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•Vikram Nagar, Boudhi Chouk, Latur.  
•Tq. Latur, Dis. Latur 413512  
•(+91) 9922455749, (+91) 9158387437

Email

•aiirjpramod@gmail.com

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**Gender Discrimination in Kiran Nagarkar's *Seven Sixes Are Forty Three* and Rama Mehta's *Inside the Haveli***

**Kamalakar Baburao Gaikwad**

Assistant Professor,  
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 is one of the courageous and creative novelists who depict the harsh realities of oppressed in Indian society. His novels basically speak about fanaticism, extremism, existentialism, quest for identity, gender violence, alienation, untouchability, conflicts etc. Rama Mehta, a recipient of Sahitya Akademi Award and a renowned Indian sociologist is always remembered for her masterpiece Inside the Haveli (1977). Her novels basically focuses on various themes such as feministic perspectives, conflict between tradition and modernity, psychology of new educated woman, injury and progress of women, redefining relationship, silence and adjustment, inner journey, gender and culture, and woman's acceptance of divorce.*

*The main objective of this paper is to portray and concentrate on the theme like gender discrimination and domestic violence in Kiran Nagarkar's novel Seven Sixes Are Forty Three and Rama Mehta's Inside the Haveli. Both reveal the tragic situations of the ordinary people in general and women in particular. They emphasizes on the victimization of women on the account of their gender. The women in these novels are observed as the victims of domestic violence in male patriarchy. They are tremendously humiliated and exploited in the dominant power structure of the society.*

**Key words:** Domestic violence, gender, culture, modernity, poverty, conflicts, depression, humiliation, sufferings and disappointments, patriarchy, self-immolation, ill-treatment, marginalization etc.

**Gender Discrimination in Kiran Nagarkar's *Seven Sixes Are Forty Three*:**

The term gender discrimination means a situation in which someone is treated less well because of their sex, usually when a woman is treated less well than a man. The term domestic violence and emotional abuse refers to behaviours used by one person in a relationship to control the other. Partners may be married or not married; homosexual, gay or lesbian; living together, separated or dating. Violence can be criminal and include physical assault- hitting, pushing, shoving, sexual abuse and stalking. We can say emotional, psychological and financial abuse can lead to criminal violence.

Kiran Nagarkar's *Seven Sixes Are Forty Three* (1978) is an autobiographical novel. This novel is the translated version of *Saat Sakkam Trechalis* (1974). Nagarkar's concern in this text is about



the lives, experiences, beliefs, attitudes and practices of the people who are victims of starvation, death and utter hopelessness. They are always humiliated and exploited by the rich people in the society. There is hardly any hope of redemption for them. As Adelman comments, “Women are given physical as well as mental torture. They can either tolerate any one of them. Especially physical tortures deal with the body such as isolation, sexual violence, physical violence and mental torture to the mind (such as emotional abuse, intimidation and threats)” (Adelman 2005: 194). At the same time Masselos asserts about the subjugation of women, “Women are subjugated and It is shown that neither religion nor socio-political ideologies have answers to their problems of “illness, starvation, death, and hopelessness” (Masselos 1981: foreword). Nagarkar has portrayed a gloomy presentation of reality of the downtrodden and underprivileged people and their crushing realities. He has described their plight and sufferings through this text. Especially he has exposed the gender discrimination and domestic violence in existing human society of lower strata. Nagarkar renders the theme of discrimination, subjugation and oppression of women on the account of gender. He shows how women become victim of domestic violence in this novel. Domestic violence is actually the result of male patriarchy. He visualizes the autocratic operation of patriarchal and masculine ideologies which creates the imbalance of power in a given social setup. In this male dominated society, women are the real sufferers who are denied to live a meaningful and dignified life. They are continuously tortured and dominated by males. Their voice is crushed down under the heavy burden of male patriarchy. Nagarkar draws special attention regarding gender discrimination and domestic violence through three major incidences of the prescribed novel. Self-immolation of Pratibha, Mr. Kathwate’s ill treatment with his daughters and Chandani and Kushank Purandare: Victims of male dominated society.

#### **a. Self-immolation of Pratibha:**

The word self immolation means the offering of oneself as a sacrifice, especially by burning; such suicidal action in the name of a cause or strongly held belief. Nagarkar focuses on the fact what causes Pratibha for self immolation. By weaving this thread, the novel opens with a shocking scene of violence and dominance. Ajit dominates his wife Pratibha in the novel. One day, he came home in drinking condition. As soon as he entered, Pratibha shut the door quickly after him so that inner matters should not reveal outside. At first, he started slapping and beating to his mother. He gives a slinging slap across her face. Later on, Ajit mercilessly beat his wife Pratibha. He’d hit her whenever he flew into a rage, with whatever came to hand, wherever he could lay his blows. (1) While beating to his mother and wife, Ajay felt like a king. He behaves as if he is the lord of the whole world. Here we witness his rude and arrogant behaviour. Being a member of artificial hierarchy of patriarchy, Ajit considers that it is his birth right to treat the women abusively and brutally. In fact, Ajit has to take care of his family, provide them safety and security. Instead we find him torturing his family. He proves a nuisance for them. He is the master of cruelty and abuse. Instead of treating Pratibha as a dignified human being and a citizen with equal human rights, Ajit regards his wife as a ‘subhuman domestic worker with a body to please him’ (Barker 2010: 442, with partial adaptations). Pratibha is treated no more than as an object or a property by her husband: Mounting her pulpy body after the thrashing would really thrill him. Spasm on spasm of dripping satisfaction. She, limply reluctant and tired, and he, worn out with all that effort. (1) Nagarkar focuses on patience and submissiveness of female characters. Despite of all torture, Pratibha is submissive to her husband. Even Ajit’s mother is a

symbol of mute. Whenever she opens her mouth, she gets merciless beating. Both these women act as mute spectators, robbed of their rights and inferior dignity in their own home. However Pratibha's patience comes to an end. She is really fed up with this routinely inhumane treatment given by her husband. Finally, she raised her resisting voice and threatened him to burn herself. The utterance made by Pratibha was ignored by Ajit. He boasts about his right of patriarchy. He disdainfully teases his wife and wants to show his male dominion. In return of this, he rebukes and abuses her to a great extent. Later on, Pratibha poured a bottle of kerosene over herself. Soon she was engulfed into red flames. She begins to scream and tries to embrace Ajit. She ran here and there for help. But nobody come for her help. Ajit was the real witness of the incidence. Being a husband, he should show favour for Pratibha. Instead he pushed her away and tried to escape from her and shouts. Now her body was very badly burnt. But it was too late to repent. She hung on to the doctor's arm with all her strength. She kept on asking the doctor about her husband and children. She showed her intense desire for life to the doctor. Three days later, Pratibha died. Her husband wept and shed tears for her.

Nagarkar highlights the victimization of Indian women despite their ill treatment by male dominated society. Pratibha's identity is deeply grounded in Indian attitude towards motherhood and marriage. She sees a woman's value in looking after her children and her duty in adapting to her husband. That's why she even goes to the extent of forgiving her husband, ignoring the fact that Ajit is responsible for her doom. "Before she went into a comma" (5) and eventually died, "she made a statement that she had tried to commit suicide because of an incurable illness" (5). Prof. Veena Das comments on self-destroying subjectivity of Indian woman, "Rather than bearing a witness to the disorder they had been subjected to the metaphor they used was a woman drinking the poison and keeping it within her: just as a woman's body is made so that she can hide the faults of her husband deep within her, so she can drink all the pain – take the stance of silence (Das 1997: 85). When Kushank tells her of Pratibha's death, she expresses no sense of shock and grief. She rather thinks that it is Pratibha who created misunderstanding between her and her son Ajit. She says: "My Ajit was such a sweet boy untills she arrived. He was even scared of mice when he was a child. Still is. (5) The mother thinks that Pratibha's untimely and unnatural death is a God's revenge upon her as she (Pratibha) was a major source of her troubles and miseries. "So be it. Tormenting an old woman, and what did she get out of it? It's like a judgment from heaven. God is always fair, that's what I say. You can't get away with it, not for ever. It comes to all of us". (5) She even refuses to come home back to mourn Pratibha's death. As far as Ajit's mother's mental make-up is concerned, she is completely unaware about patriarchal ideology, which has turned her blind-folded to see any fault in her son. On the contrary, she nurtures a strong sense of hostility towards Pratibha and believes that Pratibha has had a bad influence upon her son. Ajit could have become a civilized person if his mother would have kept a vigil on his psychological formation, so that such a worst incidence would not have been taken place. It is however to be noticed that Ajit's mother herself being deprived of all the cultural resources and riches, she has to depend on her brother for her survival if not on her son. Thus, on account of their gendered position in the society, they – both Pratibha and her mother-in-law – have come to acquire a marginalized status. Aggressive behavior which is encouraged to be cultivated by all at home, including the women, will not be limited to men's behavior outside home. It will eventually percolate through to their relations with their wives, daughters and even sons and other male dependents. Statistics are often cited to



prove men as ‘domestic terrorists’ and to establish that women bear the brunt of their violence. (Mitapalli and Alterno 2009: VIII)

### **ii. Mr. Kathwate’s ill treatment to his daughters:**

The malfunctioning of patriarchal ideology renders wives, mothers and daughters as insignificant and inferior. Mr. Kathavte, (Bhau) is the neighbour of Mr. Kushank Purandare, the protagonist of the novel. He lives in a Mumbai chawl on the second floor. He always felt the itch to beat his daughters at night. After ten. And he had lot of daughters. His youngest daughter was in the fifth standard. First he had three sons. Then he started on the daughters. He had white hair at forty and was sixty-two when his youngest daughter was born. A tough old man. Even now, when his married daughters come to visit, the bastard has beating sessions. To make them feel at home. At night. Only between ten and twelve. The youngest has quite a nice voice. The two middle ones have terrible voices. Rekha sounds like a vulture being dragged along the ground, and Meena is hoarse and scratchy. Her voice has stayed broken for twenty years. She started wailing in a little boy’s voice, and then it somersaulted and changed, flattened as though it had been through a sugarcane juice wringer. All of them were beaten quite impartially. (25) When Mrs. Kathavte intervened and pleaded her husband to stop beating their daughters, she also “got her share” (26) Once, one of his daughters named Rekha fainted due to prolonged physical assault, Mr. Kathavte says that “she was shaming” (27). Mr. Kathavte would be totally unconscious of the fact that “the yelling and screaming” (27) resulting from his act of beating his daughters, might be disturbing his neighbours. Bhau seemed to enjoy beating the girls more and more as they grew older. Little Meena screamed on god for help, “O lord,”. Anna, save me, you are the only one who can help me now. Anna, how you no humanity, no compassion for me? Listen to the cries of a poor lonely girl, Anna.” (26) Anna Pradhan, a neighbourer being upset at Mr. Kathwate’s routine thrashing of his daughters, finally raised his voice, “Kathavte, that’s enough for now, Kathavte. Give it a rest, and let us all get some sleep. She is getting too old for this; she’s a big girl now”. (27) Even Kushank is moved by the pitiable condition of Kathwate’s daughters and their constant subjection to violence and cruelty. “I prayed for those girls to die. I still do” (27), so that they can escape Kathwate’s slaps and kicks.”On the contrary, Mr. Kathwate’s sons received altogether different treatment from their father. Their privileged gendered position by virtue of being sons enabled them to raise their voice and protest against their father’s overbearing attitude. When Rekha was ten, Bhau stopped beating his sons. Only the girls were privileged from now on. The eldest son, Kishore, had warned his father, “You raise your hand against me and I’ll smash you to a pulp. You won’t be able to move for days. Bhau stopped beating him. (26)

### **iii. Chandani and Kushank Purandare: Victims of male dominated society**

Chandani and Kushank are the victims of male dominated Indian society. Though they love each other truly, their relationship is not accepted by Chandani’s father. Chandani’s father, a male patriarch in the novel does not want to marry her daughter with Kushank. He does not believe in love. He advises his daughter saying, “Chandani, this is puppy love. You’ll soon outgrow it. Then it won’t suffice and you’ll leave him behind one day” (142). According to him, Kushank is an outcaste. It shows the attitude of in Indian society. Falling in love and getting married is not personal and easy affair in Indian culture. The obstacles like caste, class, region,

religion, language etc. come in the way of lovers, who wish to marry. Nagarkar want to highlight the patriarchal and cultural norms which are mandatory to follow for new generation. Through Kushank-Chandani episode, Nagarkar reflects on unfair social practice of oppressive and unforgiving patriarchy, hostile to young lovers, that eventually succeeds in breaking the affair and giving a full stop to the prospects of their love marriage. Her dream to marry with a man to whom she loves remains unfulfilled on the ground of narrow confinements of social norms. Chandani's father rejects the proposal as he knows that Kushank is not from a respectable family and is a fatherless child who lives with his aunt to whom he considers a prostitute. The issue of her marriage with Kushank takes a bad toll on her and she is isolated even in her own house. Her attempt to intimate her situation to Kushank is spoiled and she is condemned by the family members for her act. As the novelist writes, "For days no one spoke to her. When they did, they called her a slut, whore, bitch. If she was near enough, they would grab her by the hair and beat her blue. (148) Through all the three episodes, Nagarkar has portrayed patriarchal gender relations. Women in all the three different positions- as wife, mother and daughter have suffered oppression. Their marginalized subject positions deprived them of their voice to be heard. They can exercise little powers within and outside the structures of family. These women are considered to be guided by their emotions rather than reasons and believed that they have instinctive tendency befitting only for domesticity and motherhood. These patriarchal assumptions about women have justified the power relations of dominance and subordination. The moment women come to resist their subjection and try to change their lot by self assertion and by deciding to take their own independent decisions regarding their own matters; men tend to start feeling insecure and threatened. For example, when Chandani refuses to be auctioned in a marriage without her consent and desires to marry a man of her choice, she is subjected to multiple cruelties including abuses, physical assault and emotional blackmailing by her patriarch father and other family members. Thus, it becomes quite clear that men should change their attitude towards women and treat them as human. To sum up, Kiran Nagarkar successfully represents the marginalized and oppressed sections of the post independent Indian society. He narrates the struggle for existence and survival of women who deals with poverty, degradation, crime, violence hopelessness and distorted human relations. Kiran Nagarkar in his writings and especially in this novel has done a great social service by championing the cause of humanity, social justice and human welfare. The novel is linked to power, history, subjectivity and identity. The cultural categories of caste, class, gender and religion have deep effects on our subjectivities. Religion, class, caste and gender oppression operate in a social set-up as much through the institutions of culture- the family, educational and religious institutions and media, as through the repressive and violent forces of the police and other state agencies. This novel asserts that the protagonist Kushank and other characters of the text are deeply rooted and located in their historical contexts and they cannot escape the burden of their histories. It recognizes unjustness of exploitation and oppression.

### **Gender Discrimination in Kiran Nagarkar's Inside the Haveli:**

Rama Mehta occupies a significant place among the contemporary women novelists. She wrote this novel under the influence of individualistic feminism. She has great concern with the problems of women and their quest for identity.



**Psychological Conflict:**

The novel highlights the Rajput family who believes in Purdah system. In fact, in family we share our joys, sorrows and anxieties of life. Familial relations help us to interact with each other. The male domination in a woman's life is a natural phenomenon in a patriarchal society. The suppression of the woman means treating them as a secondary and considering as others. This indicates that in the tradition bound patriarchal Indian Community, a woman has to accept and practice the principles that the community lays down. Her protagonist Geeta is a modern, educated young woman. However she is crushed under the weight of a male dominated and tradition bound society. Mehta honestly portrayed Geeta's sufferings, disappointments and frustrations. It is natural for a woman to oppose the orthodoxical traditions and customs. She boldly raised her voice against such rotten traditions. Out of anger, she roused her strong feelings and showed a feministic colour. Rama Mehta reveals her protagonist's attitude and reactions to various issues related to women tied to traditional values. She stands against the patriarchal power of male domination. Her relationship with the family members becomes bitter which forms a battleground. Here she strongly fights for a space of her own. Her in-laws represent the power. Geeta challenges the age old bondages of tradition imposed by a male dominated society. She courageously projects her conflict with the hegemonic power structures and social institutions. Simone de Beauvoir's concept of the 'other' has been beautifully utilized by Rama Mehta. She believes that men compel woman to assume the status of the 'other'. Geeta is imprisoned in the strong big walled compound of Haveli. She almost has lost all her centrifugal needs in her family. While staying in the family, she mutely suffers the violence given to her by family members. She conceals her grief and pretends that she is happy. Like a submissive wife, she doesn't show any household concern. "Who said I was not happy? I was only thinking of you."(P.53) She behaves as a obedient daughter-in-law. By nature, she is meek and yielding creature. She takes pride in such suffering. She feels that she is without a sense of wholeness of her personality. "The flames lit her face but her eyes were remote as if she was somewhere else and there was weariness in her expression."(P.88) She fails in attaining the integrity of her personality. She remains as an outsider in her family. She remains untouched by the milieu in the beginning phase of her married life. She has no idea how to behave, what to do and what to say. Even her maid servant has more knowledge about these haveli etiquettes. "The new daughters-in-law looked to her (Pariji) for guidance and followed her instructions when they came to the haveli as brides."(P.10) It creates a total feelings of dis-orientation. There are many instances of this dis-orientation from haveli; Geeta was unable fully to control her words or her feelings. She really felt surprised how in the haveli. "No one really expressed their feelings. They covered their emotions in an elaborate exchange of formal gestures and words."(P.32)

**Degradation of Human Values:**

Geeta tries to think of her roots-her traditions in the haveli and her modern thoughts. Ultimately, she discovers that these family bonds are essential ingredient of one's being. When Nandu and Manji protested the classes of Geeta, her mother-in-law silenced gratitude and admiration for her mother-in-law..."(P.169-170). Even her servants gave her devotion and respect that she understood its value for the first time. "There was none of desperation of being enclosed within windowless walls that she wanted to shatter."(P.170) Now the devotion of the servants is almost superhuman for her.(P.171) and she became aware of the

fact, "where else in the world could children be enveloped in such affection?"(P.171) As a woman, Geeta is hardly left with any choice. She fails to arrive at concrete determination. She recognizes her marginalization as a woman - especially as a daughter-in-law in the haveli. She realized that the process of ego - dissolution has already begun. She finds herself merging into others. She experiences loss of boundaries.

### **Male Domination:**

The authoritative and dominating male voice in the haveli is of Bhagwat Singji's. In has suppressed the female voice for articulation. Still, Geeta feels stranger in the haveli though the in-laws are considerate. It may be a helplessness of the customs binding the people. "Even after seven years I am a stranger to those who are mine and I will always remain a stranger."(P.103) She always longed to express her feelings of love and appreciation to her father-in-law but her despair damped her emotions.

### **Inner Self of Geeta:**

The novel explores the inner self of Geeta who symbolizes the 'New Woman.' She is educated and lives in close association with society brushing aside all narrow social conventions. She tries to discover her real self through her inner and instinctive potentiality, i.e. her classes. She is free to talk about her caged self. "It was not just that the classes filled the empty hours but they also offered a challenge."(P.161) Geeta got a 'job' now to satisfy the curiosity of her pupils. She started to love the large empty rooms of the haveli. They were not unfriendly or like a cage. The barriers like traditions are to hinder her urge for expression. She is sympathetic about the problems of the society. Her self-assertion has increased as she becomes aware of the contradiction between her desire to conform to a cultural ideal of feminine passivity of a daughter-in-law and her task of helping those who are needy - with her classes. Miller observes that, "When one is an object, not a subject, all of one's own physical and sexual impulses and interests are presumed not to exist independently."(4) Marriage is a fate traditionally sanctioned to women by society. A woman like Geeta is having no direct influence upon her husband - neither upon the future nor upon the world. "The moral values implicit in such altitudes may be seen as part of inbuilt resistance to any attempt to discard traditional patterns in a woman's lifestyle,"(5) So, Geeta has to reach out beyond herself towards social milieu through her classes.

### **Realization of Freedom and confrontation with family:**

She asserts her individuality and realizes her freedom. It brings her into confrontation with family, with male dominated family. She moulds herself up to the dictates of the haveli and her in-laws. Women pay for their happiness at the cost of their freedom. De Beauvoir emphasized that such a sacrifice for a woman is too high. Geeta plays the role of an ideal house - wife and an ideal daughter-in-law. But this new role has circumscribed herself development by taking away the freedom of expression. As a result of this, she cannot express her emotions for her father-in-law. It is the paradoxical situation in which she is enmeshed. In her heart, she has deep and profound respect for Bhagwat Singhji but while expressing it, she retraces. Geeta's problem of 'becoming' expresses Rama Mehta's polemics against gender role



imposed upon a woman in a patriarchal culture. Such relative identity distorts her identity and problematizes her self - perception. It is like chasing something fluid. Geeta's uncompromising and paradoxical self finds its expression in her work. Confusion disappears and she sees the clear light of day with realization and discovery for her authentic female self. The novel gains its feminist stance from Geeta's persistent exploration of herself as an individual. An interesting preoccupation of Rama Mehta appears to be delving into the depths of woman's psyche and showing its relation to other people in the haveli. The novel portrays sensitive individual like Geeta in her moments of struggle and in her efforts to seek solution to her problems. "Her (Geeta's) thoughts were in turmoil but she had no desire to share her anguish with her husband." (P.169) She has found her own solution. "I will stop the girls from coming." (P.170) There was a new fervor in her when she, independently, has solved her own problem. She did not feel the victim of the prejudice or anything wrong in the social custom. It is a truth universally acknowledged that women have been denied existence as complete human beings though they are mentally and physically equipped to perform at par with men. As Sushila Singh puts it, "Human experience for centuries has been synonymous with the masculine experience with the result that the collective image of humanity has been one sided and incomplete." (6) The outcome of this has been that women are defined not as a subject but as an entity in connection with man in his real life or in his fantasy life. So the protagonist in the novel finds herself confused when she has to conform to rigid code laid down by manners and etiquettes. In transition period, to give a voice to the sufferings of women and to present the injustices heaped on them is a difficult task. The novel contains the material of feminist thoughts like myriad roles of woman as daughter-in-law, wife, mother, the mistress of the haveli-identity crisis & mental subjugation and so on.

### **Inner strength:**

Rama Mehta feels that women have a tremendous inner strength. She wants to translate this inner strength into something positive, a real strength. Here, Geeta achieves security through reconciliation. The ethos of the novel is neither the victory nor the defeat but of harmony and understanding between the two opposing ideas of modernity and tradition, as Anita Desai says that, "the understanding she brought to it." (7) She also admits how with simplicity and tenderness, she has evoked the ancient & traditional way of life and the modernity of life she has brought with her. She fights to maintain the modern values that she has always lived by.

### **Self Assertion:**

She asserts herself as an individual and putting an end to her doubts about herself. She is able to hold her own in a household full of tradition-bound, royal, dignified, noble and well-mannered members of her family in the haveli. It is a proof of her individuality. She breaks traditional ground wherever necessary. She takes complete care to delineate her presence as one shows it with courage and conviction of rationale and accountability to be a mistress of the haveli. She emerges as an intelligent, attractive and wholly practical woman. She understands the relationship with all its consequences and confident as well that she is not stretching her moral obligations. It is suggested that a modern educated woman like Geeta should pursue some meaningful activity within the precincts of her household in order to find happiness and contentment as well as her rights, desires, struggles and victories all together. Thus Rama Mehta

has skillfully dealt with the gender discrimination in the novel *The Protagonist*. Geeta finally submitted herself to the purdah system of the family and continued the tradition. Her personal freedom and individuality become fruitless despite her modernistic approach. Finally we feel proud of Geeta who sacrifices her modernity for keeping the traditions of haveli and turns out to be a true Indian woman.

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