

The Manifestation of Contemporary Indian History, Myth and Political Affairs Through Kiran Nagarkar's *Bedtime Story*

Kamalakar Baburao Gaikwad *^{ID}
Assistant Professor and Head, Dept. of English
MGV's Arts, Science & Commerce College,
Nampur, Tal-Baglan, Dist-Nashik.

Abstract

Kiran Nagarkar (1942-2019) was born in Bombay in 1942. He was a celebrated Marathi and English novelist, post independent writer, Journalist, copywriter, screenwriter and playwright. He was identified as a multiethnic, investigational, multifaceted genius, impudent and unrealizable writer. In Indian English literature, he has carved his name to a greater extent as a remarkable contemporary writer. He completed his graduation from Pune University in 1964 and post-graduation from Bombay University in 1967 in English literature. He was the outstanding representative of contemporary Indian literature. His works are a target of philosophical appraisal due to the mixture of his variety of post colonialism. His writing is concentrated and thought aggravating. His literary career illumines through his philological selections and dogmatic dissertation. Bedtime Story is a play based on an epic Mahabharata written by eminent contemporary writer Kiran Nagarkar. He can challenge the established norms and to re-write the ancient narratives with fresh perspective. He delineates the real social conditions, ancient cultures and valuable ethics of traditional Indian society. Nagarkar restored the past through his technique of retelling Indian myths of epic Mahabharata. Bedtime Story reveals modern approach to his works and attempts to offer new insight. The main attempt of the researcher is to explore the indications of contemporary Indian history, legends and politics through the Hindu epic the Mahabharata considering Kiran Nagarkar's well reputed play Bedtime Story.

Keywords: Kiran Nagarkar, Bedtime Story, myth, history, politics, Mahabharata.

Kiran Nagarkar (1942-2019) was born in Bombay in 1942. He was a celebrated Marathi and English novelist, post independent writer, Journalist, copywriter, screenwriter and playwright. He was identified as a multiethnic, investigational, multifaceted genius, impudent and unrealizable writer. He was one of the noteworthy modern writers in the canon of Indian

* Corresponding Author: Kamalakar Baburao Gaikwad

Email: gaikwadkamalakar@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1434-1108>

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English literature. He completed his graduation from Pune University in 1964 and post-graduation from Bombay University in 1967 in English literature. He was the outstanding representative of contemporary Indian literature. His works are a target of philosophical appraisal due to the mixture of his variety of post colonialism. His writing is concentrated and thought aggravating. His literary career illumines through his philological selections and political exposition.

Kiran Nagarkar was the most outstanding representative of modern Indian literature. His works are a target of philosophical appraisal due to the mixture of his variety of post colonialism. His writing is concentrated and thought aggravating. His literary career illumines through his philological selections and dogmatic dissertation. His works are translated into several languages such as Spanish, French and German. Nagarkar's famous works are: *Saat Sakkam Trechalis* (1974), *Seven Sixes Are Forty Three* (1978), *Bedtime Story* (1978), *Kabirache Kay Karayache*, *Stranger Amongst Us*, *The Broken Circle*, *The Widow and Her Friends*, *Ravan and Eddie* (1994), *Cuckold* (1997), *God's Little Soldier* (2006), *The Extras* (2012), *Rest In Peace* (2015), *Jasoda* (2017), *The Arsonist* (2019) etc. Nagarkar has received many prestigious awards such as H. N. Apte award, Dalmia Award, Sahitya Akademi Award, Rockefeller Grant and Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany in 2012.

Introduction of Key Terms

Before going to discuss the aforesaid study in detail, let's try to figure out some explicit terms such as *Bedtime Story*, Kiran Nagarkar, legend, Myth, history and politics, Mahabharata etc. in this research paper.

Legend and Myth

A *legend* is a variety of folktale that comprises with a chronicle which features anthropological movements, believed or supposed to have taken place in human history. It is a non-historical

or unverifiable story handed down by convention from former times and commonly acknowledged as ancient.

Myth is an outmoded or mythological story from past times particularly about divinities, spirits or demigods and men of bravery. They often elucidate accepted or significant events. It is an impression or division which many people trust but that does not occur or is untruthful. It is a category of folktale consisting of descriptions that play an ultimate role in society. Myths are meagre stories, and they oblige a philosophical determination in antique and contemporary principles. They are either genuine or imaginary in nature. They have an unfathomable emblematic connotation and offer a message to the audience. Myth is the major issue of literature. Most of the narratives are formed out of myth. Northrop Frye asserts about legend in his groundbreaking work *'Myth, Fiction and Displacement'* (1961),

Myth is an essential constituent of collected works, the attention of poets in fairy tale and legend was unresolved and unremitting since Homer's time. (p.349)

History and Political Theory

History is a methodical record of momentous proceedings that occurred with human beings in the past. In fact, it is the learning of past actions and modification over time. History helps us to recall the earlier things to take our future conclusions. It also helps us to comprehend how dealings in the past made things the way they are nowadays. It covers all aspects of humanoid civilization such as political, technical, communal, industrial, monetary, medicinal, ethnic, spiritual, knowledgeable and martial developments.

Political theory is the effort and philosophies that are associated with leading a state or country. Basically, it reveals a person's political opinions and beliefs. Democracy, totalitarian, monarchy and authoritarianism are the types of politics. Three pillars of politics are: legislative, executive and judiciary.

Bedtime Stories

Bedtime stories help to engage the child's imagination and make the story memorable. The character, location and scenario are the major concerns of it. Simple storyline, melodic rhythm, aptness, appealing and convincing story helps to draw the attention of the child. Such stories have a moral and they are interactive and exciting.

Mahabharata

Mahabharata is the foremost Smriti text and Sanskrit epics of prehistoric India respected in Hinduism. It is the text about dharma, i.e. Hindu ethical commandment and the past happenings. It narrates the events and aftermath of the Kurukshetra war fought between the Kauravas and Pandavas.

Research Methodology

The researcher has employed qualitative method and close reading of the texts related to the thematic concern of the play. The present study explores the indications of contemporary Indian history, legends and politics through the Hindu epic the *Mahabharata* considering Kiran Nagarkar's well reputed play *Bedtime Story*. Reading a text helps to interpret several thematic aspects of the play. It also helps to generate textual and numerical evidence 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 perception.

Literature Review

Literature review is the momentous attribute which analyses the former researcher's observations on the hypothetical topic. Here the researcher has portrayed the impressions of modern Indian society, myth and political affairs with reference to Hindu epic Mahabharata.

He has proved the facts wherever necessary. The following literature review helps to understand the in-depth knowledge of the research.

a. Pant, Supriya. A Contemporary Methodology to Reiterating of the Mahabharata: A Learning of Kiran Nagarkar's Bedtime Story, Criterion, Vol-13, Issue-4, August 2022

The research mainly focuses on the narrative forms of myths and legends which can be employed as a modern approach to retelling and narrating the epic like Mahabharata by eminent contemporary writer Kiran Nagarkar. Nagarkar has used myth as a prominent tool in order to address the modern issues.

b. Frye, Northrop. Legend, Nonfiction, and Dislocation. MIT Press, Ed. Belsey and Moore.

Most reputed writer Northrop Frye explains the concept of legend in his seminal work 'Myth, Fiction and Displacement' written in 1961. It states that myth is an important constituent of literature, the attention of poets in myth and folktale was unresolved and unyielding since Homer's days.

c. Mukherjee, Meenakshi. Indian Classics, Volume 1 Antiquity, Topography and Philosophy. Ed. Moretti. UP, 2006. 596-631

In this article, the epics Ramayana and Mahabharata in their real sense reproduce provincial beliefs. This clarification was a great experiment for the writers. Thus, these epics observes the part of modern mindfulness.

- **Bedtime Story in General**

A bedtime story is an outdated form of storytelling, where a story is narrated to a child at bedtime to prepare the child for sleep. It is a calming ritual for children at the close of the day. Narrating bedtime stories is a token of proper and idealized parenting. Bedtime story in a real sense improves the child's language acquisition, problem solving skills and brain development. It builds an emotional bond between the parent and the child. It serves a model

for the child to imitate and follow. Apart from this, bedtime stories develop abstract qualities like self-control, self-sacrifice and sympathy. Thus, bedtime stories play a crucial role in the children to experience feelings of others.

Bedtime stories are the strongest tool for parents, and it can build foundational literacy for kids. Children easily break down the word into pieces by knowing the sounds. It helps the child to build their vocabulary and boost their language skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing, spelling, pronunciation, comprehension etc. Interpretation to children contributes understanding skill and language growth. Children acquire to grasp and produce verbal and engraved language through a variety of language exercises. Thus, parents attempt to provide the expressive, communal and knowledgeable growth of their children. The telling of bedtime stories to progenies has formed a pre-sleep ceremony in cultures around the world. The foundation of such stories can be taken from folklore, fairy stories and popular traditional tales. Bedtime stories in its sense a cultural phenomenon which produces a perceptive, communal and psychosomatic impression on the children life.

- **Kiran Nagarkar's *Bedtime Story***

Discussion

Bedtime Story (1975-1977) is one of the best and the most groundbreaking plays written by Kiran Nagarkar. It is finally published in the year 2015. It predominantly demonstrates the caste system. We can visualize the scenes of ancient history and crude politics throughout the play. The play tells that Pandavas are good, but they are shown as weak. On the other hand, Kauravas are strong but evil and wicked personalities. The female characters like Draupadi and Gandhari are shown as brave and strong and can fight with men. It is separated into four acts. Each act is taken from the epic Mahabharata. The several episodes are demonstrated for the better understanding of the act which comprises:

- a. To cut off Eklavya's thumb for his respected Guru Dronacharya as a token of Guru

Dakshina (Gift to a Teacher)

- b. The Swayamvara of Draupadi in which she puts a condition before all the prince or would be suitors that whoever will shoot an arrow in the eye of a fish that was revolved to a high pole
- c. The game of dice in which Pandava's mislaid their monarchy to the Kauravas. Consequently they all tried to seduce and disrobe Draupadi. Later, Lord Krishna reestablished her costumes to protect her from dishonor
- d. The battle between Kauravas and Pandavas, where Lord Krishna discoursed the dogmas of religion to brave Arjuna.

The basic concern of Kiran Nagarkar to write *Bedtime Story* was to retell the stories from Mahabharata to his readers with coping with social disorders in the society. He personally feels these inequalities as a painful experience. (BTS: 4) He observed the significant events of state emergency and worldwide happenings. His main objective was to reiterate these happenings through bedtime stories as lullaby works for making children cool. Kiran Nagarkar in *Bedtime Story* has delineated several aspects such as detachment, class struggle, determination, mortality, encounters with others, inner and outer struggle, mawkishness and sensations. It reveals world-shattering Indian customs and practices. Through the epic *Mahabharata*, Nagarkar narrates the significance of the mythological characters and their heroic deeds. These heroic characters such as Arjun, Lord Krishna, Eklavya, Karna, Gandhari and Draupadi. *Bedtime Story* is written during a state emergency. It was primarily called by the honorable former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Kiran Nagarkar's play *Bedtime story* keeps on moving his readers continuously. It also awakens their mindfulness and deep sleep and disturbs them instead of making them tranquil. It makes people realize their communal glitches and recognize their social obligations.

In *Bedtime Story*, Kiran Nagarkar reflects his virtuosity and pushes all the boundaries of their forms in an experimental way. He takes the references from epic Mahabharata and narrates shocking tale of oppression, injustice, gender and class violence. Religious fundamentalist groups criticized *Bedtime Story* when it was written after the Emergency in 1975. The play retells crossover stories from the Mahabharata that skim between legend and contemporary genuineness, indifference, horrendous wrongdoing and self-control. In his preface, Nagarkar lists a series of political barbarities including the riots of 1984 and 2002 which raises the most disconcerting questions without providing candid answers and a reasonable conclusion.

- **Glimpses of Mahabharata in Kiran Nagarkar's *Bedtime Story*:**

It is observed that epics like Mahabharata or Ramayana in Indian literature principally fascinate the readers and offers them a source of encouragement for writers across the globe. They interpret the primordial mythologies. The pioneering author of the modern era reframes the myths to address the modern issues. These epics have the great impact on Indian society and are the product of the past. In fact, they serve as an integral part of contemporary cognizance. Meenakshi Mukherjee asserts,

The epics such as Ramayana and Mahabharata in their real sense reflect provincial ethos. This interpretation was a great experiment for the writers. These epics witness as the part of contemporary mindfulness. (Epic and Novel in India: Mukherjee: 603)

Bedtime Story is an experimental play where Nagarkar motivates his readers and familiarizes the entire accredited customs. He highlights the traditional notions of India's caste system. The episode Guru Dakshina is very famous in the epic Mahabharata. Eklavya and Dronacharya are the witnesses of the occurrence. Eklavya works as the sincere, honest and obedient disciple whereas Dronacharya is the ideal and disciplined religious Guru. The lower caste Eklavya keeps the earthen image of his Guru and completes the skill of archery as he is not admitted in the training of Dronacharya. After completing his training of archery without Guru, he appears before Dronacharya. There he is asked to give his right thumb. Accordingly, as an obedient

disciple, he cut off his right thumb as the part of Guru Dakshina and revealed his true love for his Guru. He completely surrenders his Guru. The intension behind this is to conceal the identity of lower caste Eklavya and not to overtake the superior caste Kshatriya Prince Arjun. Nagarkar cross-examines this historical event and gives it an innovative dimension. The humble Eklavya obeys the command of his Guru, bends down, picks up a little bit mud in his hand, spits in it, moulds it into the shape of a thumb, places it on a greenery, kneels and gives it as a gift to his Guru Dronacharya.

Here the readers witness that lower caste Karna feels embarrassment like Eklavya. He thinks that his corporeal parenthood was un-disclosed, and he was treated as low born and inferior creature. In addition to this the female character Draupadi does not allow him to participate in her *swayamwara*. Karna reveals his identity to Draupadi as the future king of Angadesh, Draupadi sarcastically comments:

I know who you are. You are from the inferior and lower caste family. You are not supposed to behave as a king. A leased kingdom is of not any use. This is the place where all kings and princess are assembled. If you don't want to be humiliate before them, I instruct you to leave this place and hide behind your followers. (BTS: 35)

Nagarkar depicts the characteristics of his female characters like Draupadi and Gandhari. Draupadi's *swayamwara* takes place with Prince Arjun. After this, she goes directly in the campaign of five brothers, i.e. Pandava's. As per the guidelines and misinterpretation of mother Kunti, Draupadi has been distributed among them. She questions them:

You all have become mad. You share these things to me because of the insistence of your mother. (BTS: 38)

Nagarkar reveals the hypocrite nature of Dharamraj Yudhishtira. He wholeheartedly agrees to observe his mother's appreciation. Here Draupadi claims:

Dharamraj, do remember the significance and aptness of your name. Accordingly you are the pioneer of veracity and belief. (BTS: 39)

The Draupadi delineates her aggression. She curses the Pandava's with frustration:

O God, why don't you listen to me? Herewith I curse to entire Pandava's and their descendants. Your victory may be transform into curse. Their sweet words may be turn into poison. Kunti has snatched my sons likewise her sons also be snatched by someone. (BTS: 39)

Afterwards, Prince Sushasan tries to unclot her and Pandava's remain silent observers. They failed in protecting her from Kauravas. She rebukes them bitterly for their coward and timid nature. It was the discourteous instant for Pandava's. She reprimands her husband but also interrogates at the presence of god when Krishna delays in liberating Draupadi during undressing action made by Kauravas. She once again expletives God:

O God, I don't understand your behavior. Are you the same God who requires vocation when his people are in distress? (BTS: 72)

Here deliberately Kiran Nagarkar alters the names of Duryodhan and Dushashan. He changes their names to Suyodhan and Sushyashan humorously. We witness that several characters do not stand close to their mythical reputation. When Prince Arjun conquers and wins the swayamwara, he asserts to the feminine character Draupadi that she can still marry the person of her choice. She doesn't have to get married him just because his arrow smashes the target.

Draupadi immediately responds:

Arjun, I am only yours. I cannot think about others. If anyone's arrow had crash the mark, I wholeheartedly, swear to you, I would have misappropriated out of my husband's billet and vanished my chasteness to you. (BTS: 35)

- **Greed and Hypocrisy of Primordial and Contemporary Society in *BTS*:**

The play *Bedtime Story* disclosures the insatiability and duplicity of prehistoric and contemporary society. In the opening scene, the grandmother narrates the significant episodes from the epic Mahabharata to her grandchildren.

1. The first episode where Guru Dronacharya states the difference between the lower and upper caste characters like Eklavya and Prince Arjun. As we are aware, Eklavya belongs to lower caste and Arjun from upper caste community. Dronacharya gives topmost priority

to teach Arjun than Eklavya on the basis of caste.

2. Eklavya, a lower caste mahar student attempts to defend his upper-class friend Arjun from the homicidal family of Draupadi with whom he has been sleeping on the astute. Arjun discharges from the scene and Eklavya was mercilessly crushed. Draupadi's father manipulates him,

Mahar must be thankful to the idealistic Mahatma Gandhi, the father of nation, for the provisions and government jobs reserved for them. That's why government of India opted to reserve the best jobs for low caste people. If this wouldn't have done, they would remain Neo-Buddhists. (BTS: 25)

Nagarkar focusses on the plights of Dalits and the ethnic discernment and exposes the difficulties of the present society. In *Bedtime Story*, Eklavya discourses with Dronacharya and Prince Arjuna:

You have got victory in the first round. Now there is another round. The firmament will change and the environment will transform. You do not recollect that we had already met before. There is a great variance between the legitimacy and misinterpretation. Honorable Guru, I bow down myself before you with a reverence from a longer distance. (BTS: 20)

The second episode explains about Draupadi's swayamwara and her meeting with Kunti and her five sons Pandavas. The feminine character Rupali is a widow. She wishes to run her dead husband's family business. She expects assistance and provision. But astonishingly her brother-in-law also ridicules her rather than any support. Nobody assists her. Nagarkar draws our attention towards the problem of masculinity biasness which is present in contemporary society. Here both Draupadi and Rupali were denied their basic rights. Their existence was ignored, and they remain neglected and voiceless.

In the third episode, we visualize the game of dice where Draupadi pays the price for her husband's illogicality. The Kauravas tried to undress Draupadi in front of helpless Pandavas. They work as the mute observer of the happening and no one escapes her from this shameful event.

The chorus is unreliable and promises the audience that they are in a inoffensive surroundings and nothing astonishing will occur but the play ends with the extinction of the audience. He recurrently says:

Now take off your clothes. There is no need to feel shame. You have done it for several years when all types of dreadful things were happening. So why are you pretending now? You wash away this dirty play with a organic bath. Open the gas chamber taps. God be with you so long. (BTS: 96)

Findings:

After studying the minute details in the research, we can visualize the following major findings.

- a. A bedtime story is an outdated form of storytelling, where a story is narrated to a child at bedtime to prepare the child for sleep.
- b. It is concluded that bedtime stories in its sense are a cultural phenomenon which produces a perceptive, communal and psychosomatic impression on the children life.
- c. *The play is itself revolutionary in nature which highlights casteism and misogyny. The readers can witness the glimpses of modern Indian history and politics throughout the play.*
- d. It is displayed that *Bedtime Story* is a play of fortitude, human being's adjustment, encounter in one's mind, sentiment and emotion, impartiality, fair play and equivalence.
- e. The story creates awareness among people to think about their social problems and about their social responsibility.
- f. The readers are motivated to interrogate an acknowledged ethnicity.
- g. The play *Bedtime Story* exposes the greed and hypocrisy of ancient and modern society.

Conclusion:

The present research mainly focuses on the indications of contemporary Indian history, myth and politics through Kiran Nagarkar's *Bedtime Story*. In this research, the researcher has attempted to delineate the several aspects such as key words related to the research, *Bedtime Story* in general and Kiran Nagarkar's *BTS* in particular, usage and purpose of bedtime stories

as a tool to create awareness among masses, the glimpses of episodes in the Hindu epic Mahabharata, greed and hypocrisy in ancient and modern society. Nagarkar, through this play, attempts to awaken the people from their deep sleep and to think about the social problems with conscience and to understand the social responsibility. Thus, Nagarkar succeeds in interrogating the acknowledged ethnicities.

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