

Women Centric Novels of Jai Nibmkar

Suksham Ahluwalia
Associate Professor, Department of English
Arya College Ludhiana

Abstract:

Women's assertion of their identity and obstacles in this process is a common factor in Jai Nibmkar's novels. All the three novels are replete with various incidents which are direct or indirect result of gender inequality. The fact is that the woman is basically a woman as well as a person. As a woman she needs a man and as a person she is free to fight her own battle; nobody will come and give guide how to get self-identity, inside or outside the family.

Keywords: Women Centric, Identity Crisis and Inner Journey

Nibmkar is one among the eminent feminist writers who delineates feminism and the issues related with gender inequality. Beginning from her first novel up to third she very carefully has highlighted the fact that Indian woman, even though highly educated, cannot avoid the socio-cultural milieu which is a bitter fact of the present Indian society. Her novels delineate the inner life of hyper-conscious women, who can analyze their problems and get their middle way to come out without losing any of her relationships.

Her novels, *Temporary Answers* and *A Joint Venture* deal with the predicament of the Indian woman as she comes face to face with the institution of marriage. The two protagonists are apparently on the two sides of the same problem. *A Joint Venture* was published in the year 1988, fourteen years after the publication of her first novel, *Temporary Answers*. *A Joint Venture* gives us a sense of a lived reality making the novel almost autobiographically authentic not only in terms of details of a lived life but in terms of a psychological reality as well. Her third novel *Come Rain* deals with cross-cultural theme. It presents a new version of the east-west encounter, a prominent theme of the Indian English fiction. An Indian boy goes to America as a student and a researcher, marries an American girl and brings her to India, just as she does, he also finds it difficult to adjust to his parents and home.

Women's assertion of their identity and obstacles in this process is a common factor in Jai Nibmkar's novels. All the three novels are replete with various incidents which are direct or indirect result of gender inequality. The fact is that the woman is basically a woman as well as a person. As a woman she needs a man and as a person she is free to fight her own battle; nobody will come and give guide how to get self-identity, inside or outside the family.

Vineeta, the female protagonist of Jai Nibmkar's first novel 'Temporary Answer' (1974) is a young widow. Her marriage with Nagendra had all the ingredients of happiness, but it was a stifling one for Vineeta. The novel seems to imply that marriage is heavily loaded against the woman, man is the dominant factor. As a widow Vineeta gets involved with two young men, one is Vilas, her childhood friend, who has just returned from abroad as a qualified doctor and decides to set up in Poona. He in fact helps Vineeta, who is a pediatrician herself but did not practice after marriage, to set up a clinic and would happily marry her, if she so wished, so that they could set up joint practice too. While Vineeta remains unattracted to his offer, she is drawn emotionally to the young professor, Abhijit Gokhle. Being a woman, she instinctively gets into the enfolding arms of the man. But while surrendering to the emotional involvement, she ultimately gives up the idea of marriage with him as marriage is a social institution; she decides it is only a temporary answer for a woman to get rid of from her sufferings.

In Indian culture, it is very pathetic that after marriage a woman has to change and adjust herself according to the norms and life style of the in-laws. Nagendra's mother teaches her as to how to behave and treat others in her family as well as in her society. Nagendra also tries to mold her life. As a result, Vineeta behaves as per his guidelines. Being used to simple life, she does not like Nagendra's artificial way of life. Yet she wears his favorite clothes, cut her hair and put dark make-up and jewelry. She also learns to put up good nature with a reasonable amount of flirting with the other men.

*"I tried to feel part of them but couldn't. Learn to be like them outwardly. Dress like them, talk like them..... I even learned to put up good-naturedly with a moderate amount of flirting from the other men."*¹

It's only after marriage, she comes to know that Nagendra had proposed and married her only because she was a doctor. He marries her not because he liked her but because it would be a thing of proud for him to possess doctor as his wife. He wishes to show her as a showpiece to his several friends. Therefore, she thinks as:

*"he would have thought it a matter of prestige if his wife was a practicing doctor."*²

When Vineeta understands it she begins to feel depressed. Simultaneously, the feeling of revolt begins to take shape in her mind. "But inside I rebelled against it all" Vineeta feels resentful and deceived. She simply desires from her husband as much as she has given to him. She feels that she has given herself in entirety. She has sacrificed everything for Nagendra. In fact, Nagendra knows well that Vineeta has been nurturing rebellious thoughts in her mind but being calm man, he only ignores her and her feelings. He never tries to fight it out.

Vineeta is from Pune and Nagendra has feeling of dislike for Pune. Therefore, he passes insulting comments on Pune. She does not like Nagendra's this behavior. She gets angry with Nagendra whenever he passes insulting comments on Pune, her native place. His comments are Pune a city of pensioners, "hodgepodge" and also "unproductive city". He says that he does not like Pune's middle class mentality. Nagendra's comments on Pune irritate Vineeta. She has developed an attachment to Pune. He has bad viewpoint towards Pune. Perhaps he is trying to show his supremacy through his comments. Therefore, one insulting comment on her native place is sufficient for quarrel between husband and wife. There are usual fights between them.

*"So we had bitter fights. Or no, that's not an accuratedescription. It was Iwho fought, I who hurled accusations at him. He was comparatively calm because he was not really involved in the issue I fought over. Sometimes I wished he would shout or slam the door and walk out in anger, or even want to hurt me. But he never did. I was not a very important part of his life."*³

In her second novel 'A Joint Venture' (1988) the business symbolism says all that is to be said about married life; the wife is merely a sleeping partner while the husband is the active and deciding one. But in this case as the family business seems to fail and the husband appears vulnerable, the motherly instinct awakens in the wife and she goes back as it were to protect the husband. Here too the wife finds her life an unfulfilled one. But the frustrated female protagonist in this novel establishes her own identity in a seemingly strange way by conforming to the natural traditional identity of woman as mother. She realizes her worth, establishes her identity, but the strange thing is that the identity established is the traditional identity of the woman. In fact, all of Jai Nimbkar's female characters are intelligent, are capable of analyzing and understanding their situations. And ultimately they accept things as they are and try to change the system from within. They are basically conformists. But the important thing is that they conform, not because they have to but because they want to.

The American wife, Ann, comes up against insurmountable problems of adjustment in marriage to an Indian husband, in Jai Nimbkar's third novel 'Come Rain'(1993). But here jai Nimbkar highlights the inner good nature and the love for Indian values of the American woman protagonist. As she is modern, capable of analyzing her own problems, she overcomes all these problems and gets full freedom to enjoy natural scenery of India. Jai Nimbkar has molded Ann's character as one with great determination and courage. Though her family background has been influenced by eminent educationalists, the creative writer in her stands on her own legs. Her female protagonists strive against all the social barriers and the stringency of the societal system. She deals with the theme of marriage in Indian context. She successfully brings out her female protagonists' quest for self. She is a scrupulous artisan and a careful, artistic writer. She frequently gathers stories for her fiction from the ins and outs of day to day life.

In her three novels Jai Nimbkar has projected open minded women who do not reject traditional 'shamskar', but they differ from the type of new women in ShobhaDe's novels who fight against all odds and break all barriers. They are conformists who are well intelligent and are capable of thinking and analyzing their situation and understanding the lay of human relations. So ultimately these women protagonists do not set up a new identity, but accept their own natural identity with all its imperfections as they try to remain master of their own identity. Their fight is tough, but it is not rebellion as they fight against the idea of women as 'inferior to men'. They know that women are not meant to be equal to men but are to be complements having their own identity. Ann marries Ravi an Indian because she values Indian tradition and life style. Hence she forces her husband to return to India where she can enjoy learning and observing Indian traditions and cultures. The mother-in-law is a matriarch who rules the family in the traditional way. She cannot understand the free and open nature of the American 'Bahu'(daughter-in-law).she is battle ready as only an Indian 'SAAS'(mother-in-law) can be. But the American girl shows real understanding and handles the situation tactfully. Jai Nimbkar's uncompromising rationalism is mixed with a consciously matured human dimension straight or indirect connection with society

Jai Nimbkar has successfully presented the real social condition and family in India. However she doesn't take credit for her realistic portrayals. In an interview she explains, *"I am just a writer and perhaps put forward the woman s point of view more effectively because I am a woman. It is just like writing about the place and the people that I know. I can get inside a woman because I am a woman."*⁴ She thinks that a literary artist

being social reformist must have a straight or indirect connection with society. Therefore she in her own unique way focuses on marriage and women issues which are at the center of social problems, her female protagonist's desire to get something distinctive from their life. They succeed in their vocation and they are able to establish their identities completely. Her female protagonists are learned, cultured and smart wives. There is existential quest in them. It is being presented by the novelist through incompatible couples or marital discord between husband and wife. There is slow but steady progress in her female protagonists and they become matured in the course of time.

She augments the woman predicament through her writing to get equivalent openings. Indian women always fulfill their quest for self within the precincts of the socio-cultural set up. Her Female protagonists are integrated persons and they combine both social and personal lives in a pleasant-sounding way. She effectively presents the subjugated and demoralized condition of the women in an orthodox Indian society. No doubt they fight against the atrocities inflicted on them by the society but the important thing is that they never spoil the ecstasy of their conjugal life. They always cleverly find the middle way and solve their problems. They are strong enough and don't negotiate and submit to the atrocities of male domination. Her female protagonists never cross the social boundaries set for women. Vineeta of *Temporary Answers* and Jyoti of *A Joint Venture* are the two female protagonists of the novels under study. They encounter various problems in their conjugal life very courageously and wisely and succeed to establish their individuality. Jai Nimbkar is well aware that the marriage, as an institution gives special treatment to men and not to women. Here, her vision is easy and sharp on the middle-class Indian Family, the socio-economic context of the post-independence India, the inequality of sexes and the women's search for personal identity.

In Dr. G. Hampamma's words Jai Nimbkar's:

"characters are torn between a search for an authentic existence and the limitations of the human situation that prevent them from such realizations".⁵

The portrayal of women characters in Nimbkar's novels invariably bears authenticity to her feminist approach, outlook and perspective. Her keen observation of the life of Indian women and her interest in the study of their inner mind are evidenced by her vivid and panoramic portrayal of their plight. As a feminist novelist the focus in her novels is on the existential predicament and travails of the subdued women in a male dominated society governed by rigid traditions and restriction. Most of the Indian women living in a conventional and traditional family feel subdued to raise their voice against antagonistic supremacy of the male persons of the society owing to their inferiority feeling and stiff code of conduct forced on them. These two novels show how such women in spite of being highly educated undergo psychological suffering due to inferiority complex and deep sense of inhibitions. Here we get an image of new woman waiting for unrestraint and liberation in a world that keeps on changing with rapid speed.

References:

- [1]. Nimbkar. Jai, *Temporary answers*. Disha Books, 1974. p-23
- [2]. Ibid., p.22
- [3]. Ibid., p.92
- [4]. An interview with Jai Nimbkar as quoted by Dr. Archana Rohokale in her Ph.D. thesis.
- [5]. Hampamma. G, 2011, "Self Victimization in the shorter fictions of Jai Nimbkar", *Research Spectrum: Vol-2, Issue-11, P-4*