



## STUDY ON KIRAN NAGARKAR'S CUCKOLD

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**Abstract:** Kiran Nagarkar's Sahitya Academy Award Winning novel Cuckold is a twisted tale of love and war set in the early 16th century during the era of Bhakti movement. It is based on the life of mystic saint Meerabai and her husband Bhoj Raj. Meerabai is considered to be the first woman saint of Bhakti movement in the Indian History and still remembered throughout the world for her utmost devotion towards Lord Krishna. There are several novels and movies based on her life and in most of them she has been celebrated and pedestalized as a saint. Nagarkar's Cuckold is an exception. A novel dealing with the life of saint Meerabai and her husband with such title makes it out of the ordinary. This paper aims to scrutinize the character of Meerabai in this novel.

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### Introduction:

The Legendary Meerabai Meera has been a well-known figure for us through the centuries. Her immense popularity transcends time and space. She is placed in the era of 1300 A.D. to 1650 A.D. known as the era of Bhakti movement. She was a Rajput Princess born in (Vikram Samvat 1555) 1498 A.D. in the village Kudaki, near Merta, a small state near Marwar, Rajasthan. She was the daughter of Ratan Singh Rathod and granddaughter of Dudaji of Merta. The Rathods of Merta were Vaishnavas, devotees of Lord Krishna which influenced Meerabai and moulded her life towards devotion for Lord Krishna. As an infant Meera became deeply enamored of an iconic idol of Krishna owned by a visiting holy man. She was inconsolable until she possessed it and probably kept it all her life. Some myths say that when she was 4 years of age, she watched a marriage procession. When she saw the bridegroom she asked her mother innocently who will be her bridegroom. At this her mother pointed towards the idol of Krishna and since then Meera started considering herself as spouse of Lord Krishna. In 1516, Meerabai unhappily married Bhojraj, the crown prince of an influential neighboring Rajput Kingdom in Rajasthan, just to fulfill her family's wishes. Although Bhojraj respected her spiritual instinct, it was also expected that Meerabai would conform to the traditions of her new family. This did not happen. She denied to follow the traditions of her new family as well as to consummate her marriage with Bhojraj. She declared that she is betrothed to blue-skinned cow-herder Krishna and there is no place for any other man in her life.

Meera was a devotee of the highest order. She was born as a princess but in search of religious deliverance she left all the pleasures of a palace and abandoned her worldly possessions. She left the palace abandoning her all the ornaments and started wandering in the streets reciting poems and dancing in a plain white sari with ektara in her hands. Her behavior can't be measured against our merely human standard. Her devotion to God has taken her out of the social realm, the realm of norm and custom. She is considered to be an epitome of devotion, love and dedication towards the supreme.

Her love for Krishna is epitomized by the popular belief about her final disappearance in the temple of Krishna in Dwarka. She is believed to have entered the sanctum of the temple in a state of singing ecstasy. The sanctum doors are believed to have closed automatically and when later opened the sari of Meerabai was seen enwrapped around the idol of Lord Krishna, symbolizing the culmination of her union with Lord Krishna. Kiran Nagarkar's Meera Through Cuckold Nagarkar gives us a new insight and compels us to look at the legend of Meerabai from a new and startling angle. Although she is not the central character in the novel but the protagonist can't be seen without her. Meerabai continues to be seen from the outside as a somewhat inexplicable character whose motivation seems contradictory. Nagarkar shows that Meera is directly or indirectly responsible for Maharaj Kumar's decline.

### Defamiliarization of the Myth

He challenges the historical narrative of Meera's life and the legend embedded within Indian cultural discourse. She has never been referred with the name 'Meera' throughout the novel but the reference is easily identifiable to Indian readers. She has been given the name 'Greeneyes' by the Maharaj Kumar and 'Little Saint' by the populace. The 'Little Saint' of the novel portrays a radically different Meera from the stereotyped we have known over centuries. Although she is named as saint but she had many such human traits which cannot be numbered as saintly. Cuckold offers a fresh vision of sainthood. The mythical Meera with the ektara in her hand and modesty in her eyes is replaced by a bold, bright-eyed Rajput woman who can ride a horse and kill a barahsingha with single bolt. She enjoys setting off her considerable beauty with carefully selected clothes and jewel which is so unlike to the stereotypical white sari clad, ektara strumming saintly Meera. She is also interested in the management of zenana and enjoys the hold of bunch of silver keys like a typical traditional daughter-in-law of an aristocratic family of India. We get a child like image of her when she cheats at chess or cards which are a far cry from themythical damsel of Meera lore. She shares a good bond with her father-in-law, the great Rana Sangha and sometime also could be seen active in political affairs. She also proposes military strategies which we can't imagine about stereotyped Meera. During their exile in Kumbalgarh her husband Bhoj Raj says 'In a few years' time father should hand over the command of our troops to my wife. She'll sing and dance and the people of Gujrat, Malwa, Vijayanagar and Delhi will catch the fever, disown their kings and follow her wherever she goes. (Nagarkar. 341)

*Get him on the double Tell him it's an emergency The doctors have given up I can't bear it I think I'm going to die It's a slipped disc A shooting pain up the spine A fire in the brain A comet bursting in the kidneys. Is he here? (Nagarkar. 91-92)*

Nagarkar's version of songs portrays a woman of blood and bones who is mischievous, dramatic and ardent. *In death and in life, I'm yours, yours alone Take me. Do what you will with me. As stone or stray dog, as roach or rose, as fish or fowl, Whatever the shape of reincarnation, I'm yours, yours alone. (Nagarkar. 325)*

In these songs she seems so passionate that the songs don't fit in the figure of stereotyped Meera. Her love towards Krishna seems very similar to intense human passion. People named her 'Little Saint' but it is not her saintliness that grabs the attention of the readers, but fervency of her poems does. Conclusion The legendary Meera is a role model for the feminist movement because she refused to be bound by

tradition and custom and made a breakthrough in Patriarchal society. Nagarkar puts her in a post-feminist framework. He shows her as a wife who refuses to perform her wifely duties towards her husband. Meera's reputation as a woman who is forced to marry against her wishes made her a martyr but in this story reader sees her from her husband's eye and they feel sympathy for him not for Meera. Nagarkar's Meera behaves contrary to her popular hagiographical image and this makes readers to know how every historical narrative has multiple facets. He encourages the readers to question their own assumptions about the history and the legends they have internalized. His depiction of Meera as Greeneyes or the Little Saint frames a robust lively picture of a sharp witted, calculative, obstinate woman who is quite different from the Meera of tradition who has been sanctified beyond all credibility as a person.

In Cuckold, Greeneyes appears to Maharaj Kumar's wife as a "Nautch Girl" who cleverly uses all the preconceived public assumptions about feminine propriety as devices in getting the crown for her husband Maharaj Kumar. On the other hand, Queen Karmavati involves in a clever plan to get her son, Vikramaditya, to be crowned as the apparent heir as in the Ramayana, Kaikeyi who was desperate in getting the crown for her son Bharatha. Karmavati plays a vital role in turning the public opinion against Maharaj Kumar portraying his wife as a whore as she sings and dances in the public and also for coming out of the isolation from the zenana quarters. She uses the entire available harangue as her amenities of which constitutes masculinity and femininity. One who is unable to take control of his wife is considered as weak and unmanly in the so-called patriarchal society. The society does not give any of the Rajput men space to gratify or have soft corner towards any women. The so-called society has also set demarcations and boundaries to Rajput women that do not allow women to indulge in any social activities.

Karmavati appears to be an important minister to the King. She is not only ambitious in making her son the King of Mewar but also through her subtle coercion influences the King's decisions which may include military activities. For example, the King's decision to send Maharaj Kumar as a commander-in-chief of the Mewar forces against the Mussafar Shah, the Sultan of Gujarat appears to be result of, as Maharaj Kumar says in a typically ironic way: "Why was Father abandoning one of his basic tenets? Did I owe the honour of becoming the commander-in-chief of the Mewar forces, to Mother Karmavati's good offices?" (Pg. 161) The course of the story takes turn when the decision of the mother of Vikramaditya and Maharaj Kumar decides to assign Vikramaditya as the apparent heir of the kingdom and to remove Maharaj

Kumar, the existing apparent heir from his place. And soon after the disgraceful victory in the Gujarat war, the question of having Maharaj Kumar as the apparent heir arises. His mother's appeal is not taken seriously. Father will have the matter as a spit for toasting meat. Maharaj Kumar's mother may not know how to broach the subject of her eldest son. "Father will look quizzically at her and point out she must be more watchful for she has just dropped a stitch in the nine hundred and seventy seventh sweater she is knitting for him." (pg. 253) Eventhough, Greeneyes seems to be the King's favourite daughter-in-law, she is out of favour because she sings and dances. Atlast, Queen Karmavati is in the move of making her son, Vikramaditya, the ruler of Mewar. She makes all kinds of schemes to hatch in favour of her son and to make him the King's favourite. She also makes the counter schemes to remove the present favourite and apparent heir from his special position. Such plans are put into immediate action so that the history of royal men often gives an impression that the decisions are their own and are not influenced by anyone else's thoughts. This can be best proven when Greeneyes plays a subtle trick upon the King's feelings. She sends Maharaj Kumar to lead Mewar's army against Malwa where she utters, "But as usual His Majesty had already made up his mind"(pg. 423. It is obvious that there is another women behind the King's mind playing a role against Queen Karmavati's plans.

As already mentioned Cuckold is a hagiography, the re-version of seeing historical and mythical figures as human beings; de-sanctifying them; bring them from their unapproachable position that has really shaped them. Like Indira Parthasarathy's Nandan Kathai which shows the saint Nandan not as a glorified figure but as a victim of his times or the film, Joan of Arc which shows sacred women as a confessor who says what she wanted to see in her visions was a very human fatal error. Nagarkar also portrays Meera as Greeneyes not as an eponymous saint but creates a credible woman out of Meera. He partly pays rich tribute to a highly individual woman who knows her own mind. She is called "Greeneyes" or "Little Princess" or "Little Saint" but not "Meera" which itself depicts the difference in the way she has been portrayed in the novel. She has played no role in the development of Maharaj Kumar's wife from being put down as a nautch girl to receiving solution of glory as the little saint. She, loving Krishna very deep and delighted, scorns the strict rules and regulations of the palace. She is conscious of her role in the royal family and the power she has over others. Meanwhile, she is also portrayed as an obedient wife who does Pativatra, washes her husband's Maharaj Kumar's feet and puts them to her eyes even though he hits her. In the second

half of the novel, when one is so much infused with the image of Greeneyes, one gets into a sensation of whether the legendary Meera can be as worldly as our earlier stories projected her to be. We have the strong feelings of the emotional opinions she has on her husband, Maharaj Kumar. She cherishes cleverly so that the power she has, never fades away into him. This difference in the portrayal of Meera is encouraged by the fact that Nagarkar never uses her name throughout the novel rather than Greeneyes or Little Princess or Little Saint. Both the queens, be it Queen Karmavati or Greeneyes, use their sexual power over their husband. Queen Karmavati uses it for Vikramadiya, her son to cherish the crown and Greeneyes uses her sexual power just to enjoy it. The way in which Nagarkar picturizes Greeneyes is especially striking as she is shown as woman of extra-ordinary sexual power and of great sagaciousness. She is portrayed as a woman who cheats enthusiastically at cards, a woman who can debate with the King and assures that she would get back all the money that she has lost in cards. She is a woman who simply cannot be contained within the extra-ordinary round of conventions. The King understands her well and is able to see many sides of her, including her more earthly aspects, which she reveals when she says, "She's no saint, this woman. She has a money-lender's heart, mind and soul" (pg.423)

**Conclusion:** Kiran Nagarkar, an Indian novelist, playwright, film and drama critic and screenplay writer both in Marathi and English, is one of the most significant writers of the postcolonial India. Cuckol, one of the finest and much critically acclaimed novels written by him focuses on how the women characters fight for power - not for them but for the sake of the male characters, in spite of the social and sexual constraints they have in the society and in the royal family. Nagarkar portrays all the possible ways for Maharaj Kumar, the heir apparent to cherish his hierarchy in the kingdom. He analyses what position the women characters hold in the royal family they are offered to make the heir apparent, the hero of the novel Cuckold. This novel shows a variety of ways in which women characters try to come out of the social and sexual confines that are set on them. It is not that all the women are concerned with the political life of the time but with the impression they make in the life of Maharaj Kumar, the narrator and the heir apparent in the novel. It is obviously true in India that limits are set for women and they are restricted in the social and political activities. When it comes to a traditional or an orthodox family, a woman has to stay inside the houses to look after the household or she may be locked up in the houses or as in the novel she is demarcated within the zenena quarters. To encourage their sequestration, the patriarchal society

opposes all kinds of divagations from the rules that are set in the society.

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