



SEXUAL ASSAULT AS A PLOT DEVICE IN POPULAR YOUNG ADULT FICTION: A Reading of Sudeep Nagarkar's *"Sorry, You're Not My Type"*

Irin Roshan

Master's in English Literature

Department of English (PG)

Kristu Jayanti College, (Autonomous)

Kothanur, Bangalore, Karnataka

ABSTRACT

The readership of Young Adult Fiction and Popular Fiction in India has been on a constant increase in the past decade. In the process of understanding relationships and responding to the psycho-sexual developmental changes, they go through, teenagers and young adults are often drawn to these so-called 'romance' novels that are so widely and variably available in the market. The scope of this paper does not involve the evaluation of the aesthetic quality of the novels addressed, but rather focuses exclusively on the psychological and social effect that the text produces on the readers. Themes of sexual assault, abuse, and victimization of women then need to be written with and examined with intensive scrutiny, especially when it holds the power to promote ideas concerning consent (in both men and women), and boundaries. Very typically, this is not the case, incidents, and scenes of sexual assault, abuse, and violence are used to serve a very different purpose. It is here they lose their gravity and agency and further desensitize their readers to the issue at hand by trivializing; to the extent of fetishizing rape and abuse, depicting the problematic behavior pattern of rapists and abusers as something desirable and appropriate. As a widely read author who is popular amongst the youngsters, Nagarkar's novels cannot be condensed into a piece of art. His

novels, consciously or unconsciously, not only become a part of discussion amongst teenagers but also take up the role of imparting knowledge and molding behavior. This places a considerable responsibility on the author to address psycho-social issues with greater care.

KEYWORDS: *Sexual Assault, Abuse, Rape, Popular Fiction, Socio-feminism, Feminist criticism, Marginalization, Desensitization.*

RAPE AS A PLOT DEVICE

Sudeep Nagarkar's 'Sorry, you are not my type' was originally published on the 13th of February 2014. The plot revolves around three friends Vikrant, Yuvi, and Anamika whose relationships explore the meaning of love and friendship in their lives.

The story is packed with a lot of twists and turns, the female character faces sexual assault which shatters her. In many popular fictions, we can see sexual assault being portrayed as a mechanical plot device to propel the hero on his narrative journey. Sexual assault, in the present times, predominantly presents the narrative of men being a villain who exploits women or a hero who saves helpless woman. Either way, the women's pain is unrecognizable and normalized.

A similar reference can be seen in many texts of classical literature. W.B. Yeats' 'Leda and the Swan' figures the "helpless breast", the "loosening thighs" and the "white rush" which is a poem about rape.

In this novel, the female character, Anamika faces mental abuse along with physical abuse. She is blamed for something she never did; she is objectified and slut-shamed. Scenes of brutality and sexual violence in most movies and plays focus on the violent nature of the act rather than paying attention to the victim. Rape, as a plot device, completely breaks the female character and snatches her substance from her. She no longer feels strong and is not given room to be a victim-her healing times and how she is dealing with the trauma are very rarely showcased. Assuming that the trauma of abuse can very easily be overcome not only trivializes the issue at hand, but also becomes a moment of denial for all the survivors who have to live with the trauma throughout their life.

This significant incident that takes place in the novel gives us no information about the experience of the victim, Anamika, and her fight through it is condensed into a few lines. The only motive it serves is to redeem Anurag, to bring him to the foreground, and to establish him as a hero, a man without whom Anamika would have never been able to heal. This dissolution of agency and displacement of authority over the victim's life and decisions is not just taken away from her, but is further abused. This can be seen when Vikrant takes the liberty of sharing intimate details of Anamika's story with Adithya without her consent. The liberty that the men disregard for consent on every level is something Nagarkar attempts to bring out in this work. The domination of male characters in a story which involves the rape of a female character raises important questions, as it limits the role of women in their own story. This snatches away the very last bit of her identity, which is heavily overshadowed by the surrounding men.

Samuel Richardson's "*Pamela*", or "*Virtue*" rewarded, is a book about the sexual exploitation of a maid by her rich master. In the story, Pamela marries her rapist; this is the virtue rewarded. In the other books of Richardson like "*Clarissa Harlowe*" or "*The History of a Young Lady*", Clarissa gets raped, repeatedly kidnapped, imprisoned, and then finally dies.

1.2 SOCIO-FEMINIST APPROACH TO THE NOVEL

In an article by Psychology Today titled: "*What People Think About Women with Tattoos*" by Wendy L. Patrick, we come to know how women are judged differently from men for having tattoos. The article read that tattoos may send wrong signals when it comes to judging sexual receptivity, and that men may misperceive tattooed women as more sexually responsive. This leads to approach behavior, potentially with false hope of sexual activity.

In Sudeep Nagarkar's "*Sorry, you are Not My Type*", we can see the female character Anamika as very bold and has tattoos, and is not afraid of speaking her mind. On the other hand, Yuvi is a drunkard who has no control over himself even though he is in a serious relationship with Kashish he cheats on her. Yuvi forces himself on Anamika despite resisting and ends up calling her a "slut". He tells her "if you can sleep with Anurag then why not me?" and rapes her. With an inhumane and merciless approach, he tore her clothes and left her to die.

The other characters in the novel don't seem much empathetic toward the victim; rather they are absorbed in their petty discomforts. The author does not give much heed to the mental state of pain the victim has experienced. And when Anamika is being questioned by the police about her situation, she doesn't disclose Yuvi's name because she loves him and remains loyal. The aspect of "if you aren't tolerating pain, then it's not love" (Nagarkar, Pp.56) is evident here. In saying so, the character of Anamika is made weak and unresponsive through idealization.

At the end of the novel, he says "In every girl's life there is a boy she'll never forget and in every boy's life, there is a girl he'll never forget. Anamika, Vikrant, and Yuvi too had someone in their lives, but sometimes you need pain and heartache to see what matters the most. No one can understand your pain until they are put in your position. They had decided to stop re-reading the same chapter of their lives, as with the next chapter, the story was bound to get better. Happy endings do exist. It all depends on where you end the story.

These lines put the readers in a juxtaposition where you need to go through pain to understand it; you need to get raped to understand what's good for you, to become a better person; portraying rape as a good thing, an enlightening experience, and all that had happened contained no shock or trauma because she was willing to heal. This type of notion naturally implies the contrast, suggesting that the reason for the continuous life-long struggle of a victim is their fault because they don't want to heal.

Too often, we see a female character forced to endure terrifying levels of violence at the hands of one and more men before she is allowed to be powerful or to be put back in her place. It serves as a reminder that no matter how strong of a character she may be, she can still be hurt by men in a brutal, intimate way and as such should rely on the protection of other men.

1.3 DEPICTION OF SEXUAL ASSAULT IN THE NOVEL

Society deems women to be weaker than men. Men are assumed to hold more power over women to assert their dominance over them. Most Indian fiction views sexual assault similarly. The focus is either on the accused or the one who helps the victim come out of the trauma, there is absolutely no recognition of the victim or light on their trauma.

Sexual assault in the novel is per se a tool employed to attract attention than to highlight the plight of the women. Instead of shifting the reader's focus toward the gravity of the crime, it is dealt with lightly. At times, the victim is objectified, and her agony loses value in the eyes of the co characters which adversely attacks the psyche of the readers, rendering the fiction problematic. Time and again, the selected work points out instances where the assault is treated in a very normal way, which gives the reader an opinion that "sexual assault" is nothing below the belt.

Nagarkar's "*Sorry, you are Not My Type*" is a work of fiction that brings along a handful of issues with it. When the readers scrutinize the weaving of the plot, traits, and responses of the characters in diverse situations, the depiction of love, friendship, and bonds come out as the major themes of the novel are unreal to some extent. The language Nagarkar incorporates in the fiction is also overly simple-which snatches away the beauty of diction and renders the style of writing a medium of categorization. It also hampers the richness of writing, making it extremely ordinary and layman to read, specifically, Literature fiction, relies on the richness of language, employment of figures, and literary devices to appeal to its readers. When we study and critically examine Nagarkar's novel, we come to terms with the fact that all of it finds a minimal or no place in his work of fiction.

1.4 CONCLUSION

The mere reduction of extremely intricate issues of abuse and sexual assault to something that caters to the need of the male author brings attention to the moral depiction of violence in fiction. As a medium of propagation of ideologies and knowledge, literature serves a very crucial purpose, and in that it holds great power. A power to influence the minds of youngsters and establish trends in the socio-cultural context by surviving in the Westernizing world. How carefully this power is used is a question of grave concern. The increase in rapes, assaults, and abuse make it our primary concern to examine and identify the root of this behavior pattern, which will make possible the eradication of it. Where such sensitive issues should be addressed with great care and responsibility, many popular fiction authors exploit the suffering of women to manipulate them into propagating their essentially masochistic and patriarchal values.

An unrealistic depiction and trivialization of these issues sabotage the immense efforts of social activists towards women empowerment in one single blow by desensitizing the readers towards abuse and violence. It further fails to excite the appropriate response from the readers towards those who have gone through pain and violence around them. Any survivor who reads such a poorly written representation is bound to feel underserved in her want for acceptance and understanding from others.

To be able to proactively involve the youth and to bring a change in the mindset of people, it is equally necessary to eradicate narratives that are undermining the entire activity of the creation of a safe space for survivors. When used in the right manner, a story can empower and sensitize women and others to violence and abuse and help in inspiring a constructive response from society towards these problems.

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