

Kiran Nagarkar's *Jasoda*: an Abyss of Poverty, Patriarchy And Inexcusable Orthodoxical Customs

Dr. Kamalakar Baburao Gaikwad

Head and Assistant Professor in English
Mahatma Gandhi Vidyamandir's Samajshree Prashantdada Hiray
Arts, Science & Commerce College, Nampur, Tal-Baglan, Dist-Nashik.
E-mail: gaikwadkamalakar@gmail.com

Abstract:

Kiran Nagarkar (April 1942- Sept. 2019) was a contemporary and post-colonial writer, novelist, playwright, film and drama critic and screen writer in the canon of Indian English Literature. His novels render the testimony of doctrinal assessment of post colonial impetus. Nagarkar's novels convey the readers a new-fangled approach while reading his works. His notable works are: Saat Sakkam Trechalis (1974), (tr. Seven Sixes Are Forty Three) (1978), Ravan and Eddie (1994), Cuckold (1997), God's Little Soldier (2006), The Extras (2012) Rest in Peace (2015), Jasoda (2017) and The Arsonist (2019).

*Kiran Nagarkar's *Jasoda* is enigmatically humorous, tormenting and instinctive in its appearance. In this novel, Nagarkar has skillfully uncovered modern India's gloomy and untailed viciousness. His story telling intellect takes us into the chasm of deficiency and patriarchy. Nagarkar's wisdom lies in his keen observation, brilliant realization and profound compassion in delineating his characters throughout the novel. The main objective of this research paper is to highlight the glimpses and adverse situations of his characters through poverty, patriarchy and an inexcusable orthodoxical customs such as struggle, hardships, marginalization, domestic violence, class construction, prejudice, sexual exploitation, untouchability, identity crisis, Gender inequality, social injustice, pain, agony, anguish, subjugation, humiliation, verbal abuse and child trafficking through Kiran Nagarkar's convincing novel *Jasoda*. The researcher raises his voice for the voiceless community and evaluates the several causes of the sufferings faced by marginalized sections due to their destitutions by the higher authorities and the society.*

Index Terms: *Marginalization, poverty, patriarchy, inexcusable orthodoxy, class structure, discrimination*

Introduction:

Kiran Nagarkar, the recipient of 'Sahitya Akademi', was one of the inexhaustible and significant post colonial Indian novelist, playwright and bi-lingual writer. He illumines several issues of postcolonial India in civilized language. His novels reimburse accolade to Indian conventions, culture, nationalism, beliefs, approaches and subject matters. His writing style is sparkling and stimulating. His work narrates the overwhelming authenticities of subjugated and underprivileged people.

The present research comprises with the major issues such as poverty, patriarchy and unpardonable

orthodoxical customs as discussed in Kiran Nagarkar's persuasive and customary novel *Jasoda*. It narrates the components of distasteful uses of supremacy and torments which human beings faces in their lives. Kiran Nagarkar's *Jasoda* is the source of both stimulation and embarrassment. It is the gut-wrenching narrative with disgusting convention of influence, anguish and its yoke on human beings. It takes the readers into chasm of scarcity and male dominated society. In this research paper, researcher has delineated the glimpses and unpleasant state of affairs of his characters through paucity, patriarchy and an intolerable orthodoxical civilizations such as resistance, privations, marginalization, familial aggression, class structure, favoritism, sexual misuse, untouchability, identity crisis, Gender inequality,

societal unfairness, throbbing, torture, distress, suppression, mortification, verbal maltreatment through Kiran Nagarkar's convincing novel *Jasoda*.

Research Methodology:

The researcher has employed qualitative method and close reading of the texts related to the thematic concern of the novel. This helps to comprehend the sufferings of underprivileged and impecunious male and female characters with deep understanding. Reading a text helps to interpret or understand several thematic aspects of the novel. It also helps to generate textual and numerical evidences from texts at large scale so that comprehensive information can be visualized and put before the readers extensively. Therefore the researcher has interpreted the literary texts for better insight.

Literature Review:

Literature review is the significant characteristic which analyses the former researcher's perceptions on the supposed topic. Here the researcher has portrayed the glimpses of poverty, patriarchy and inexcusable orthodoxical aspects through Kiran Nagarkar's convincing novel *Jasoda*. He has proved the facts wherever necessary. This literary review is projected in the bibliographical part.

Discussion:

Kiran Nagarkar's novel '*Jasoda*' was published in 2017 and was nominated for JCB prize for the literature. It is a narrative of a bucolic woman fighting in the patriarchal society. Nayantara Sahgal praises the novel,

*'Jasoda is as convincing and influential as Nagarkar's other novels but exclusively itself in the gut-wrenching story it tells of the disgusting uses of supremacy the anguish it causes, and the human strength that augments about it.'*¹(Nagarkar, *Jasoda*, Cover page, 2017)

Poverty is such a circumstance in which people cannot congregate their indispensable human requirements. They constantly short of the monetary funds and other necessary things for a minimum standard of living. The traditional institutions and societal networks are the major sources of rural

poverty. These poor and underprivileged people's voice is always unheard and ignored and they are deprived from cultural, social and political identity. Girls and women becomes the victim of sexual exploitation and children experience the bondage of malnutrition and child trafficking. The novel depicts the transformative and atrocious expedition of the protagonist *Jasoda*, a contemporary Indian superwoman and dutiful wife. She finds the way in her oddities courageously and attempts to bloom in adverse situations. *Jasoda* is the perfect example of chronological magnificence and the ingredient of every deplorable custom. Nagarkar has portrayed a beautiful picture of a modern heroine named *Jasoda* with the glimpses of sympathy and empathy. Later, *Jasoda* bears her children, tolerates all hardships to raise them and switches between Mumbai and Paar in order to survive them.

*'She brings her knees near. Her child sits on her thighs. She tightens her organs closely. She did not let go till the girl was still.'*²(*Jasoda*: 3)

Narrator writes the *struggle of Jasoda* in his own words. She scrapes her one cow in the famine incapacitated wastes of Kantagiri, an imagined village, the capital of the state of Paar. Kantagiri is the place where familial brutality and matrimonial rape were widespread to the women in the rural village. When *Jasoda* conceives a baby girl, she strangles the child to death without any desolation for the lifeless child. This shows the patriarchal structure where gender rules are framed by the society. She raises and feeds her sons, strangles every new born offspring, cares for her unacceptable mother-in-law and works as a midwife for which she receives some millet and lentils in order to cater her needs. Her husband is very casual and claims that he has significant works to carry out for the local prince. *Jasoda* independently makes her journey to the city by the sea by her own. She confidently proves the wrong assumptions lay down by the society.

Nagarkar traces the journey of a courageous woman who makes her way and overcomes all difficulties and attempts to reduce dehumanizing poverty. Here the question is that:

'Will Jasoda come back home with her offspring's? Or reside in the city that's

turn out to be dwelling for her children?’³

This journey of Jasoda’s struggle and poverty is rightly described as,

‘Kiran Nagarkar’s novel Jasoda increases the curiosity of the reader from the first page to the end. It arouses a question in the minds of the readers whether Jasoda is saint, murderer or mother?’⁴

Dearth is an expected disaster which causes a calamitous foodstuff and water scarcity and unfruitfulness of the ground which affect on the living of rural people. The consequence of drought makes people of Kantigiri to migrate from rural to urban especially slum area as marginalized. Jasoda, when loses the whole lot visits her husband in the palace to offer her funds to nourish children and to take care of his mother from sickness. He shows least care, warmth or liability towards his family.

‘There’s nothing to eat in the house. I need money to feed the children. Your mother needs to see a doctor badly. The baby hasn’t had any milk either.Sangram replied, ‘I’ve got responsibilities here. Do you expect me to leave His Highness?’⁵(Jasoda: 91)

Patriarchy is the major communal perception which supports men and suppresses women. It claims that men are superior to women. They exercise an authority over women. It normalizes gender based domestic violence. It reinforces male dominance and complete control over women. It leads to sexual harassment. This is a communal system where authority is held by men and civilizing norms, ethnicity favour men. Here we find hegemonic and marginalized male characters. Nagarkar’s male characters are created with faults and they generate troubles to the women protagonist. Helpless and powerless Jasoda returned home. In this situation, her husband Sangram Singh has to understand Jasoda’s pathetic state of mind. But we witness here that he also harasses her like others and treats her as a marginal entity.

*‘The back of her husband’s hand caught her on the jaw. She staggered and fell back upon her son Himmat.’
.....No water, no kerosene.’*

Sangram Singh kicked her in the small of her back. ‘Get up. I am late. Cook my meal first.’⁶(Jasoda: 13-14)

Nagarkar justifies the inhumane treatment of Sangram Singh. Measure for measure is the rule which returns to us. This rule is also applicable to Sangram Singh. Prince Parbat Singh, representative of high class society and the owner of Royal Palace considers Sangram Singh as a marginalized person. He humiliates Sangram Singh and offers verbal abuse,

‘Take that bloody sycophantic visage of yours and don’t show it here or in any part of this world. Ever..... a long death so that I don’t have to perceive your revolting countenance till my failing day?’⁷(Jasoda: 23).

Sangram Singh, husband of Jasoda, is the symbol of authority, power and patriarchal superiority. He is an embodiment of juvenile manliness, very insulting and sly man who never takes accountability of his family. He encourages feminine infanticide. He beats Jasoda mercilessly every day especially when she fails in completing her domestic works. He becomes the Lord of Alaknanda in order to recompense his status after his marriage with Madhurima Devi. He retains his male inheritor to take over his family name and prosperity. When the princess gives birth to a girl child, he kills the child. He refuses to accompany Jasoda and his family when they transferred to Mumbai due to dearth.

Nagarkar highlights patriarchal dominance and exploitation through slum mafia. Jasoda faces all her obstacles of life as well as each terrorization valiantly in slums from mafia. A mafia tells Jasoda,

‘As far as you are concerned I am the Sarkar. I am not just the government, make no mistake, I am the Almighty Himself. I can throw you and your childrenand put them to work if you don’t pay the rent and you will never see them again.’⁸ (Jasoda: 118)

It is observed that men are the elapsed masculinity and their torments go overlooked. The demonstration of male characters is not touched even in this 21st century. It is assumed that the men are the scheme custodian of the patriarchal system. Here

Nagarkar's character Himmat from his childhood becomes the bread winner of his family. He does a cheapest work as a rag picker to support his family. Every day he collects plastic bottles and recyclable things and sells in the market.

King Parbat Singh, the Prince of Kantagiri was the symbol of patriarchal dominance. Prince and Princess Sunanda Devi were contented in their marriage life. But it was short lived. Within couple of years, it was shattered. Princesses hold fast and visited several temples but failed in performing her basic duty as a woman. All her attempts prove fruitless. Prince Parbat Singh also tortures the princess Raat Rani. He shows his patriarchal dominance. The princess signs a clandestine agreement at the prince's importunate, and when the prince interferes in her dealings, she always declines. She wrestles against Parbat Singh stating,

*'You solicited and implored, enticed and persuaded me from your hospital bed to give up my comfortable life with a foremost businesswoman to come to this godforsaken conflagration.'*⁹

The prince assassinates his brother to turn out to be a prince of Alakanda palace. Similarly, when Parbat Singh is paralyzed, Sangram Singh endeavored to massacre the prince. Due to malnourishment and a dreadful famine, the servants are compelled to leave the area, leaving the prince unaccompanied and reliant on Sangram Singh. Sangram Singh takes the advantage by blackmailing the prince. He relocated the king's belongings into his name. Due to deprived healthiness and his yearning to see Raat Rani, Prince Parbat Singh later dies. After King Parbat Singh's death, Sangram Singh kept an evil eye upon the princess. He had a wicked mentality for her. Also he kidnaps her and imprisons her underground.

*'He locked her up in one of the rooms in the basement. The rooms had no casement and no light and it was always protected.'*¹⁰ (Jasoda: 194-196)

He maneuvers her and demands money in the form of her body and treats her like a thing. Later, princess commits suicide due to several torments. She pleads him,

'I will do anything you want. I will cook for you, give you a massage, look after all your needs, and have any kind of sex

*you want. Please I beg you for fresh sunlight, air, sky and the moon. Please don't do this to me. I can't take it anymore.'*¹¹ (Jasoda: 198)

Sangram Singh uses authority and freedom to his own benefit. As an overriding personality, he used ways of aggression and maltreatment. Thus Sangram Singh showed his dominance over Jasoda, Savitri, Prince Parbat Singh, Princess Raat Rani and over his own daughter Janhavi. The male characters in Jasoda suffer psychologically and sociologically from gender norms. They attempt to recognize the actuality of the contemporary humanity where the society intimidates them with elimination for failing to pursue the masculinity standards. The readers witness the torture to the character Dulare in the form of caste discrimination and patriarchy. Dulare is the epitome of untouchability and victim of patriarchal stereotypes. He is deprived and powerless farmer who was enforced to fatality. He scrounged Sangram Singh's goat and ox to plough his land. But the old ox fell on the ground and died. Later, Dulare distributes the meat with his neighbours due to his poverty. Sangram Singh plans to murder Dulare. Out of fear, Dulare conceals in a well in order to save his life. Sangram Singh appoints a guard beside the well since he was familiar with Dulare's hiding.

Jasoda's eldest son Himmat was industrious and acts out dominant towards women. A knock is created in him because of his observation of cycle of birth and death of a girl child. He protects his sister from feminine infanticide and he resolute on civilizing Janhavi so she was asked to send to schooling. Himmat does not sustain female infanticide. He disgusts nuptial brutality.

*'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.'*¹² (p. 205).

When Jasoda gives birth to a girl child, she tries to kill her but Himmat forbids her to do it. In Jasoda, gender roles are built to defend men so Sangram Singh acts as a male beneficiary. In Mumbai, he obtains two clienteles: Suyog Gadgil and Cawas Batliwala, a lawyer. Sangram Singh resumes school and starts working in office as a part time job along with these two colleagues. After their come back to Kantagiri, Himmat joins English medium

school in Sharana. He promises that Janhavi's learning is vital and teaches the subjects like English, Geometry, Algebra and Arithmetic.

*'Himmat took part in chess with Janhavi and skilled her that arithmetic was a part of game and riddle. She was well versed in English since it was the only verbal communication in which her eldest brother talked with her.'*¹³ (Jasoda: 210).

Later, Himmat, a marginalized and unacknowledged character, turned out to be a prominent young Mathematician in Stanford University.

Marginalization, scarcity, intolerance, patriarchy and indefensible beliefs are the prevailing concerns of contemporary era. *Marginalization* is the universal problem which impacts negatively on every member of the society across the world. The meaning of marginalized refers to no belongingness and unvalued and unnoticed member of the society. It is a big blot on Indian society where poor and weak people are suppressed and oppressed by the powerful people in the name of patriarchal dominance. Marginalized sections of the society raise their voice for justice against these evil trends. But it is disgraceful fact that these things are still unnoticed and ignored. In contemporary era, the existence of marginalization strongly works in the privileged Indian society in the form of caste, color, religion, or belief. This marginalized class undergoes the hostile treatment such as male dominance, domestic violence, physical and verbal abuse. The present study highlights the marginalized people's worst situation where patriarchal dominance prevails to a greater extent. Here Jasoda is the symbolic figure of marginalized class who faces the experiences of abusive status. In her poverty, she approaches to a grocer of Kantigiri named Bhanwarlal for few litres of kerosene in order to cook some food for her children. Instead of assistance, he rebuked her in a humiliating language,

*'Try next week. Jasoda, shall I look kerosene in the folds of my dhoti? His hand went to the lap and smashed his member, 'Want to check it.'*¹⁴ (Jasoda: 13)

Domestic Violence is the communal malevolence that works as a manipulative subterfuge. It is the

abusive system occurs between intimate relationships. The violence can be takes place against the children, parents, wife, sisters, daughters or elderly persons. It can be physical, verbal, religious, economic, financial, emotional, reproductive, sexual etc. It comprises with beating, choking, mutilation, stoning, honour killing, dowry death, bride burning, marital rape, harassment, abusing, acid throwing etc. Kiran Nagarkar reveals a major concern related to male dominated prejudiced approach towards women. Male often adopts unfavorable gestures for women in their oddities in order to harass them. Research asserts that males are the foundation of tyrannical hegemonic masculinity.

Class structure is basically the hierarchical organization by which a society is categorized into class. It differs as per the strata of the society, i.e. upper, middle, working and lower class. In Marxist theory, the capitalists own the means of production and working class sell their own labour. Sangram Singh, Jasoda's husband, is employed in Paar's royal palace. Sangram Singh is a gluttonous, impolite, and self-interested person who doesn't mind about his family but is conscious of his rights as a man of the house and knows when to implement them. He obviously takes benefit of the ladies, and his only objective is to achieve the support of the Prince of Paar. Jasoda and her family are among the remaining few to depart the drought-stricken town of Paar in search of an enhanced life.

Discrimination is the prejudicial treatment of people based on race, gender, sexual orientation, age, marital status, ethnic origin, colour, disability etc. It deals with harassment and victimization. Here the person is treated in a less favourable manner.

Parbat Singh, symbol of oppressor and exploiter, abuses to Jasoda as well,

*'Stop peering within my room. Haven't you noticed unclothed flesh before? Or do you have sex with all her clothes on?'*¹⁵ (Jasoda: 23-24).

Sexual exploitation is the major concern of Kiran Nagarkar's *Jasoda*. Sangram Singh often takes advantage of Savitri sexually. Savitri was the wife of an outsider, and continually gives ill-treatment to her.

'Sangram Singh placed his finger on his lips. He compressed the fragile rock slowly over her breast and tummy. He

*bowed down and began to lick the sweet powder.....inhale through her mouth as wave after wave of deliberate happiness crested and broke inside her.*¹⁶(Jasoda: 42)

Here the readers observe how Savitri bears brutal sexual assault by Sangram. Several times, he allows the ants to crawl on all over her body and jumped when he himself is bitten by ants. Sangram Singh often marginalizes her and considers Savitri as a prostitute and an object of sex. According to him, prostitutes are meant for service. They do not have any respect and sense of gratitude. Nagarkar mentions her pathetic and physical torments,

*'Her left eye was engorged and purple-blue. Her lips were crimson, ready to rupture, the lower lipShe did not risk gazing at the rest of her carcass.'*¹⁷ (Jasoda: 44)

Savitri's mistreatment is highly creditable and spirit wrenching.

*'He pulled her to him and played crab's feet on her belly. He pinned her against the wall stretched, her arms behind her head and raced his fingers from the underside of her arms.....But he didn't pay any attention to her. He was digging into the sides of her flat hard stomach.'*¹⁸(Jasoda: 49)

Savitri's sexual exploitation reaches to its greater height of dishonor when Sangram Singh sent her outside when she is naked, observed by her son Himmat. Sangram Singh exploits Dulare, Savitri's husband. He was falsely charged with suspected unforgivable sins such as killing his robust animal and eating for dinner and stealing the wood from Siyaram's house some weeks ago. Savitri requests Sangram Singh,

*'Come into your part of the village and break into someone's house? Which Untouchable would dare to do that? Least of all Dulare!'*¹⁹ (Jasoda: 51-52).

Sangram Singh had a corporeal association with Dulare's wife Savitri. He had no concern in the connection with the lower cast woman. Dulare knows this affair of his wife but he is helpless. His inferiority complex allows him to keep quite. He expresses his inability,

*'How come we are untouchables and you are not? How come it's the raining season and there's not been a drop? How come, how come? Because no one anticipates God to be just or rational.'*²⁰ (Jasoda: 41).

In the end, Dulare's wife Savitri kills Sangram Singh in order to save her life.

The researcher wants to uncover the problem of *untouchability* and torture and cruelty by high class society to the marginalized class. For example, Dulare faces tremendous resentment that prompts him to take refuge in the well to abandon the brutality of Sangram Singh. Savitri goes to Sangram Singh and requests him,

'You know Dulare is hiding in the well. Please spare him.'

Sangram Singh asserts her,

*'You have lost your mind, Savitri. Which untouchable would dare to enter our well and pollute it?'*²¹ (Jasoda: 66)

Savitri fell at Sangram's feet and pleads him for the protection of her companion Siyaram and shows her enthusiasm to be his slave,

*'I will do whatever you want, Maalik, just let him go. I will be your slave for life.'*²² (Jasoda: 67).

The innocent misrepresentation of Himmat reflects the pitiable circumstance of the children living in slums of India who belong to marginalized section. He claims,

*'Pleaje, maddam, give phive ruppije.' He followed it up with a tuneless song. 'No fadder, no mudder. No brudder, no shister. Nutting to eet. Give phive ruppije pleaje.'*²³(Jasoda: 114).

His prevailing words soar like strings on readers mind to stir up tragedy. Marginalized women also encounter sanitized troubles such as earning daily bread, water and shelter very badly that they are unable cope up with. Nagarkar describes,

*'Jasoda had been so anxious with getting to be acquainted with the city, settling down, and ekingshe hadn't perceived that she had overlooked her period for three months.'*²⁴ (Jasoda: 116)

The female characters in Kiran Nagarkar's *Jasoda* are authoritative, autonomous, and compassionate, but the male characters are hegemonic and prevailing. *Gender inequality* focuses on the oppression of women. Here the researcher attempts to investigate the undeclared misery of masculine individuality in feministic literature. The novel offers a revolution of *Jasoda* and her surge from patriarchal civilization. She courageously attempts to survive her children in the countenance of domination and agonizing deficiency. *Jasoda* is a masculine abandoned gender in society. She is a symbolic figure of unbreakable work, struggle and hopefulness. She emerges as a character which symbolizes the considerate but marginalized woman on the basis of gender and class. She reflects as an inspirational and iconic woman who faces all her hardships with confidence and sturdy mind. She becomes the janitor of her fortune and with her hard labour contributes to the accomplishment of her son *Himmat*. Her daily routine is described as,

*'Every morning was hectic for Jasoda. She gets up early in the morning at 5'O Clock. Then she slipped into the park through a tiny gap in the fence and went.....where she could brush her teeth, go to the toilet and finish her bucket- bath without anyone watching her.'*²⁵(*Jasoda*: 165).

She lives a troublesome life in a slum but never surrenders before the unfavorable circumstances. She fights back courageously and finds ways to live a venerable life in hardship.

*'She reaches to the shop at half past five in the morning and finishes her task quickly like a machine. Her first task at that early hour was to briskly scrub the mudlight the kerosene stove and put the potatoes to boil. She set about peeling ten kilos of onions and chopping them, her eyes watering profusely.'*²⁶ (*Jasoda* 165)

Threat of *child trafficking* is one of the biggest problems in marginalized slum area. To prove the fact, *Jasoda's* child *Saleem* is being kidnapped. She launches a complaint in police station but no one investigated the matter. Here the question arises in the minds of the readers,

*'Do the lives of poor section in slums really matter for the governing bodies?'*²⁷

Police Officers are absolutely unable to comprehend the throbbing of a mother for her son. She knows the kidnapper but doesn't have enough proof. Her voice is unheard and she is oppressed by police authority.

Conclusion:

Through this research, the researcher has portrayed the issues of marginalized sections such as water and food shortage, poverty, migration, domestic violence, degradation of living standards, child trafficking, gender inequality, male dominance, patriarchy, inexcusable orthodoxical customs etc. Education is the strongest weapon to eradicate social evils from the society. Awareness must be created among the masses irrespective of their sexual category, age, colour, category, social group, belief etc.

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