



Altering the Stereotype of Dependent Women and Their Self-Assertion

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Abstract

Life is a series of natural and spontaneous changes; this reality of life inevitably reflects in literature and the position of woman is no exception to this phenomenon. The status of women all over the globe particularly in India has undergone a rapid change in recent times. The personality of woman was inundated by the male dominated attitudes against the backdrop of predominantly male oriented culture. She was left with no mind, no personality, no individuality, no freedom, no compatibility of her own. She had been 'a woman in the shadow of man'. The woman in life and literature had capitulated to the male paramountcy leaving no subsistence of her own. The changes brought about by the western culture and education, freedom struggle and changes in the economic conditions which jolted the foundation of joint family proved powerful pedals to bring woman out of the shadow of the Sita image. She gradually came out of the cocoon of pride in suffering and tolerating and started searching for her 'self' and her existence in society. The struggle was a traumatic not only to her but to the so-called orthodox people who dehumanised woman for their selfish ends.

Keywords: Assimilation, assertion, aspirations, repatriation, predicaments, subjugation.

Introduction

Jai Nimbkar is an illustrious writer who mainly writes in two languages Marathi and English. She carried forward the legacy of writing as her mother Irawati Karve was also a prominent writer of her times.

The proclivity to revolt against the so called vacuous entrenched values, was in the blood of Jai Nimbkar and this propensity is seen in her works. Her works include, *Come Rain* (1993), *Temporary Answers* (2004), *A Joint Venture* (1998), *The Lotus Leaves and other Stories* (1971) and *The Phantom Bird and other Stories* (1993).

The varied social and regional differences in culture, language, religious beliefs in India have given writers a source, themes and subjects to write about the Indian milieu. After the struggle of independence and the aftermath of partition, the major concerns of the novelists have been social issues, human relationships and gender equations.

Many Indian women novelists have made significant contribution to Indian novel. Anita Desai, Dr. Saral Barnabas, Shashi Deshpande, Kamal Markandaya, Arundhati Roy Shashi Deshpande, wrote about their hopes and desires. Predicament and silent suffering inside the threshold. When two individuals even though having same background, communities co-exist, the conflict is inevitable, the issues about what is yours and what is mine, what is right and wrong tend to arise. To avoid this conflict, freedom of expression, protection of everybody's rights and more important unbiased social practices be given prime importance. In India gender stereotypes are the biased mindsets of the societal structure

which followed years after years resulting into a revolt against the conventional social taboos. In this scenario it is very pivotal of the assertion of women in their narratives to dismantle the structure of patriarchal powerhouse to attain social, political and economic equilibrium. In the novel *Come Rain* we come across the protagonist and other female characters who in the journey of life, assert their entities.

Analysis and Synthesis

Come Rain by Jai Nimbkar is a journey of an American girl Ann to Sangampur, who comes to India crossing the threshold, defying the archetypal role before her marriage to an Indian suitable boy Ravi. The novel focuses a light on the subtle conflict in personal relationships. It is a beautiful novel working on multiple themes appealing to the masses of the world. The novel shows that even in well-developed countries they face challenges of time, issues like poverty, homelessness, addiction, spousal conflicts, subjugation in marital relationships and cultural differences affecting unshakable relationships.

The male characters in *Come Rain* symbolize the racial patriarchy inherited and transferred from one male community to another resulting the female deprivation encompassing detests for the near and dear ones. After her arrival, Ann expected that Ravi would enquire about her journey and her lonely life in America in his absence, but her expectations conflict with the Indian mentality which was so powerful to drive out from any Indian male, that had been the part of patriarchal structure of Indian society.

The utterances of the protagonist show the innermost dependence, expectation and the reality which Ann faced on her arrival to India. Ann is educated and strong enough but she couldn't control herself, she felt contempt for women who used tears to express self-pity or to resolve. All the characters in Ravi's family considered Ann as an outsider, a girl who was not their far relative not belonged to their culture. In India, daughter is given more importance than a daughter-in-law; a few exceptions are here and there where a daughter-in-law is instantly accepted and appreciated but in reality, she is tested on various norms and in different situations. Ravi's father was a typical example of Indian patriarchy where male has dominance over the rest of the family members. He was an imposing looking man, tall and heavy, with long straight nose, prominent eyes, his voice was that of a man used to command and his manner that of one used arranging and directing the lives of those around him. He carried his authority easily and its exercise was casual and relaxed, as though he didn't expect opposition. Ravi's mother was not happy with Ann's arrival in the family and Ann always felt that she was making a cold scrutiny with her grey green eyes. There was complete absence of welcoming warmth and considered her as her enemy. Even though she was not having good looks but managed to look patrician. Ann, being mature, was ready to adopt the new culture but there were obstacles in her way. When we make a comparison between two major characters- Ann and Ravi, we realize that Ann is more mature and has positive comportment towards life, whereas Ravi is narrow minded and has pessimistic frame of mind. Ann being brought up and part of free living which advocates freedom from constraints and indulgences in pleasures. Ann is a self-defined woman who has her own practical view of life. The novel is also a tale of an American girl who faces mental turbulence, agony but overcomes it, asserts herself and retains her individuality.

Jai Nimbkar portrays a positive image of women in her novels. There is a struggle for democracy in the lives of her individual characters and financial and economic independence play a pivotal role in determining the course of action taken by the protagonists in *Come Rain and Temporary Answers*.

Ann is a strong will power woman has clear thinking about the society. *Come Rain* is not just an assimilation of two cultures but Ann's asserting herself by going through predicaments, revolting against the established values of subjugation and elevating herself up in the society. History tells us that powerful people make places powerful by immortalising themselves. The novel is not just a journey from one continent to another from America to Asia but it is a journey into the heart of woman facing challenges in different occurrences. It is a feminine journey from predicaments to aspirations, a journey of womanhood from suppressions to aspirations, journey from dislocation to repatriation and from renunciation to assertion.

The narratives of Ann and her mother show the confronting views.

Mrs Palmer, Ann's mother said,

"You call yourself liberated, but at heart you are just an old-fashioned girl who is in love with the idea of following her husband to the ends of earth. You don't even want to admit the possibility that something might go wrong." (ibid p.51)

Through the conversation of Ann and her mother we come to know how she had changed the narrative of traditional of

womanhood who wanted to be protected from all evils of society, who always felt secure in her house in her country. but Ann decided to cross the boundaries. She altered the definition of dependent woman by accepting different country and different culture without bothering of the effects. She had crystal clear thinking which deeply rooted in her nature. To her one could be happy anywhere if one wanted to be happy. She said,

"You can be happy anywhere if you try." (ibid p.45)

Ravi wanted to live with his parents but Ann wanted to have her own house. Ann after a heated discussion with Ravi's parents Ann became successful in living independently.

"I am so glad we decided to have a place of our own. It's such a good feeling being responsible for your own life." (ibid p.61)

The remark made by Ravi also illustrates that individuality is very important.

"It's nice to be ourselves, you know. You can do what you please without worrying about anyone else being disturbed." (ibid p.70)

Ann was an independent girl; she was the youngest of five children and always tended to be rebellious whenever her mother tried to impose restrictions on her. The mother and daughter relationship was stormy yet they were close to each other. As she grew up, she felt she was muffled the over protectiveness of her mother. She cared for more freedom decided to leave home to escape from her mother's obsessive love.

On certain occasion we feel pity for Mrs. Palmer. She loved her children and wanted to protect them for their good but the new generation thought that it was a direct attack on their freedom and integrity. She had been a busy and happy housewife, needing nothing outside her home and husband and children. One by one the children left the nest childless and husbandless all at once, she felt that all her functions as a woman had come to an end.

"She alternated between deep depressions when she drank excessively," (ibid p.72)

When Ann's mother visited India, she felt very uncomfortable for not having a commode and toilet paper in the washroom, she asked Ann how she could manage without commode. Ann replied,

*"I wash myself, like everyone else."
"Did you know about this before you came?"*

Ann said,

"No, but I learned. And now I wouldn't dream of using the other kind of toilet if this kind is available. It seems so much better. And cleaner too." (ibid P.200)

The conversation between mother and daughter shows as to how Ann had assimilated with the Indian culture. To complain about everything is the nature of her mother and to get adjusted with the new life is the temperament of Ann. The

positivity always overcomes the inconvenience and difficult situation. When Mrs. Palmer came to India she was not interested in visiting historical places, the main purpose behind her visit was to persuade Ravi and to go back to US. Her narratives show her innermost concern to be in America with her daughter and son-in-law.

I haven't come here as a tourist. This is not a country I would have chosen to come to as a tourist. Look I will be frank with you, I came all this way only to persuade you and Ravi to come back to U.S." (ibid. P.200)

Mrs. Palmer was worried about the future of his daughter and her husband, or probably because of the death of Ann's father she might felt alienation and needed somebody's company.

Ann came to India not as a tourist but to get settled, being a foreigner, in the beginning she faced difficulties in getting adjusted with the new life but she overcame everything. Being brought up independently in America, she here too wanted to be self-dependent economically. So, she joined a trust called Samaj Seva Sangh as a pre-school nursery teacher where she would work daily for two hours. By doing so she asserted herself as an independent woman not fragile to be broken to pieces by the circumstances.

Ravi's sister Mohini was very reticent she was treated in the family as if she didn't exist. Her individuality, her freedom and her wishes were not given any importance. But with the help of Ann, she became independent regained her individuality. She got married to Prem against the will of her parents because he was not of their caste and creed, he was a Sindhi, nobody from Gogte family was present for her marriage in court except Ann. After her marriage we find there was a change in her nature, she became independent asserted herself, crossed the threshold of caste creed and religion and became a successful careful housewife.

"She didn't feel that she knew Mohini too well yet, although she welcomed the change in her, from a shy girl to a woman, in just such a short period. Even her face changed, became more open, more receptive." (ibid. P.127)

Ann not only changed Mohini but also changed her mother-in-law. After the birth of Rahul, she came twice a day, always brought home cooked meals and gifts, dry fruits homemade sweets. Ann said,

"She is so pleasant and considerate, I can't believe she is the same woman." (ibid. P.131)

Ann had a high opinion about India and Indian culture. This may be one of the reasons that she decided to stay in the country. Her narratives proved that she really had great respect for the country and its rich heritage.

"It was not necessary to change in any way in order to become an Indian, to be accepted as an Indian. This was the country in which newcomers were welcomed but not expected to refashion themselves into one of the already existing moulds. They could not only keep their own dress, language, religion, culture, they could pass it on to their next generation practically intact." (ibid. P.212)

Ann not only accepted the new way of Indian but decided to get settled in India forever without the company of her husband. When Ravi decided to go back to America for better

prospects Ann took a firm decision to stay India forever. She changed the stereotyped image of a traditional woman who was believed to accompany her husband wherever he went. Ann changed the traditional narrative pattern and asserted herself as a 'new woman' of 'new age' by not going to America.

When Ann's mother asked her who would look after her when she was gone, she replied,

"I don't need to be looked after. I can be quite self-sufficient." (ibid. P.214)

Conclusion

Thus, the novel Come Rain is not just about the familial conflict of old and new values but it is about the resilience of Ann who challenged the patriarchal structure and asserted herself as a self-reliant woman who not only brought changes in her life but also changed the lives of other female characters making them self-sufficient. It is also a narrative of ethical dimensions of women's empowerment in the patriarchal society.

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