

## **Feminist Approach in *Jai Nimbkar's* Select Short Stories**

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### **Abstract**

Jai Nimbkar is a modern Indian woman writer who shows an incipient streak in portraying women characters which reflects her individual stance on man-woman relationship. She presents her argument that woman has been given a demeaning position in the patriarchal society. Her protagonists are vibrant and many a times radical. The protagonists of her short stories “*The Childless One*”, “*Turning Points*”, “*The Huntress*” and “*The Distorted Heaven*” from her collection of short stories *The Phantom Bird*.

Woman is always expected to restrict herself. The writer expected the themes that depict the modern woman's right to reject the life prescribed by a male-dominated, anti-individual society.

**Keywords:** Dehumanize, Career, Traditions, Opportunity, Victimize

Jai Nimbkar is a creative short story writer with her own definite views on the art. Using the trivia of daily occasions to bring realism in her short stories is her art. She has been writing without ceremony, playing out the lives of ordinary people from lower middle class and labour class. These people we encounter on the streets, bringing into sharp focus the meaning of life itself. Jai's assets are her easy and sharp observations of life in middle-class

Indian family, her ability to capture the subtle nuances of interpersonal relationships and to breathe life into her characters so that they remain rooted in the social reality.

Indian Feminism focusses more on defending equal social rights to women. Their representation is for gender equality. Her protagonists are set into a journey in search of their autonomous selves, for self-exploration in order to arrive at a definition of the “Self” and “Self-recognition”. G.S. Balarama Gupta says;

Woman’s sense of anguish and alienation that results from her acute consciousness of man’s perfidy and her struggle to achieve emancipation from traditional constraints and orthodox morality and achieve a conscious identity for herself. (Gupta 1993,41).

Certain norms and practices have been established by the patriarchal system, for women over centuries through ideological, biological, sociological, anthropological as well as other justifications to control women and to force them to stay subordinate. Only a submissive woman is regarded as rational and whole. The moral is docility in a woman leads to happiness for all and that upsetting the domestic order may lead to disrupting social and cosmic order. Woman’s role is to save humanity through submission. Woman in her place is a cornerstone of society.

“Indian society continues to threaten women who supposed “failure” makes them punishable. The punishment they suffer may take the form of isolation, frustrations, self-questioning and resignation”. (Riemenschneider 1985,315)

Radha in “*The Childless One*” raises her voice against the system. Her mother-in-law represents the domineering patriarchal authority. In spite of Radha’s repeated protests, she is left under the care of her wily mother-in-law, by her husband Sripati, during her supposed pregnancy. Sripati has married Radha against the wishes of his mother. Radha knows very well that her heartless mother-in-law would not receive her properly. But she has no option but to go to her mother-in-law.

As Radha's delivery gets delayed her swollen abdomen becomes a "focus of pain and fear and shame". (Nimbkar 1993,184) and she manages to avoid everyone but not her mother-in-law who remarks, "*God knows what monster child is growing inside her*" (Nimbkar 1993,183)

Finally, Radha is diagnosed of her swollen abdomen to be a tumour and Radha undergoes the surgery for its removal. Her mother-in-law gets to remarry her son as she feels Radha is of no more use to her son. Sripati is also willing to remarry and then Radha realizes. "*I have got nobody now. I've got only myself*" (Nimbkar 1993,188)

Worried about her life Radha leaves her husband's and mother-in-law's house and finds work as a farm labourer. People call her "Vedi" a mad woman and laugh at her. Radha grows tired of being used for a few laughs. "She learned to keep herself to herself. Life assumes a placid routine and she began to live without hatred and bitterness as her constant companions." (Nimbkar 1993,189)

Radha's suffering is akin to the suffering of Guleri in Amrita Pritam's Punjabi Story, "*The Stench of Kerosene.*" Guleri after learning about the second marriage of her husband, unable to face the patriarchal authority, commits suicide. On the contrary Radha combats and questions the institutions. She revolts against the male dominance and questions her husband: "How many times will you marry before you know that you will never have any children.... All you were ever fit to father was a lump of flesh.... A child with neither head nor limbs" (Nimbkar 1993,191)

Radha questions the very male hood, which treats woman as an item of lust. Through her, Jai Nimbkar makes it clear that women also have an equal right to be as ruthless as they want.

The new female model in Radha crystalizes itself as she seems to be a synthesis of female values although it is still in its underdeveloped stage. But the race of the power

woman is already born: the women who have watched most carefully and deserved and won the opportunity to effect this change. (Murali Ganam 1985,84).

Women are easily caught in the meshes of intrigues and social constraints of all kinds and their subservience to men gives them no freedom of action on her own. Yet women endure and bears everything by the sheer power of her womanliness – her gifts of beauty love, patience, compassion and goodness.

In “*Turning Points*” the protagonist gets an opportunity to present her paper in New York and also to work there for six months as a guest lecturer. But she rejects the offer for the sake of her 23-year-old son, a medical student. After the death of her husband, she is completely devoted to her son, Bichu who was then a child.

Jagdish her senior colleague proposed to marry her years ago, but she made a choice which was in Bichu’s favour, fearing Jagdish may not be the sort of father Bichu needed. Jagdish cared for her so deeply that he takes as much of the burden of administrative work off her shoulders as he could. She too loves him in “a muted non-urgent way” (Nimbalkar 1993, 124).

Jagdish advises her not to lose the opportunity, but to take time and to decide. On the same day during dinner, Bichu her son tells her that his girlfriend Sarita wanted them to get married as soon as possible. His mother’s advice to postpone the marriage till the completion of his education is kept aside. She tries to convince him in every possible way but realizes that it is not going to fit in with the strategy she must follow if she wants to save herself a small space in his life. So, she immediately takes the decision and tells Bichu that she would not be present at the time of their wedding. The very next day she confirms to Jagdish that she is very much prepared to go abroad. But she also comes to learn that Jagdish also is leaving for the same place. Jagdish worries if she would change her decision.

But to run away from her selfish son and her acceptance to go along with Jagdish brings a hope to lead a new life with him. Once she had rejected Jagdish for the sake of her son. But

now just because of her son she gets closer to Jagdish paving the way to live the life for herself without the support of a person who cares for her she deliberately liberates herself from the shackles of traditional roles. The decision to turn down.

Another story “The Hunters” is with feminist thought. The protagonist Malavika or Vicky yearns for communion with the other sex. Vicky’s parents died when she was quite young. She lived with her sister Arati and her husband who are the only parents’ guardian she has known.

During one of the party, Vicky is introduced to Mr. Saha a member of parliament, critic, novelist and Journalist. In her first meeting she thinks him a crummy type of fellow and feels his face out of a ghost story. But slowly she gets attracted towards his big and sleepy looking strange eyes, and his soft and rather attractive voice. She finds him watching her and she begins to enjoy and like that when he gives her compliment on her smile, she wishes she would have “*Spent a bit more time in front of the mirror*” (Nimbkar 1993,91)

Slowly Vicky and Saha start enjoying each other’s company. One day when Saha leaves her at home after shaking hands with her, she finds herself thinking that “*The Handshake probably meant more to him than a kiss to Vinod*” (Nimbkar 1993,95)

Saha proposes marriage with all hope to Vicky. He asserts that cannot offer her a lot of money but would make her happy.

On this she says “*I-feel flattered that you want to marry me. But I am not your sort, you know. It would never work.*” After some time, she realizes that she has trapped the mosquito at the cost of her own blood and enters the world of vacuum, which is akin to her expression of sorrow. She may trap Saha but at the cost of her own self.

Nimbkar’s another story “*Distorted Heaven*” presents a beautiful, exquisitely slender, tall and graceful Sumitra. She barter her marital life to get a name for her illegal unborn child. She becomes pregnant by a man who worked for her father and unable to marry her as he was already married. Aruna the daughter of a rehabilitated Devadasi is used by Sumitra as a prey.

She drags Manohar and entices him with the condition: “I’ m not asking you to give up Aruna. If you marry me and give my child a name. I’ll leave you absolutely free to go on seeing her’ . (Nimbkar 1993, 81). This sounds “a preposterous bargain with a man she didn’t even know.” (Nimbkar 1993, 83).

Sumitra is clever and understands that Manohar is ambitious. She also takes the advantage of Aruna’s family background. Being left with no other option, Manohar finally accepts and lays the conditions: “*The child must be brought up without the knowledge that I am not its real father.*” (Nimbkar 1993,83).

After marrying Sumitra is afraid that Manohar may hate the child but feels very happy and glad to find that he is very fond of her daughter Neelam. After living for twenty years as his wife, “only in name” (Nimbkar 1993,85).

She realizes that what she has lost in her life, for which she cannot blame anyone but herself. She alone is the cause of the consequences, so she must bear it. And Monohar on the other hand never lets her forget that. So, she decides of giving a meaning to her married life and asks Manohar to give up Aruna. Manohar replies that their bargain never had a time limit. And, moreover, Sumitra does not have any right to ask him for anything. She is not satisfied with what he has to give for her as she has received “expect the essentials”.

However, she had thought that time would change everything and would bring her happiness. Sumitra tries to convince Manohar that Aruna has had a good life for twenty years. She requests Manohar to end his relationship with Aruna, by asking her to go away from him, for she wanted a few years of his life. Manohar is shocked at Sumitra’s ingratitude and denies doing so.

Finally, Sumitra uses her only weapon and tells Manohar that, I am going to tell Neelam about her real father. Manohar feels helpless and requests her for some time. Manohar with no option left goes to Aruna to make final decision. Unfortunately, when Manohar tries to cross

the road to reach his car he meets with an accident and dies, thus destroying all the hopes of Sumitra.

Nimbkar's vision is fundamentally affirmative. The process of disillusionment never ends there is always further to go. The world of sense is far too dull to give up. Infact, Jai Nimbkar's vision of woman's predicament is sharper and deeper than that of other women writers. Jai Nimbkar's protagonists register their protest in varying degrees of intensity. They want to exercise their freedom, make a choice and refuse to conform or compromise.

**Conflict of Interest:** The corresponding author, on behalf of second author, confirms that there are no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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