

**'DISTRESS AND DISORIENTATION' IN KIRAN NAGARKAR'S
'RAVAN AND EDDIE'**

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ABSTRACT

Kiran Nagarkar is the most prominent Indian writer in the canon of Indian English literature. He reveals the distress and disorientation of his protagonist in his famous novel Ravan and Eddie. His protagonist Ravan undergoes a struggle to find his real self. He tolerates the cramping pressures of anxieties and sometimes lost in it. Nagarkar remains primarily a novelist of moods, of persistent states of mind, of the psyche. He sees the world in terms of experience as it emerges from the encounter of the self with the world outside. The present research paper probes into the world of the protagonist and his deep psychological problems. Through the theme of identity crisis, the researcher wants to display the tragic plights and condition of existence of protagonists in an effective manner.

Keywords: *real self, conditions of existence, states of mind, psychological problems, real relationships, Identity crisis, distress and disorientation etc.*

Introduction:

Kiran Nagarkar's novel *Ravan and Eddie* (1995) is an iconic and comic masterpiece which focuses on bawdy and Rabelaisian adventures of his protagonists in post-colonial India.

"It elucidates the twists and turns, the pleasure, pain, the horror, the angst, the guilt, sufferings, humiliation, power, expiation, domination, betrayal, self discovery, a quest for the meaning of guilt and responsibility, sin and sex, crime and punishment, power, domination, betrayal, self-discovery, nationalism, secularism etc."

(Book Review of *Ravan and Eddie*, Whazzup Mumbai, Tuesday, April 4, 2006).

Nagarkar projects their tragic condition through black but passionate humour, wit and satire. He puts forth the complicated predicament of modern man living in a multi-cultural society. Kunz, Annemarie concludes,

“Nagarkar’s novel provides a very good and real impression of what life and the Hindu-Christian relationship were like that time.”

Lukmani comments,

“The main focus remains on the characters. Nagarkar makes the readers have a stake in his characters.”

(The Shifting World of Kiran Nagarkar, Introduction, page x)

The major attempt of the researcher is to show the true identity of the protagonists through thematic aspect of distress and disorientation and identity crisis. The term distress and disorientation refers to a period of uncertainty and confusion in which a person's sense of identity becomes insecure, typically due to a change in their expected aims or role in society. The factors responsible for this distress and disorientation are extreme poverty, class struggle, humiliation, real self, psychological relationship, conflicts, pain and suffering etc.

Kiran Nagarkar exposes identity crisis of Ravan at different levels. He focuses on Ravan’s dilemma. Right from his childhood, Ravan is in confused state for his identity. He doesn’t know about his identity crisis. Verma comments on individuality of human being.

“The individuality of man is mostly preserved by society by giving that person sociable treatment. If it is not given, then their lives may doom.” Mulk Raj Anand says, *“The society’s progress depends on the degree and nature of perfection achieved by its individual members. In a true sense, an ideal society is a community of mankind, a brotherhood that apprehends the individuality of man.”* (Verma, 54).

The unbearable burden of Identity crisis starts in Ravan’s life right from his birth. He has identity crisis in his mind about calling him as a murderer of Victor Coutinho by Violet. The first thing he doesn’t know how he is the murderer of Victor Coutinho when he was one year baby. As a baby, Ravan falls from the balcony and Victor saves him at the cost of his life. By seeing the death of Victor, Violet started blaming Ram as a murderer who was even beyond knowing the meaning of the same. “Murderer, murderer, Violet said in a hoarse voice.” (6). In victor’s funeral, with a superhuman effort, she took a deep breath, pointed her finger at Parvati’s son and proclaimed, Cain. Murderer. (10). In one of the incidence, she communicates with Lalee about Ravan in a disgusting manner,

“I do not wish to sully my tongue with that abominable name.” Violet advised her, “Beware of him. He killed my husband.” (295-296).

The naming of Ram as a Cain has the biblical reference. Bible declares the origin of first murder into this world by the hands of Cain. In the book of Genesis, Cain murdered his younger brother Abel because his offering is accepted by god. As a part of revenge, he killed Abel in the field. Cain said to his brother Abel; “Let’s go out to the field. While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.” (Genesis 4: 8) Violet announces him “Cain. Murderer”. Ravan carries this burden of ‘murder’ throughout the life. This was the root cause of his unhappiness. It is seen that Ravan’s identity as a ‘murderer’ is intensified and he has been held guilty for the crimes which he hasn’t committed. Ravan’s fall in the novel is purely accidental and even then coincidentally he is trapped in the conscience of sin and guilt. With his ‘insider–outsider’ identity, Nagarkar looks at the Christian concept of ‘sin’ through Ravan. Ravan’s problem is that he has been drifting towards the world of ‘sin’ and ‘evil’ for which he is not at all responsible. Parvati repeatedly says, “Ravan is beyond redemption”.

Ravan’s disorientation affects badly on his domestic life. He has identity crisis about non-understanding the conflict between his parents. When Ravan grow up, he is confronted with the identity crisis. Now he is unable to understand the quarrels between his parents. He couldn’t figure out why Parvati asked his father to mind his language. He rarely swore. He certainly hadn’t just now. Unless bed was a swear word. He had the strange sense that when his parents argued about work, or anything else for that matter, they always ended up where they started. He would have liked to have made everybody happy by calling himself Ram-Ravan or Ravan-Ram, but both his parents found the hyphenated conjoining offensive. (21) Now Ravan asks the questions himself. He introspects about himself as a murderer. “Was he Ram or Ravan? Black or white? Good or evil? He had no idea. He didn’t mind being either. His name was a source of taunts and baiting in school and in the chawls but even good, solid, descent names could be distorted and lent themselves to wit, rhyme and scatology. (21) When, how and why had he killed Eddie’s father? Was he leading two lives and did the one not know of the other? Did his parents know that he was a murderer? (46-47). Ravan is beyond the understanding why he is named as Ravan instead of Ram. His father still called him Ram. Parvati called him Ravan. If they called him Ravan in school, it was because Parvati had taken him over for registration. (21) When Ravan tried to convince Chandrakant Dixit about participating in RSS, he was badly scolded by Chandrakant Dixit’s father, “Sala you bloody murderess of Mahatma Gandhi. Don’t pretend to be so surprised, you murdered the Mahatma, you have the gall to come to my house and preach the gospel of the Sabha? Out, out.” (24)

In his childhood, Ravan became the victim of humiliation. He is unable to realize why he is called as a Ghati by Taekwondo teacher Mr. Brillimoria. Nagarkar demonstrates the

humiliations in his protagonist's life. He says that humiliation was the intimate partner of his protagonist Ravan. He is humiliated by the orthodoxical and religious authorities. They didn't give him fair and humane treatment. One day, he put on his white shirt and khaki half, left home and didn't go to the Sabha. On his way back to home, he stopped at St. Sebastian's School and Church to watch a game of cricket. A teacher of St. Sebastian unnoticed him and called as a ghati. "What do you think you are doing in my class, *ghati*? Go back to you Sabha. (29) Ravan introspects why he been called as a ghati by a stranger. Nagarkar illumines the truth that even if ordinary people fight for their honour, still humiliation never stops them to chase. He is unable to understand why his work is not counted and is given the reward for his hard work. He thinks himself, "Why people around him letting him down? He had given his best and yet he had nothing to show for it." Here Ravan was not fighting for his life but for his honour. Humiliation made him panic. He confidently spoke about Eddie's persuasion. Eddie denies this and blames him for his father's murder. In a state of loneliness, finally Ravan is kicked off from the Sabha. He is proved as the victim of alienation and loneliness and accused as a murderer by Eddie in RSS Sabha. He kept asking himself a question, where was he going wrong? Was he failing the world? Or were the people around him letting him down? He had given it his best shot and yet he had nothing to show for it. (27) How could he have killed a man when he was a year old? Why he fails in convincing other people? He was humiliated by Chandrakant Dixit's father and his mission in bringing Chandrakant failed thoroughly. Ravan is unable to understand why people humiliate him and do not give justice to him. On the occasion of Founders day of Sabha, Ravan asked his prize to Appa Achrekar for bringing Eddie to RSS. Then Lele Guruji hold Ravan's collar along with the thin flesh at the back of the boy's neck and began forcing him to retreat. He said to Appa, "No, Appa. This is a nobody. What do you want, Ravan? My Wilson fountain- pen. What fountain pen, you ass? What have you done to deserve it? I brought Eddie. I talked to Eddie and persuaded him to join us" (34) Lele Guruji's hand was tightening its grip on Ravan's neck while dragging him off the stage. Ravan was not fighting for his life; he was fighting for his honour. He asked few of the questions to himself, When had he killed Eddie's father? And why? Was he leading two lives and did the one not know of the other? Did his parents know that he was a murderer? Were they keeping mum because he was their son? Did Godse fire the first shot? Or did he? Where was the gun? And Eddie's father had Ravan shot him or stabbed him with a knife? And what if his parents didn't know anything about his past either? What would happen when they discovered it? Would they throw him out? What a question. Who would harbor a murderer? (46). One day, he asked his mother in a restless condition,

"You never told me I killed Eddie's father."

In return of this, out of rage and anger, Parvati spoke,

"You didn't kill him. He almost killed you." Ravan asks, "How come I'm alive and he's dead? Don't you ever say something so terrible?" (48)

Ravan introspects how he is a murderer of Mahatma Gandhi. Mr. Dixit had revealed that Ravan was an active partner in Gandhi's murder. (192). Ravan fails to understand why Chandrakant Dixit's father calls him as a murderer of Mahatma Gandhi. He cannot recall either of the events. But the stain of murder definitely darkens Ravan's life. Ravan started thinking of his own.

"Was this his vocation? Was he born with a career which he was too opaque to recognize? Should he give up school?" (145)

Nagarkar describes the incidences which confirm Ravan's identity as a murderer. His identity as a murderer is confirmed when he is asked to kill Prakash Stoneware's stepmother Hemlata. Prakash requests him,

"I want you to kill my stepmother. I will give you twenty rupees." (141)

Rajeev Borade agrees to pay three rupees and seventy five paise and makes a request to cut off his father's left hand as he beat Rajeev for stealing the money. (144). Kiran Nagarkar shows the feeling of guiltiness of Ravan as a killer. By receiving the offers of killing, Ravan got confused. It gave him tremendous pain and soon he discovered that he is a murderer. He lost his sleep and weight. He was ashamed to walk among human beings for fear that they would recognize him for what he was: a patricide. A killer of not just an unborn baby's father but the killer, albeit part killer, of the father of nation. Now he introspects,

"Was this his vocation? Was he born with a career which he was too opaque to recognize?" (145)

The next morning, Sudhir Salunkhe requested Ravan to kill his adamant landlord as he was threatening to evict his family because they hadn't been able to pay rent for the last seven months. (145) Ashok Sane supplicated for killing his father to Ravan as he beats his mother, Ashok, and his nine brothers and sisters every night.(146) Their appeals make Ravan to commit the crimes, assuming him a murderer, take Ravan to a deep cavity of sin and guilt. Towards the end of the novel, Ravan's friend Shobhan Sarang commits suicide, and everyone suspects Ravan. Ravan's crisis becomes deeper and graver. An innocent Ravan is unnecessarily blamed and accused for the murder of Prakash Sonawane's father. Prakash Sonawane assigned the task of killing his stepmother and not his father. He says,

"I want that bitch dead. Let her pay for her sins. You better work your black magic again. I will pay you as much as you want once she's dead because all my father's money will come to me. Do it quick but let her suffer." (157)

One day, he got his hands around Ravan's neck, *"I told you to kill my stepmother, not my father, you bastard. I am going to kill you. Give my father back to me. His hands were back at Ravan's throat."* (149) Prakash Sonawane blames Ravan and asks him, *"Do you want the black magic to kill you too?"* Now Ravan started thinking, *"I don't know what the black magic is or how to operate it?"* Nagarkar explains the dilemma in Ravan's mind,

"How else could you explain the words that had escaped his lips just now? He certainly hadn't spoken them. He had never wished Prakash's father ill, let alone dead. He had never even wished any harm to Prakash's stepmother. And yet Prakash's old man was dead. All because of him. Did he need any more proof that he was a murderer?" (149)

Finally Prakash confessed Ravan that he deliberately killed his father and Ravan is not at all responsible for his death. (156) He also request Ravan not to kill his stepmother. (158). Nagarkar portrays how Ravan carries the burden of sin on his own because of accused nature of people like Mr. Anant Tamhane. Even he tries to convince that poor people are helpless in raising their voice against the rich. If they stand against rich, poor people are always crushed and penalized. Rich men tortures poor and in return of that if poor people raise their voice, they are crushed by callous society. Poor people don't have the right to fight against injustice. They should always remain as sufferers. Mr. Anant Tamhane hold Ravan's back and teased him,

"You don't need an afterlife to pay for your sins. You pay for them here and now." (96).

Later on, Mr. Anant Tamhane spit on Ravan. Ravan also, in return of it, mustered his saliva in his mouth and dropped the spit bomb. Due to this act of Ravan, Anant Tamhane's father Mr. Sadashiv Tamhane prosecutes him. After few days, Mr. Tamhane deliberately tortures to Ravan and other tenants to vacate their rooms.

Ravan, a tortured protagonist, is unable to understand his father's adulterous nature. He became insane when he heard bad sayings of people about his jobless and good for nothing father and Lalee. It was really unbearable for him. He had a difficult time stopping himself from wringing his father's neck. He was so patently thoughtless, childish and selfish. He could not understand why his mother didn't poison him. (287).

The protagonist Ravan is innocent but still he is blamed for the crime which he hasn't committed. When Violet, Eddie's mother, realized that Eddie is following RSS and reading the books of Hinduism, she screamed at him, *"Idol worshipper, where did you get this satanic book? Did that Hindu boy, the devil himself, give it to you? Now Ravan is unable to understand why Violet blames him."*(115-116). The various circumstances compel Ravan to

confess as a murderer. Ravan confesses his aunt Lalee that he knows black magic and with the help of this art, he has killed Eddie's father and Prakash's father. "You know Eddie, the one who told my friends that Ravan's aunt Lalee is a whore? I killed his father because he was making eyes at my mother." I killed him when I was eleven months old and Eddie was still in his mother's womb.

"I killed Prakash's father, the boy who used to terrorize our school students and teachers, I killed his father."

In addition to this he shows few of the letters from the boys from his school asking him to do black magic on people who had been bothering them. (289). After hearing all this, Aunt Lalee became restless and tells to the owner of Irani restaurant,

"No child this, he is a bloody murderer. He wants to kill me." (291).

Readers can witness the identity crisis of Eddie regarding the curiosity to know the eternal truth in Hinduism. His mother Violet orders him not to read the stories of Mahabharata and Ramayana. She says, listening such stories is like committing the heinous sin. Now Eddie says that these stories are as similar as the Bible. Violet warns him not to compare those stories with the Bible. Now Eddie has the question-The Bible is the word of god and those people (Hindus) also say that the Gita is the word of god. He doesn't feel the sense of betrayal. He worships Jesus as well as Hindu Gods. Now he is unable to understand, why his mother and Father D'Souza so angry with him and making such a terrible fuss? Father asks him, "Do you know the price of worshipping anyone but our lord god Jesus Christ? Excommunication. Eddie didn't understand the meaning of it. (132-133)

In short, Identity crisis or identity cohesion is the stage of psychological development in which the protagonist Ravan is always in confusion state. During his adolescence stage, he is faced with physical growth, sexual maturation and integrating ideas of himself. He forms his self image and endures the task of resolving the crisis of his basic ego identity. Throughout the novel, he struggles to find himself. He has no idea who or what he is, where he belongs or where he wants to go. Thus the novel *Ravan and Eddie* focuses on the basic concepts of identity crisis of Ravan at various phases of his life.

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