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Historical Viewpoint in Kiran Nagarkar's *Cuckold*

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Abstract:

Kiran Nagarkar is a dynamic Indian writer whose works empower the readers to understand the actual status of the nation. Along with many other themes, his works also evoke humanity in human beings, its necessity for the future generation and the historical perspective. His other works like *Seven Sixes are Forty Three*, *Ravan and Eddie*, *God's Little Soldier* and *The Extras* enflame the necessity of humanity in the society. Nagarkar captures the essence of the social reality of the contemporary society and at the same time, their ability to present the realities as critical commentaries. He fulfills one of the most important aspects of history, which is an ability to generate new thoughts about a past society through this famous novel and winner of Sahitya Academy Award *Cuckold*. Nagarkar does not spare the society for its blatant negligence of issues like poverty, exploitation, discrimination, courage velour, rivalry, contemporary historical backdrop.

Historical context of a text could help the reader better understand the overall meaning of the text and its details. Historical context is the social, political, cultural, economic, and environmental situations that influence the events or trends we see happen during that time. Therefore, if we are unfamiliar with the traditions, culture, thinking, or events happening at any time in history, we could misinterpret or lose the meaning of a piece of writing we are reading. *Cuckold* is a historical novel which is deeply relevant to the contemporary world and yet will undoubtedly stand the test of time. It's an engaging tale in the hidden pages of history of valour and courage, social obligation and royal duties. Historical fiction generates new thoughts about a past society. In creating distance between the story's history and the reader's history, writers assist the readers with understanding new things and gaining new perspective.

Key words: Culture, historical perspective, velour, poverty, religion, society.

The novel *Cuckold* is a study in history from a different point of view, with emphasis on Rajputana and Meera. It is to the credit of the writer that he has properly filled the bare outline of history with fictional creativity. In short, he has not merely re-told history but has re-created it also. The novel *Cuckold* by Nagarkar is his second best novel in English, whose subject matter dwells upon historical background of the 16th Century Rajputana estate, Mewar, in Rajasthan. The same Mewar is being viewed from the vision of the narrator, the implied author, looking at the past from the present, exploring several levels of convoluted human relationship, that of father with son, mother with son, brother with brother, king with subject, enemy with enemy, friend with friend, husband with wife (or wives), and cuckold with wife's lover who is human in form but divine in incarnation.

Maharaj Kumar, the imminent king-in-making for Mewar, whose actual name is Bhoj Raj, is the twenty-seven-year-old elder son of Maharana Rana Sanga, the most powerful king among Rajputs of his time. He had been an outstanding warrior in various battle-fields as well as statecraft, and possessed such a formidable appearance that "the nightmares and the villains in Pataladesh look less terrifying than him." The credit of building Mewar with its modern and beautiful capital city of Chittor goes to the Maharana Rana Sanga only. Maharaj Kumar presides over the court proceedings in the absence of his father, Rana Sanga and metes out justice to the litigants, as considered suitable from the ruler's point of view.

The history has painfully witnessed that every royal family is plagued with jealousy and conspiracy among the envious family members. There is Vikramaditya, Rana Sanga's third son from his favourite Rani Karmavati (very much like her counterpart in Ramayana, the wicked queen Kaikeyi of King Dasharatha). Vikramaditya is competitor of Maharaj Kumar in every phase of his character, and he is a lecher, greedy, cunning as well as thief, lacking administrative competence to run the estate. He is an incorrigible rogue in every sense and term. Rani Karmavati, being the step mother of Maharaj Kumar, is loaded with intriguing matriarchal mindset against Maharaj Kumar, and in all her conspiracy the kingdom is in favour of her son, Vikramaditya. It indicates that the Mewar palace had to face threats not only from the enemies outside, but also from the familial conspirators inside.

In course of time, young Maharaj Kumar gets married to a beautiful, devout and obedient young girl - the only daughter of Rattan Simha, the second son of Rao Duda of Merta. "It was his grandmother, the Queen Mother herself, who found the girl for the Maharaj Kumar. She was born in a village called Kurki... Since she had lost her mother as a child, she grew up at her grandfather Rao Duda's house... Her eyes were green and her manner was quiet... She would

make a fine wife and God willing, a fine queen for Chittor, in the fullness of time.” Their royal marriage was held with a grand ceremony. It appeared as if the whole Chittor was going to Merta for the wedding. She was the religious-minded and unfathomable Princess Meera, who stepped into the palace as the wife of Maharaj Kumar.

But, Meera did not accept Maharaj Kumar as her husband, because she was in love with Blue body god, the Flautist, Lord Krishna. Naturally such an attitude of Meera did hurt the Rajput ego of Maharaj Kumar. How can any common man tolerate his newly wedded wife in love with some third person? He, as a Rajput Prince, must have felt himself totally insulted or underestimated. It was also against the royal honour in a situation where his wife was not under his control, while the general trend is such that men/ husbands commit murders of their wives if they find them having their relationship with the other men.

As the narrative develops further, the narrator, Maharaj Kumar still believes that she would surely love her socially approved husband as a faithful and pure wife does. She should surrender herself to her husband’s will and pleasure with the same enthusiasm as she is doing for her lover in disguise, the Blue god, Krishna. He also exhibits his faith in her that though she might love the Blue god with her mind and soul, she would not hesitate to offer her body to him as and when needed by him. This is the definition of true love between a human being and God, a divine attachment sans carnal love or lustful desires. This is the Platonic love which takes all human beings to the sublime state of subtleness, the blissful distinction.

In the bygone era of India, the history of Rajputana is coloured with bloodshed on unyielding principles and internal rivalries and treacheries. The upbringing of Prince Kumar is based on bed-time tales of courage and valour exhibited by his ancestors, warrior kings and queens, on various occasions. In fact the Rajputana is rich in its warrior tradition, and their stories instill courage and enthusiasm in the minds of the listeners so that they too may remain ever alert to protect the honour of their land, community and their personality.

Nagarkar through his protagonist here hints at the never fulfilled futuristic ambition of ruling Rajputs and how their ambition is always guided by their past. The protagonist also knows that the courageous exploits of his ancestors were extolled by bards in their musical renderings with a view to make people aware of their great deeds which never saw death above the crown, and also infuse in them the love and sacrifice for their motherland. He realizes that the Muslim Sultans, like Ibrahim Lodi in Delhi, Mahmood Khilji II in Malwa, Muzaffar Shah in Gujarat and even Babur approaching as an invader from Central Asia are not posing greater threat than the threat being posed by his own kith and kin from Sisodia clan.

Nagarkar, highlights how the Mughal king Babur considered open battle field as a moveable fortress, an arrangement that surprised the Rajputs. He demonstrates horrendous battle-scene with his rare narrative skill of describing the concurrent occurrences of the battle-field, in order to provide the right impact on the minds of readers of this novel. The novelist also informs us about the diary maintained by invader Babur who was on his march towards Delhi. The said diary was smuggled out by the intelligence service of Maharaj Kumar, which was headed by Kumar's friend, Mangal Simha. The diary, called '*Baburnama*', contained all strategies for expansion of Mughal Empire in entire India, battle-plans, and love-sick poems composed by Babur himself and his love for paintings.

The heroes in the history of India are symbols of valour and courage. The young prince Kumar is groomed up as a courageous Rajput. It is seen in an episode of his being made to stand before the cage of a tiger, while he was just a fourteen-year-old boy. Though the boy was well armed, the tiger looked ferocious and hungry to devour any prey before him. However, when he shot three arrows and killed the tiger, he realized the significance of suffix 'simha' (lion) attached to the names of Rajputs.

It may be noted that in India, the concept of war implies victory against the enemy 'by hook or by crook', and the field of battle is not made for showing mercy, sympathy or any sort of kindness to the opponent. If these moral, ethical or humanistic qualities are to be shown before the enemy, it is better to surrender and accept the defeat.

Nagarkar has maintained a dichotomy of abiding by the Rajput tradition of valour and its violation by double-crossing, as, fox-like cunningness as is exhibited by Maharaj Kumar. The moment Maharaj Kumar's sword rests on the neck of the Sultan of Malwa, for a lethal deal, it hesitates for a significantly decisive second, whether to go ahead with its task or not. Such an artistic description by Nagarkar reminds readers of Hamlet's hesitation in killing his uncle, Claudius, while the latter had knelt down in prayers to God.

The vast canvas of Rajputana valour is mirrored in the defeat of the Prince, Bhoj Raj, who must now admit the superiority of his personal vanquisher, the Flautist. After the disastrous episode of Khanua battle, Kumar escapes to Chittor, determined to confront the Blue god. Meera has gone to Mathura, the birthplace of her beloved. The prince raises his double-edged sword (Nagarkar has deliberately used a symbolic phrase) to smite the beautifully smiling face of the marble-Flautist at Basawa temple. Just inches behind him are his enemies, six swords drawn for the kill. We may also note here that a living entity (soul) forgets everything due to his change of body, but the Lord (God) remembers because He does not change. His '*sach-chid-*

anand' form remains constant. He is '*advaita*' which means there is no distinction between His body and Himself.

The Prince, at the end, develops insight and drives away all dark clouds of misunderstanding from his mind (like all doubts, getting warded off the mind of Arjun after being enlightened by Lord Krishna). Having suffered all disappointments, humiliations and defeats, the Prince emerges with dignity and the sense of his 'self' is undiminished.

The critical analysis of the novel makes it clear that Nagarkar has the bare outlines of history and he filled them in his fictional creativity. An interesting sidelight the novel provides is about the transitional phase of modern warfare in India. Maharaj Kumar, a finally defeated character, is at the centre of this change. He wants a treatise written on a sustained study of planned retreat, again a strangely un-Rajput but a modern thing to do. He harbours a desire to buy weapons from Portuguese for fighting against Babur. For his independent as well as non-conventional views, he has to hold arguments with local rulers.

Nagarkar takes a fresh view of the valour and honour system of the Rajput tradition. Through the indulgent yet pragmatic eyes of the Maharaj Kumar, the narrator explores the society obsessed with the mythical standards of heroism and sacrifice it has set for itself. Kumar's politically savvy opponents leverage this often hollow ethic to their advantage swaying the opinion of the populace. He, however, finds himself alienated for living by intrinsic spirit of these values and not subscribing to the outward trappings of machismo and bravado.

The novel highlights the Rajputana dynasty comprising warrior Ranas, their battle-oriented life, fierce battles fought in violation of the Rajputana warrior-spirit, merits and demerits of war, political and domestic conspiracy and treachery to grab the throne, Mughal invaders including the most powerful Aurangzeb and his ultimate arrival in Delhi and egocentric behavior of man. But, behind all these, there is a moving narrative force in the form of the major plot, and that is the triangle of love among Maharaj Kumar, Meera and the Flautist. The love-story of the trio bears the Indian history at its backdrop.

What is churned out of this novel is that the concept of love, sans flesh and blood, is the divine love, which is found between Lord Krishna, the Flautist or the Blue god, who is envied by Maharaj Kumar. It is quite natural also, for Kumar is the Prince and the king-in-the-making for Mewar. Woman in the capacity of a servant or *dasi* or wife for the prince or the king is the commodity of consumption. Men can hardly think of the divine status of a woman, except when she is either a mother or sister. The company of women in general enhances their royal identity and taste.

Nagarkar creates a flesh-and-blood, flawed and complex person from the necessary data the history has made available to him. In Maharaj Kumar, he creates a loving son, a master statesman and war strategist, and at times, anachronistically forward thinking crown prince. He

is also the arrogant crown prince who, incredulously, finds himself cuckolded by a rival he cannot fight with---the Divine Flautist—Lord Krishna.

Conclusion:

Reflecting on the above discussion, the present researcher is convinced that in the novel *Cuckold*, Nagarkar has meticulously traced the intricate threads of history, weaving them into a rich, vivid tapestry with his remarkable craftsmanship. Through his eloquent and immersive prose, he brings the past to life, painting a powerful and evocative portrait of history that unfolds with every page, leaving the reader spellbound.

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