "Meninism is a belief or ideology that men in society are in some cases oppressed and it is focusing on the discrimination of men in the 21st century".

Meninism is not modern society demonstrates in literature whereas the realm of narrative is imaginary. It is always misrepresented. The society has created boundaries, not only for women but also for men under gender norms which cannot be ignored. Gender norms are structured and it is sensible for women in the society. There are stories in literature which reflects the sufferings of women in the gender identity crisis. When it comes to male identity, the images and characters portray the patriarchal hegemony as their rooted form of meninism. But men are also marginalized and that should be noted. Meninism is not monolithic, it is diverse. It is impossible to address male identity within the framework of patriarchal hegemony. The rise of the feminist movement led to improve the status of women. Indian constitution offered equal rights which changed the attitude of women in the family as well as in the society. Women writers in pre-independence had portrayed poverty and hunger whereas women centric novels exposed the position of women in the society. On the other side, men are the forgotten gender and their sufferings go unnoticed. The representation of men in literature is not touched even in this 21st century. This article decenters male characters in women centric novel.

Sahithya Akademi winner Kiran Nagarkar was one of the prolific Indian writers, novelist and playwright. He was one of the significant writers of postcolonial India and his works target the political criticism which involves irreverence alongside seriousness. Kiran Nagarkar illuminates various problems of postcolonial India in humanitarian language. His novels pay tribute to Indian tradition, religion, styles, and issues. Kiran Nagarkar was a bilingual writer of English and Marathi. His writings were brilliant and thought-provoking. He speaks nationalism and mainly focuses on Indian culture. His work describes the crushing realities of downtrodden and deprived people. Kiran Nagarkar wrote his first novel in

Marathi *Saat Sakkam Trechalis* in 1974 and later it was translated into English by Shubha Slee as *Seven sixes are forty-three*, in this novel he cleverly portrait the identity crisis of the protagonist Kushank Purandare. In 1994 he wrote *Ravan and Eddie* his first novel in English. This work earned him fame and attention among the writers and readers. In 1997 *Cuckold* was published. It is a historical novel, narrating the life of Maharaj Kumar, based on the real-life Prince Bhoj Raj. This novel received Sahitya Akademi Award in the year 2001. His novel *Jasoda* was published in the year 2017 and long-listed for JCB prize for the literature. It is a story of a rural woman battling in the patriarchal society. Nayantara Sahgal states that “*Jasoda* is as compelling and powerful as Nagarkar’s other novels but uniquely itself in the gut-wrenching story it tells of the sordid uses of power, the suffering it causes, and the human spirit that rises about it” (Nagarkar, 2017, Cover copy). The author took two decades to complete the novel.

Women centric novels in Indian literature have widespread assumptions that men are the conspiracy keepers of the patriarchal order. Whereas their own image has been fashioned by patriarchal mechanism, in which men find their way out in the form of suicide. This paper argues that women centric novels portray the hegemonic male characters which decenter the psychological and sociological problems of being a man in this twenty-first century.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Latha Anantharaman’s article “She who shrug and carries on: *Jasoda*” in a popular newspaper *The Hindu* says, it is a story of every woman who are struggling in a rock and finds a way to blossom. It gives a transformation of *Jasoda* and her surge from patriarchal society. The path travelled by the character, *Jasoda* and her children to survive in the face of oppression and excruciating poverty is described in the novel.

A research paper titled, ‘Animalising and Mechanising Self-Determined Women Characters Regardless of their Class structure in *Jasoda*- A Feministic Perspective’ studies *Jasoda* under a broad light of social discourse that represent social reality and oppression. This paper focuses on animalisation and mechanisation of female body and states patriarchal domination take control over women. Even though women are resilient nowadays, regardless of their class and caste, female characters are still oppressed and treated as objects. This research exemplifies the life struggles of every female character regardless of social class and caste in this novel.

III. REPRESENTATION OF HEGEMONIC MALE CHARACTERS

The novel *Jasoda* is a journey of a rural women battling in the patriarchal society. *Jasoda* is the story of a rural woman battling for patriarchy. She lives in a fictional village called Kantagiri, the capital of the state of Paar. Sangram Singh, *Jasoda*’s husband, is employed in Paar’s royal palace. Sangram Singh is a greedy, rude, and selfish person who doesn’t care about his family but is aware of his rights as a man of the house and knows when to exercise them. He naturally takes advantage of the ladies, and his only goal is to gain the favor of the Prince of Paar. *Jasoda* and her family are among the remaining few to leave the drought-stricken town of Paar in search of a better life somewhere else. The story progresses with *Jasoda* having children, bearing all the hardships to raise them, and switching between Mumbai and Paar to ensure their survival.

“*Jasoda* tightened her anal muscles. She squeezed her thighs together hard till her face swelled and the veins in her temples bulged out. She did not let go till the girl was still” (p. 3).

The birth rate of female children was inversely proportional to the birth rate of male children. When girl child born in society, they are not welcomed even by their mothers. When *Jasoda* gives birth to a girl child, she strangles the child to death without any misery for the dead child. This shows that gender rules are framed by the society in order to maintain the patriarchal structure. In many Indian communities, female infanticide was widespread. The sad part is that even women in the patriarchal society promote hegemonic masculinism which has been inherited to their son right from childhood. Society plays a major role in developing patriarchy. The novel captures the dark side of globalized Indian village which is subjugated by caste and patriarchy. Kiran Nagarkar incorporated the gender inequalities of being a woman in his character *Jasoda*. He offers profound insights into the arena of the exploited domination. His male characters are created with flaws and they are the one who create problems to the women protagonist.

The antagonist of this novel is Sangram Singh, husband of *Jasoda*. Sangram Singh’s character set an example of toxic meninism. When *Jasoda* fails to complete the domestic chores, she was beaten and battered by her husband daily.

After becoming the lord of Alakanda Palace, Sangram Singh marries Madhurima Devi to compensate his position and status. He desperately wants a male heir to inherit his name and Wealth. When the princess gives birth to a girl child, he kills the child. He refuses to accompany *Jasoda* and his family when they migrated to Mumbai due to drought. Sangram Singh is an epitome of dominance and power.

King Parbat Singh is the Prince of Kantagiri. Prince and Princess Sunanda Devi were happy in their marriage life. But it was wearing off in the couple of years. When princess was unable to perform her prime duty as a woman even though she fasted and visited temples but it all became futile. Kiran Nagarkar visualized the patriarchal superiority through the character Sangram Singh and Parbat Singh. Both the characters are driven by a deep desire for power and dominance. The prince murders his brother to become a prince of Alakanda palace. Similarly, when Parbat Singh is paralyzed, Sangram Singh attempted to murder the prince. Due to starvation and a terrible drought, all the other servants were forced to leave the area, leaving the prince alone and dependent on Sangram Singh. By coercing and blackmailing

the prince, Sangram Singh takes advantage of the situation to fake and transfer the king's possessions into his name. Due to poor health and his desire to see Raat Rani, Prince Parbat Singh later passes away. When it comes to the king's possessions and the queen's beauty, Sangram Singh has a wicked mentality. The beauty of the queen attracts him. As she learns that the prince was the target of Sangram Singh, he kidnaps her and imprisons her underground. He "locked her up in one of the rooms in the cellar. The rooms had no window and no light and it was always locked" (pp. 194-196). He manipulates her and demands payment in the form of her body and treats her like an object. So, she hangs herself from the ceiling fan after being subjected to a number of tortures and struggles.

"Please don't do this to me. I can't take it anymore ... I'll do anything you want... But I can't live another day without the sun and fresh air and the sky and the moon" (pp. 196-198).

In addition to Sangram Singh, the Prince also humiliates Raat Rani. She signs a secret contract at the prince's pleading, and when the prince intervenes in her affairs, she always refuses. She fights against Parbat Singh stating "You begged and pleaded, cajoled and coaxed me from your hospital bed to give up my cushy life with a leading industrialist to come to this godforsaken hellhole." This incident provides a detailed picture of how the characters, Sangram Singh and Parbat Singh in the novel create and maintain patriarchal system and how this impacts the other female characters.

It is naturalized and antagonistic male voices are over heard in women centric novel. Patriarchal meninism has binary characteristics in which society plays major role in developing power and dominance. It is also clear at the ways in which Sangram Singh uses power and privilege to his own advantage. "The dominant people will do every tactic including violence and abuse to make their labors work effectively and efficiently" mentioned in the book *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (Scott, 1990). To prove the above-mentioned statement, Sangram Singh uses his patriarchal power over Jasoda, Prince Parbat Singh, Savitri, Raat Rani and finally pushes his dominance over his daughter Janhavi.

IV. DELINEATING MARGINALIZED MALE CHARACTERS

"Gender studies is an interdisciplinary academic field devoted to analyzing gender identity and gendered representation". Meninism is not widely known because gender studies emerged after the second wave of feminism and mostly addressed women's issues. Meninism focuses on the difficulties men face in this contemporary world. It is plural and diverse form of gender identity in which men's issues are negotiated in many contexts. "Hegemonic masculinity" is a concept popularized by Raewyn Connell, as an ideal form of masculinity which remains unattainable for most men. Men are the victims of their patriarchal stereotype and they are marginalized as well. Literature promotes patriarchal heroism and the lack of importance towards men's issue contradicts social world. In those days women were worshipped as deities but in recent days crime against women was increasing day by day. In Patriarchal society men hold the power in the family. For many centuries women were deliberately denied the opportunities of growth in the name of religion and traditional customs. They restricted women's freedom of expression and freedom of movement. An Indian woman right from their birth is expected to obey men's rule and serve them without question. There is violence in our society because people are taught to value dominance and power regardless of self-identity and humanity. Society indirectly encourages men to behave rude by expecting them to adhere strictly to gender traits. The character study on meninism will help men and women to understand gender performances and problems of gender norms.

Kiran Nagarkar tries to delineate the hegemonic part of male identity, but literature fails to notice the mature masculine character in every women-centric novel. In women-centric novel, one can often find a dominant male character who ill-treats his wife and support polygamy. There are other types of prejudice that result in similar oppression. The character Dulare suffered from caste discrimination as well as from patriarchal stereotype. Dulare is an untouchable, who borrowed Sangram Singh's goat, Lakhan. When Dulare borrows an ox from Sangram Singh to plough his land, things get difficult for him. Sadly, a tragic outcome results from the old, frail bull lying dead on the ground. Dulare feeds his neighborhood and distributes the meat with them owing to his poverty. Sangram Singh, to his regret, learned about this and plans to assassinate Dulare. Dulare hides in a well in order to run for his life. Sangram Singh hires a guard beside the well since he knows where Dulare is hiding. Sangram Singh had a physical relationship with Dulare's wife Savitri. On the other hand, he had no interest in the relationship with the woman of a lower caste. Even though Dulare is aware of their physical relationship, his inferiority complex keeps him in the dark chambers of uncharted fears.

"How come we are untouchables and you are not? How come it's the rainy season and there's not been a drop? How come, how come? Because nobody expects God to be just or reasonable" (p. 41).

Women-centric plays aim to understand the social situation of women in the cultural sphere by putting this comparable combination of women, violence, and patriarchy on stage. The theory of Feminism should not exclusively apply for the factor which focusses mainly on the sufferings of women rather should concentrate on the marginalization based on sexuality, caste and class. Fiction, especially women centric novels, have a tendency to portray men by characterizing them uniformly as patriarchy's representatives, without acknowledging that meninism as a gender in India also needs to shed the rigid, iron-cast image that hegemonic patriarchal practices have created for masculinity in India over the years. Thus, the matter remains unresolved because men themselves fit into the category of gender stereotypes.

At the end, Dulare's wife Savitri killed him in order to save her life. Dulare's character is an epitome and example of untouchable men in the society which clearly depicts those men are also the victims of the patriarchal stereotypes. Society not only makes women inferior but also some men from inescapable discrimination. He is a character that embodies many of the ideals of meninism. He is a man who is struggling to break free of the traditional gender roles that have been imposed on him by society. The full story of Dulare's life emphasizes the existence of a poor, defenseless farmer who was forced to death.

The novel revolves around the two male characters, Sangram Singh and Himmat respectively. The beginning of the novel takes place in Kantagiri where domestic violence and marital rape were common to the women in the rural village. The protagonist Jasoda is an everyday heroine and a dutiful wife. Sangram Singh is very abusive and cunning man who never takes responsibility of his family. He promotes female infanticide. Sangram Singh is an epitome of immature masculinity. Himmat is an epitome of mature meninism. Himmat, the eldest son of Jasoda was studious and acts out domineering towards women. He watched the cycle of birth and death of a girl child, which created an impact within him. He is the only person who protects his sister from female infanticide and he insists on educating Janhavi so she was sent to school. So Himmat is matured enough to not promote female infanticide and he hates domestic violence.

"Himmat was holding Janhavi in one arm and a large knife from his mother's collection in the other when Jasoda and the man came in again" (p. 205).

When Jasoda gives birth to a girl child, she tries to kill her but it was forbidden by Himmat because he watched the birth and death of a girl child so he never promotes female infanticide. In the beginning of the novel, patriarchy is the predominant social concept which supported men and suppressed women. Gender roles are constructed to protect men so Sangram Singh wanted a male heir. In Mumbai, he got two patrons Cawas Batliwala and Suyog Gadgil. Cawas Batliwala is a Lawyer. With their help he resumes his school and started working in the office for part time. After their return to Kantagiri, Himmat joined English medium school in Sharana. He assures that Janhavi's education is important and taught arithmetic, algebra, geometry and English.

"Himmat played chess with Janhavi and taught her that arithmetic was nothing but games and riddles. She was fluent in English since it was the only language in which her eldest brother conversed with her" (p. 210).

"Please don't ask me to elaborate on the subject but Janhavi's education will suffer or perhaps even be halted if I am not here" (p. 223).

Later, Himmat becomes a renowned young Mathematician in Stanford University. In this novel, Himmat's character is marginalized and unrecognized. Character like Himmat and Dulare has had a profound impact in the society of male oppression. It illustrates how meninism can be used in a right way to challenge oppressive gender roles and expectations. These two characters are capable of making their own choices and does not fall into the hegemonic character despite, the appearance of toxic meninism fashioned the minds of the society. Himmat, Dulare, Cawas Batliwala and Suyog Gadgil are the mature male characters mostly focused in this paper. These male characters are not affected by the values that the patriarchal culture has created. Despite all the unexpected tragedies, these men with strong personalities continue to be a nice people. It proves, with these characters, the patriarchal ideals and standards seem unworthy.

V. CONCLUSION

The portrayal of women in literature is not biased nowadays. In the 20th century, women were given equal opportunity in many fields which cannot be denied. Fiction is actively decentering male characters whereas gender studies excluded and ignored men's issue. The beginning of the story *Jasoda* and its ending is separated by two-decade-long gap so the changes in human lifestyle, gender equality, women empowerment and evolution of Indian society were clearly brought out in the novel. It clearly reiterates that the ideology of gender stereotypes created catalytic impact on contemporary men so the patriarchal hegemony is replaced by mature meninism. Gendered shelves are shaped right from their birth. Since childhood, everyone is imposed with lot of gender stereotypes. In order to project patriarchy, men are not allowed to cry, because it questions his masculinity. Men and women in the society are forced to carry the burden of oppression. Gender inequality is one among them and every gender has to face discrimination in different ways. Because of the nonsensical stereotypes, both men and women are facing oppression. Meninism is often represented as an unsympathetic identity in contrast, contemporary men are victims of their own patriarchal stereotype. It is impossible to understand meninism within the framework of literary text, because they are often one sided. It is an early modern ideology which cannot be found in just literary texts. Literature never made serious discussion on the topic of male identity and their sufferings in the contemporary society. Mostly women-centric novels focus on the negative traits of male character and female characters are victimized. So, women-centric novels should come up with more mature and supportive male characters. Society should understand that men also suffer both psychologically and sociologically from gender norms. Though men try to understand the reality of the modern consumer world, the society threatens them with exclusion for failing to follow the gender norms.

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