



FAITH, FEALTY AND FORTITUDE: A MANIFESTATION OF SPIRITUALITY IN KIRAN NAGARKAR'S GOD'S LITTLE SOLDIER

KAMALAKAR B. GAIKWAD

Research Student,
S. P. Pune University, Pune. (M.S.)
(INDIA)

DR. SMITA SATISH PATIL

Research Guide,
S. P. Pune University, Pune. (M.S.)
(INDIA)

ABSTRACT

Kiran Nagarkar, the recipient of Sahitya Akademi Award is recognized as a cosmopolitan, experimental, irreverent and visionary. He is one of the significant contemporary writers in the canon of Indian English literature. In Present paper, Kiran Nagarkar tracks the record of his protagonist's spiritual awakening, discipline, faith, fealty and fortitude in God's Little Soldier.

He illuminates Zia's childhood, his immersion in Islamic doctrine at the urging of his devout aunt Zubeida, and his conviction as he grows up that he is destined to be "God's little soldier", a defender of Islamic values in a degenerate and immoral world. Nagarkar shows how Zia has proclaimed his fealty and how he wants to light the path of Allah and bring errant souls back into the righteous fold. Thus the researcher's attempt is to reveal Zia's fanatical love for Allah and his extreme desire to stand up for his beliefs and on earth for God.

Key words: *Spirituality, fealty, fortitude, zeal, impact of prayer, defender of faith, Islamic doctrines, curiosity for spiritual growth etc.*

Kiran Nagarkar shows the glimpses of spiritual quest, display of faith, spiritual zeal, fortitude, conversion of religion, fanaticism and religious extremism, hypocrisy, passion and love, influence of Hindi cinema, manifestation of knowledge, identity crisis, conflicts, pain and suffering, psychoanalysis, exploration of the heroics and perils of idealism, conversion, adaptability and adjustment in new Islamic culture, and Oedipus complex in *God's Little Soldier*. In this research paper, the researcher only highlighted the aspect; manifestation of spirituality. Nagarkar tracks the systematic record of his protagonist Zia Khan's faith, fealty and fortitude. He also shows his worthiness and reveals how he was the apt instrument or

chosen vessel in the hands of Allah. He takes us through Zia's childhood, his immersion in Islamic doctrine at the urging of his devout aunt Zubeida, and his conviction as he grows up that he is destined to be "God's little soldier", a defender of Islamic values in a degenerate and immoral world. Zubeida aunt says, *"Your destination or manzil is the key to everything. Jannat, paradise itself, is not beyond our reach once we know your objective."* (53) Zia Khan, a son of a liberal Muslim family in Mumbai, is introduced to us as a child in the arms of his fundamentalist Muslim aunt Zubeida who has left her husband to nurse an impossible devotion to the actor Dilip Kumar. (23) Author projects him as a spoilt son of rich parents, precociously self-aware, resentful of his asthmatic brother Amanat, who gets his mother's attention, and madly in love with the Bollywood child-star Sagari. Nagarkar tries to convince us how Zia was moulded by his aunt Zubeida Khaala. She was Zia's one and only friend, ally, guide task master, his lodestar, his inspired instructor. (25) She was the most intrepid member of the family. She took Zia along with her every day to scout the alien terrain, the wild jungle full of tigers, hippos, mad elephants and polar bears. She also took him to the Dawoodi mosque at Bhendi Bazaar for a private prayer. She settles the queries of Zia in a convincing manner. She tried to kill his intense and contrary feelings, curiosity, fear, fascination and uneasiness. She was soft and kind hearted woman. She was the most caring person. She knows very well Zia's sensitive mind and the way he thought almost better than he himself did. (53) She believes in charity. She had very little money and whatever she had she was constantly giving to beggars, to a servant for his son's eye operation or to the driver to send his daughter to school. It did not matter whether the person was a Hindu, Christian or Muslim. (22) She imbibes the Islamic doctrines in the mind of Zia. She had told him that it was his destiny to become a waalee, a saint who could perform wondrous miracles: cure the sick, bring light to the blind and speech to the mute. She tries to satire on Christianity and reveals the superior aspects of Islam to Zia.

Prophet Mohammed is greater than Moses to whom God himself gave the tablets with the Ten Commandments, greater than Jesus, whom the foolish Christians held to be the son of God. It was Mohammed who had given the world the gift of Islam: the act of surrendering, the surrender of the true believer to the One and Only God who is Allah. It is this same verb Islam, his aunt had told him, which is the source of the word Islam. Zubeida khaala was Zia's mentor in spiritual matters. She firmly creates awareness in Zia's mind that his vocation is to bring back to Islam those who had strayed. His voice would be a thunderous indictment in the ears and consciences of those who had become casual about Allah or had turned their backs upon him altogether. His own faith would be like a beacon to sinners. Yes, he would bring back the lost souls of Islam. In due course, he would convert the pagans and idolaters and increase the tribe of the prophet. And Allah had chosen her, the meek and submissive Zubeida, to mould and guide the little boy into a great pir and saint. That was her mission. (21) She says to Zia, *"You say your prayers, do as the Holy Book says and follow what your*

khaala teaches you and you will always be God's Little Soldier. We are nobodies and belong nowhere since we have turned our back upon Allah." (49)

Zia proclaims his fealty to Allah. He was very special for Khan's. For Zubeida khaala he was the light. Definitely he was going to light the path to Allah and bring errant souls back into the righteous fold. (38) Zia developed already in his childhood a fanatical love of Allah. It reveals Zia's extreme desire to stand up for his beliefs and on earth for God. Zia realized his mistake about worshipping the idol lord Ganesh. He wanted to make amends. He was willing to pay any price, undergo any punishment, offer any sacrifice to win back his aunt. He didn't know what the terms of reparation were and what would move the stone that passed for Khaalajaan's heart. Sometimes she scolds Zia for his irresponsible behaviour. She asserts Zia, *"You are a willful child, Zia. I should be punishing you but I have a soft heart and you are taking advantage of me."* (3). She doesn't want Zia to watch the outside disgraceful spectacle. She makes him sleep by singing lullabies at night. She strongly imbibed the things in the mind of Zia that – *"Sinners and Non believers will fall into the fiery pits of Jehannum"* (4) She also warns him not to sing materialistic songs. She calls him Satan and condemns him for singing such songs. She proclaims, *"Singing is forbidden unless it is in the praise of Allah, the Almighty."* (4). Even she tells him, *"Your father Zafar Khan is Satan, a very image of the evil one. We'll all burn in hell for eternity because of him."* (6). Zubeida Khaala always reminds Zia khan that he is the God's chosen one, Allah's anointed vessel. Abbajaan bought presents for the whole family, just for the *pleasure* of seeing the delight on their faces. Pleasure was the key word. Pleasure is how Satan entices and entraps gullible fools. Abbajaan would come to kiss him goodnight with Ammi but Zia would turn away. He had names for all three of them. Ammijaan was the *love* of his life, Amanat was the *joy* of his life and Zia was the light of his life. (6) Zia's elder brother Amanat was his mortal enemy. His devout aunt Zubeida Khaala takes care of Zia. She gives spiritual lessons to Zia. Nagarkar says, *"The power of mass prayer was a revelation to Zia."*(84) He writes of Zia's first visit to the mosque by himself. He discovered that his prayers had more body and weight and rapture when he was among the believers in the mosque. At the end of the prayer, Zia was aware of an intense bond with his fellow men. He recollected maulavi's words, *"Allah was their father and all those in the mosque were Zia's blood brothers."* (84) Zia certainly wants to shake up the world. He doesn't know how, but he is strong determined person. Zubeida Khala had often told him, *"You will not remember Zia' but we almost lost you twice. First time at your birth and then, shortly thereafter, to the devil in the shape of a woman tried to snatch your soul Islam. But I was adamant, and Allah, the Merciful, the Beneficent, saved you. 'Can the devil be a woman?' asked Zia. He can be anything. A snake, a sin, temptation."* (21). He grows with his brother Amanat up in a wealthy Muslim family in Mumbai (India). His aunt Zubeida is a devout Muslim, his parents are not. But Zia believes in Allah and the fact that he was his little warrior chosen to fight for the faith. One of Zia's earliest memories was of a concert at their home, Firdaus. His aunt Zubeida pushed her chin out in the direction of the

dais and said, 'Satan, that's what he is.' Zia was supposed to have been in bed. He could barely keep his eyes open but he was not about to sleep. Abbajaan and Ammi had followed his brother Amanat to stay up all night on the paltry excuse that he was older. Zia would show them. Not only Amanat, but his father, mother and the entire audience of invitees would be dead to the world by three or four in the morning and he would still be keeping vigil. (Essays on Indian and world literature, On Kiran Nagarkar's Gods Little Soldier, Indian Express, Sunday, April 09, 2006)

Nagarkar reveals Zia's spiritual zeal when he was seven years old. He writes in the diary gifted to him by Aunt Antonia Langston. He says. *"My name is Zia Khan. I am seven years old today. Allah is my God. Islam is my flag. And the prophet is my Guide. Zubeida khaala has told me that I am chosen to be a waalee and lead my people to the light of Allah. She says I must be a good boy with good thoughts. Only then can I be a waalee. Amanat is my brother. He's always sick. Abbajan and I call him 1001, because he tells me the stories."* (39) One day Zubeida khaala took Zia along with her to the patch of open ground behind Jumma Masjid. There he heard the preaching of Maulavi first time. Maulavi says, *"We are all the children of just one father, the great and good Almighty Himself. It is He, in His infinite love, who begot us all."* (58) This maulavi was Zia's first revelation. He was torched by a light, the light of Allah Himself, which this man on the dais had directed towards him. He spoke of Hussein's torture, slaughter and quartering. Zia came under the influence of Maulavi. He decided, *"I swear to unite all the brothers and sisters of the planet in the name of Allah. I will not tolerate any dissent."* The maulavi's words kept ringing in his ears. *"If your brothers Hassan and Hussein could sacrifice their lives for Allah, you too, Zia, can ride forth and redeem your people by becoming a martyr for them."* (59-60)

Nagarkar shows Zia's curiosity for the spiritual growth. Zia had read the Koran in English many times. He never ceased to marvel at how such a small book managed to encompass all of life for all time. At makeshift mosque, he requested Maulana Rizvi to teach him Arabic. He firmly believes that the Koran he read was not the Word of God. For the Word of God was in Arabic, and any translation, however literal, was at best an attenuation of God's voice, and however well meaning, a tampering with the word. Maulana Rizvi promised him to teach Zia the Koran in Arabic. (112) Readers strongly become the witness of Zia's self righteousness. It compelled him to see the troubles of people of Cambridge and with that noble motive, spiritual zeal and his self righteousness, he quitted his study and get involved in social activity. He asserts, *"Who knows? All because of my blasted self righteousness. How can I ever forgive myself?"* (115) Zubeida Khaala reminds Zia about his renewal of faith in Allah. She writes, *"Are you praying, my little boy? Pray five times a day and Allah will keep you out of harms way. Are you going to the mosque on Fridays? Make friends with mullah. And read the Koran every day. It cleanses your soul."* (116) Zia prayed five times a day as per the instructions laid down by his aunt. If he was out and unable to keep his prayer timings, he asked god's forgiveness and prayed when he returned to his room or whenever he

got a bit of privacy. He went to the mosque in Cambridge every Friday. Whenever he thought of Allah, there were tears in his eyes. He had been reborn because Allah had picked up a foolish and erring man and given him a second chance. Zia wanted to show Allah that he would do anything, absolutely anything to be worthy of Him. "Give me a sign, oh Lord of Creation, give me a sign. Reveal to me the task you have chosen me for. Make impossible demands on me. Test me, Oh Lord. Ask any sacrifice, be it my life, and I will not hesitate to lay it down for you." He regularly went to the mosque in Peterborough even though it was far away. He waited there after prayers when it grew quiet and he seemed to feel the presence of the Almighty almost physically. He stayed on folded knees for half an hour, sometimes an hour, at times even longer. He cited the names of patrons in Nairobi, Dar-es-Salaam and Cape Town and quoted the wonderful things the Qawwals of Lucknow had said about his troupe. He praised their voices and passionate love songs which was the bounty of Allah. (123-124) The mosque in Peterborough proved to be a propitious discovery for Zia. Vivian, a girl friend of Zia, knows his reserved behaviour. She asserts, "*Modesty is a fine quality, Zia, but not at the cost of the truth.*" (123) She speaks in an exaggerating tone, "*The light of god has shone upon Zia; he is assisting the master of Immanuel, to the IMF, UNESCO or some other hallowed congregation of men. Oh he is the shining light and he is going to lead the multitudes to the Promised Land, hallelujah, hallelujah.*" (127)

Nagarkar cleverly depicts Zia's method of afternoon prayers. He cleansed himself meticulously, washed his hands thrice, his mouth thrice, the nostrils twice, the face from ear to ear thrice, the right and then the left arm thrice, passing his wet hands over the head, ears, neck and finally washed his ankles and feet thrice. He unrolled his prayer rug, faced the Kaaba and proclaimed his intention to pray and the number of prayers he would say. Zia gets the spiritual satisfaction after his regular prayer. Prayers made him giddy with joy. During prayer, he feels that his words become more and more frantic. No one would rescue him except god. He wanted to do things for Allah, to show Him how madly he loved Him; his eyes, ears, all his senses he dedicated to god; his body, spirit and soul were Allah's; every act and action of his was a votive offering to the One and Only. Then Zia suddenly felt the hand of Allah on his head. It was as though he could hear the Almighty talking to him: "Have you not knocked on my door day in and day out and asked me to give you a sign? Have you not begged me to entrust you with a task, however impossible? Now go, my son, and defend the honour of your god. (128-129) Zia takes an oath to eradicate evil from this world, "Oh Lord. It is my intent to carry out your orders. I will accomplish my mission. With your help and guidance, I will locate the evil and annihilate it." He thanks lord for protecting his soul. "*I may lose my own soul. But as long as You are my witness and my guardian, I'm safe and I've nothing to fear.*" (131-132) Finally Zia had knelt and touched the ground with his forehead and concluded his prayer. After his prayer, Vivian tried to mimicking him. Now this was the unbearable act for Zia. He rebuked her with a rage, "*I have taken a lot of shit from you. You have bad mouthed me at every turn. You wished me ill and prayed that I would slip back into*



the depression that overtook me when I first came to Cambridge. ...All this and more I have ignored or borne without comment because I did not wish to add to your misery and sickness. But if you ever, ever again make fun of Allah or my prayers to Him or anything connected with Islam, I will kill you.” (132-133)

Nagarkar shows Zia’s intense desire to assassinate Salman Rushdie. Vivian by knowing this truth asks him courageously. He demonstrates Vivian’s euphemistic tone which Zia strongly disliked. Islam does not allow women to speak vulgar words. She violated this principle and asked him, “Why are you monitoring Salman Rushdie’s whereabouts on that wall map? Zia asks her whether she had reported to police. She asserts, “*If I had gone to the police, you wouldn’t be here but in some jail where your interrogators would be playing ping pong with your balls.*” Vivian’s tone and high pitched intensity seemed to convince Zia more than her words. How could she use a word like ‘balls’? Zia thinks, “Good Muslim women would not even euphemistically refer to the thing between their own legs, let alone men’s legs. He had to re-educate her, make her into a pure and modest Muslim woman. Before she learnt Arabic, she needed to learn manners, social etiquettes and most of all, be taught to respect menfolk and especially her man. She would have to be taught Islamic values. (137-138) When Vivian asks him whether he read Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses* and he should not condemn the book without reading it. Zia calls it as *The work of the Prince of Darkness*. Then Zia tries to imbibe the Islamic values and to defend the honour of god. “God is not like a quantum theory, that you can check Him out for yourself if you are so inclined. Nor can different gods subsist side by side as Newtonian physics does with Einsteinian. God is faith and must be taken on faith. This is the essence of god. Allah does not need protection from Satan, but a true believer does. It is I who must defend the honour of god or else it is I, not god, who will be defenseless against Satan. If I am to lead my people and perhaps even non believers to Allah, I must prove myself worthy of Him. I must vanquish Satan and protect myself and my flock.” (138-139)

The researcher concludes the discussion with Zia’s manifestation of spirituality. The base of any religion is, of course, spirituality. The faith, fealty and fortitude are the strongest pillars of spirituality. The readers witness the incidences such as Zia’s religious fervour, fanaticism, fasting and prayerful life, passion for his own religion, savior, strict follower of Islamic principles and his self righteousness and revelation for god and Zia’s curiosity for spiritual growth etc.



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