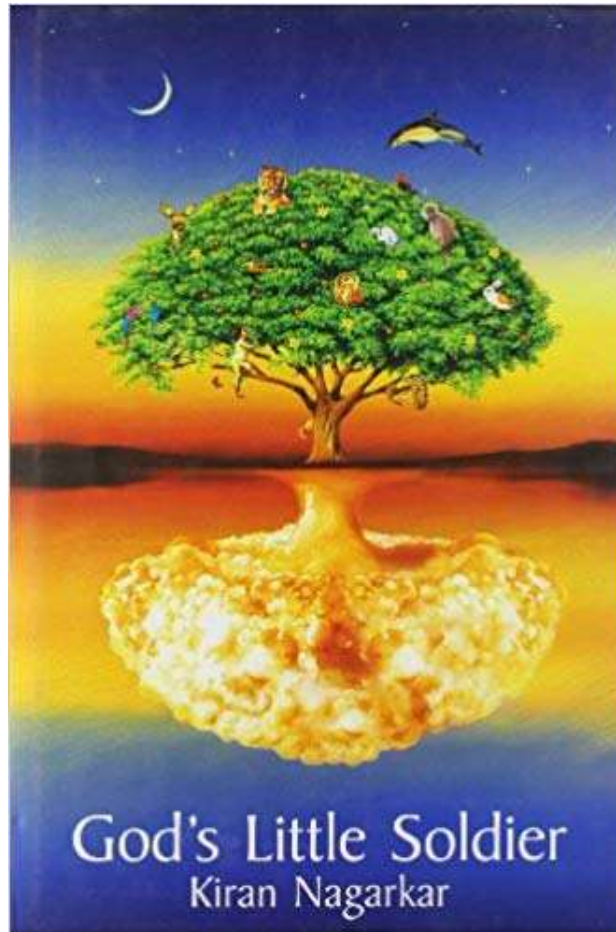


**Balancing Two Different Cultures: A Critical Study of
Kiran Nagarkar's *God's Little Soldier***

S. Anandh Raj, Ph.D. Research Scholar and Dr. K. Padmanaban



Courtesy: <https://www.amazon.com/Gods-Little-Soldier-Kiran-Nagarkar/dp/8172236336>

Abstract

This paper assesses the synthesis of portrayal of two different cultures in Kiran Nagarkar's *God's Little Soldier*. The novel is set in Bombay, Afghanistan, America, and Kashmir terrains. The novel is called "literary terrorism" because Zia attempts to kill famous novelist Salman Rushdie at the literary seminar in Cambridge University. Zia's life passes through three religious avatars Islam, Christian, and Hindu. He changes his name in each of the religions as Zia Khan, Brother Lucens, and Tejas Nirantar. He attempts to find peace and pleasure through these three religions' faith but fails and he becomes fanatic and terrorist. He regards himself as protector of Islam and follows the sinful lifestyle. In the novel Nagarkar has employed extreme humour, metaphor, epistolary style, and digression method. Nagarkar's protagonists do not have cohesive selves but possess fragmented

identities. They are trans-cultural, trans-national, and individual struggling to balance the two seemingly different cultures.

Keywords: Kiran Nagarkar, *God's Little Soldier*, Cultures, Fragmented Identities, Individual Struggling, Trans-Cultural, Trans-National

Kiran Nagarkar

Kiran Nagarkar is a literary ace who writes against malefactors and encounters the consequence with courage. He is one of the finest Indian novelists of English novels of our time but has not yet been recognized as he deserved to be. He writes about the failures of today's destructive and selfish society. He also touches the human behaviour such as love, hate, and machinations. He explores the social milieu and the latent pressures with boldness, imagination and an exceptional humour.

God's Little Soldier

The novel, *God's Little Soldier*, explores contemporary violence of society. It is presented in the form of global terrorism and existence in the psyche of contemporary society. Nagarkar states that he does not perceive terrorism in isolation but as an essential part of the entire society. He focuses on tragic incidents of 1993 bomb-blast in Mumbai, 9/11/2001 terrorists' attack on World Trade Center in America, 26/11/2006 attack in Mumbai and recent attack on 13/11/2015 in Paris and bomb-blast incidents in the various places across the world. Terrorism has become headache to the entire world and every nation is fighting against the international terrorism.

Peter Zemla, a German scholar, extols the novel in the following remarks:

With *God's Little Soldier*, Nagarkar has written the portrait of a man who always wants the good and always achieves evils. It is a parable about the very fine line between reality and intense book, which in spite of its length never loses its breakneck speed, this curious collection of human foolishness will remain important far beyond this literacy fantasy, religiosity and fanaticism, humbleness and violence, in our times. This colourful and intense book, which in spite of its length never loses its breakneck speed, this curious collection of human foolishness will remain important far beyond this literary autumn. (2)

Structure of the Novel

The novel, *God's Little Soldier*, consists of three parts and set in different locales across the world. Sometimes these worlds are found within the same city, and within the same family. It is a tale about Zia Khan who is protagonist of the novel. He was born in a liberal family in Bombay. He is a brilliant student of Mathematics in the school. The family of Zia is very liberal in which his father, mother, and brother are liberal minded, whereas his aunt, Zubeida Khaala is very obsessive and fanatic. She loves Allah and hates other religions. This novel deals with extremism and global terrorism. Zia Khan attempts to defend Islam and its preaching. He wanders across the world and keeps changing his identity as Muslim, Christian, and Hindu. He observes the three religions and compares them with each other. Every kind of belief is examined and questioned by Zia Khan. Nagarkar relentlessly pursues his quest for contemporary terror world and various religious beliefs. At present the world is facing a highly structured terrorism which is very difficult to eliminate. Fundamentalism is one of the terrorisms which stems out from cultural exclusion and most significantly from religious unrest. The common denominator of fundamentalism is the enemy of rational debate and intellectual inquiry.

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Zia Keeps Islamic Rites

Zia belongs to highly educated, liberal, and middle-class Muslim family. He is an expert, scholar, and prodigy in mathematics. His brother Amanat is a well-known novelist. Obsession, extremism, fanaticism, and terrorism are the themes of the novel. In the beginning chapters, author highlights Islamic rites, culture, and customs. Every religion has its rites, ritual, and traditions. Zubeida, Zia's aunt, tries to pursue him towards obsessive ideology. She preaches him that he is a wilful child and future of Islam. Zia's aunt is obsessive and fanatic of her religion and intolerant towards the other religions. Ramadan is a holy month for Islamic community and everyone keeps the Rojas in the month. Zia also keeps fast and prays with his aunt. He tastes Islamic cuisine like the tandoori chicken, tangadi kebabs, bund gosh, the sherbets, the bhajias and kachoris.

Ramadan permits to believer twotime meals as after sunset and before sunrise. In the end of second week of Ramadan, Zia realizes that his monumental starvation and dehydration are in vain. He comes to home from school and his teacher forces him to drink a solution of water, salt, sugar and lemon juice. Zia becomes sick due to keeping fast of Rojas and his father and mother know that he had kept Rojas. Zubeida is ever distressed about the condition of her own people whose faith in Islam is flawed. She thinks that Allah has chosen her, the meek and submissive; it is her holy responsibility to mould and guide the little boy into a great saint.

Discovering New Enemies Everyday

Zia is impressed and nurtured by Zubeida's preaching. He everyday discovers new enemies and his brother refers to him as 'a religion of extremism'. He even goes through a phase of being a terrorist. As a young boy he stabs the panwallah's dog, he used to play with. He disregards the idol of Lord Ganesha. He feels very guilty because his aunt and mentor catch him in the act and refuses to have anything to do with him. He goes out and stabs dog with a knife. When he doesn't succeed in killing the animal, he destroys his innocent mind. His immersion in Islamic doctrine at the urging of his devout aunt makes him a defender of Islamic values in a degenerate and immoral world.

Zafar Khan is father Zia who is well known civil contractor and his family lives at Firdaus lane in Bombay. After some days his business collapses and he becomes bankrupt. He could not pay the bank loan and as a result of it bank seals his house. Khan Family lives in poverty. Khan family shifts to a new house called Suleiman Mansion on Sardar Vallabhai Patel Road near Bhendi Bazar. The Mansion is a seven-storey building which has blocks of one, two, and three-room apartment each. Zia experiences new world and he feels miracle of the new colony of Bhendi Bazar. He observes that multi-caste and multi-religion people are living in Suleiman Mansion.

Zubeida Khaala, Zia and Bhendi Bazaar

Zubeida Khaala becomes delighted because whatever she wanted, she has got in the atmosphere of Suleiman Mansion. She takes Zia along with her every day to scout the alien terrain, the wild jungle full of tigers, hippos, and mad elephants. She shows him Jumma Masjid, well known mosque in Mumbai. His aunt takes him often for a private prayer to Dawoodi mosque. His aunt shows him Chor bazaar and he gets impressed by seeing the thief market. Zia observes Bhendi Bazaar's dark side in his own sights, sounds, and smells of the city's underbelly. It is the shadow of the Jumma Masjid where Zia is indoctrinated into the ways of puritanical Islam through of his aunt. Thus, seeds of terrorism and extremism are sown from that place.

Bhendi Bazar is perhaps the most conservative Muslim locality in Bombay. Nagarkar has presented reality of famous Bhendi Bazaar in following statement:

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In the evenings, as the electric bulbs swayed on long wires in the droughts generated by the slow, lugubrious movements of the ancient fans, vials of attar picked up the feeble light and twinkled like distant stars, and the Durbar-e- Akbar turned into a living, breathing fire that expanded and contracted with the pendulum movement of the lights. Business seemed to pick up as the sun went down. Young and old men, some with bracelets of flowers wrapped around their wrists, thrust forward the backs of their hands while the salesmen brought out bottles, one by one, from the cupboards and rubbed on an infinite sisal quantum of the attar with the glass stick of the stopper. (52)

Bollywood Connections

Nagarkar portrays the Bollywood connections of Zia and his beloved Sagari. She is the most popular child actress in the nation. Her four films have already been released. Two of them celebrated Silver Jubilees all over India. Zia watches all four of them, but he likes a movie, “Sona aur Mona.” In this film Sagari plays the role of twins - Sona and Mona. Sona is lively, vivacious, and full of mischief while Mona is serious, studious, and timid.

The Focus

The novel’s focal point is the manner in which it handled setting. Nagarkar has portrayal of Suleiman Mansions in Bhandi Bazaar, multi-culture of Mumbai. He has covered the extremely cold mountain fastness of the Mujahedeen in Afghanistan, and breathtaking descriptions of the Trappist Monastery and Hindu ashram. Nagarkar interweaved his magical worlds with the dexterity of a master weaver creating new patterns on his word-loom. There is galaxy of memorable characters including the fascinatingly devout Zia, the enigmatic and self-deprecating Amanat the angel of mercy, child actress Sagari who becomes the guardian of the khan family, Abbajaan, Ammi, Zubeida Khaala, Countess Antonia and her daughter Vivian.

The novel is powerful which forces one to re-examine previously held beliefs about religion and commonly held stereotypes and churns up one’s established notions of integrity, honour, reverence, tolerance, and love. In the quest for the right and good life, neither Zia’s approach ultimately worked nor worked nihilism. He spares no opportunity to lampoon the American way of life, arms deals, the new Russia, and more. This distends *God’s Little Soldier* virtually to breaking point, almost turning it into a ragbag of pieces: some effective, some not, and some straying very close to hollow mockery. The novel has many rooms: here, there are spaces set aside for satire and irony; areas demarcated for psychological reality and yet other corners occupied by work that is socially engaged. In the last phase Zia’s identity is a Hindu name Tejas Nirantar and he provides weapons to the terrorists in the Kashmir territory.

Shakta Muni is shown as modern swami and deceiver of his devotees in the ashram. Author has shown that every religion has extremists and these extremists are responsible of spreading intolerance in the society. According to me reasons why one becomes a terrorist may include poverty, illiteracy, and unemployment, difficult situation in family and obsessive faith. These aspects may be responsible for provoking one to this violent path of fundamentalism. I would like to sum of the novel with author’s quote about terrorism:

“I’m a story-teller and while looking into why a terrorist does what he does. I reached a pertinent conclusion that for a terrorist their religion is terrorism. The novel has no message and if there is any endeavor in my story it is this desire to eliminate the

distance between us and them-the terrorist is really inside us. (“Greatest Indian Novel: Interview with Kiran Nagarkar” 3)

It would not be wrong to say that we have been experiencing different shades of terrorism for the last six decades. We and our government have not succeeded in eradicating the root causes of terrorism.

Nagarkar does not prevent his imagination from running riot. As Lucens leaves the monastery, he begins to dabble in the stock exchange and comes up with plans to save America from legalized abortion and teenage pregnancy. Organizations are formed, followers recruited, and money rose for these purposes, before Lucen’s eventual downfall. Here, his activities include making massive profits in the stock market, running a campaign against abortion and setting up an organization called the Guardian Angels dedicated to nothing less than the moral rejuvenation of godless, sinful America. Later his fertile and febrile imagination takes the terrorist across many continents and puts him through situations, which looks too farfetched. One cannot imagine a Christian monk willing to get into big league and sell nuclear weapons to the terrorists in Afghanistan for raising funds for his zero orphan’s institute.

To Conclude

Nagarkar has displayed extensive knowledge including knowledge of several religions like Islam, Hinduism, Christianity, and Kabir’s philosophy about God. Nagarkar has described rites, rituals, and culture of these three major religions and his mastery over the language that has made the novel, *God’s Little Soldier*, conspicuously readable. The novel has explored the social milieu and the underlying tensions with boldness, imagination and a rare humour. Author has explored violence and obsessive faith of contemporary society both in its outward manifestation in the form of global terrorism and extremism existence in the minds of today’s restless and violence prone-generation.

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