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Feminine sensibility in Jai Nimbkar's a joint venture

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Abstract

The very title of the novel, A Joint Venture is symbolic and says all about Feminism. The term 'joint' refers to business as well as human relations in life. Anything and anywhere when partners enjoy equal rights and freedom, it leads to perfection. And this is what feminism stands for. It is a fact that contrary to popular belief feminism has nothing to do with belittling men, in fact feminism does not support sexism against either gender. Feminism works towards equality, not female superiority.

Keywords: Equal rights, search for identity and patriarchal superiority

Introduction

The novel A Joint Venture is a fine example of Jai Nimbkar's unique creative representation of feminine sensibility. In other words, it presents practical execution of the basics of feministic theory. Being a woman herself, Jai Nimbkar finds it easy to keep the story engaged with feminist ethical concerns to offer equal rights to woman and achieve a balanced picture of society. No doubt, the woman has been used by society as a household 'pet'. Since a long time, woman is assumed as a fragile thing which man can use as per his need. But here we need, the new woman, Jyoti, the main female protagonist who can analyze her problems and get her middle way to come out without losing any of her relationships. The novel begins with the depiction of the frustration of Jyoti and her decision to leave Ram. Jyoti, the female protagonist, after thirty years of marital life realizes that she has got nothing in return and that she is nobody without her husband and children. She is the wife of Ram. He is in the seed business. At the very beginning of the novel, Jyoti expresses her desire to her husband, Ram to leave him and live separately. It doesn't mean that Ram doesn't love her; in fact, he loves her but in his own way. The couple has two children and is economically sound. Therefore, it is really difficult to understand as to why she has reached at this decision. The couple has been married for last thirty years and now at this juncture Jyoti feels that she has not lived her own life at all during all that period. She has been living only for Ram and not for her. However, Ram fails to understand why Jyoti has taken this decision and therefore it tremors him. He directs her not to take any decision in a panic. He advises her to go to Mahabaleshwar and to rethink on her decision. Jyoti accepts and goes to Mahabaleshwar.

At Mahabaleshwar, she ponders over her marital life and comes to realize that in the course of time unknowingly her whole life gradually became a part of Ram's life. As a result, she never had any identity of her own. In her married life of thirty years, Jyoti carries out her responsibilities and duties as a wife, as a mother and also as a worker very faithfully. On the contrary, Ram fails to contribute in the same manner as Jyoti. Therefore, their marriage is about to collapse. When she comes to know about Ram's susceptibility, she immediately changes her mind and comes back to Ram to protect him because, she cannot face her husband's dignity hurt. Jyoti examines her husband quite dispassionately. In fact, she is thinking to leave Ram because both are incompatible with each other but she does not lose her regard and concern for him. It is her mother instinct which becomes dominant in her when she sees Ram vulnerable. So, finally Jyoti accepts her husband as he is but there is a change in him. His entire dominating ego is gone. He is now a weakling that needs motherly protection. So, now Jyoti's identity grows more potent than that of wife. The novel ends with the realization of Jyoti's true identity as a powerful mother who is strong enough to protect the weak child.

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A detailed textual analysis of the novel makes it clear that this Woman centric story is a successful attempt to challenge the systematic inequalities which a woman faces on a daily basis. The story of Jyoti is, in fact, a realistic depiction of resentment at the unjust treatment meted out to woman, in general, in a patriarchal society; it is a struggle against neglect and the dual moral standards to which woman are subjected in Indian society.

Jyoti is the eldest daughter out of three children in her family. Her father worked as a postman and her mother was a middle-class woman of orthodox mentality. Therefore, her story is the story of a typical Indian girl from a middle-class family. She is a very intelligent student. She passes her B. Com. with distinction and tops the list in her college. She is eligible for getting scholarship and wants to pursue higher education. However, being relatively ordinary in looks she fails to attract the attention of boys during her college days. On the contrary, the girls who are not as intelligent as Jyoti but superior in looks than Jyoti are able to draw the attention of the college boys. Jyoti's aptitude is treated as something immaterial because she is an ordinary girl in her looks.

It is a saddening truth that the educational and other achievements of girls are given less importance as compared to physical beauty. Physical beauty of a girl is more valued. In this society, it is really difficult for mediocre and simple looking girls like Jyoti to get married and have good looking husband. Therefore, Jyoti is not surprised at all when the dozens of eligible males have denied to marry her. Because of these denials, she had made her mind that she perhaps might never get married.

“This had not greatly surprised her. Even though she had grown up accepting marriage as the natural and necessary state for everyone, experience had made her face the possibility that she might never get married ^[1].”

On this background, when Jyoti receives Ram's offer of marriage, she immediately accepts it. She does it very practically. She knows that she is already rejected by dozen bachelors whose concern perhaps was her ordinary looks. Moreover, her parents are not in a position to offer huge dowry. It is also one of the obstacles in her marriage. Her fear is that if somebody becomes ready to marry her, he will demand a huge dowry. And her parents being poor will not afford to fulfill it. For her parents too, this proposal is like a dream come true. It is worth mentioning the comment made by her mother when Ram came with a proposal for Jyoti. She could not understand why a man who is superior to her daughter in every way should propose to her.

"She had hinted at some dark purpose behind his wanting, to marry beneath him. She had even hinted that he might be impotent or have leprosy. Why else would a man like that want to marry Jyoti who had neither looks nor money nor important family connections? ^[2]”

Ram is very plain and straightforward while proposing Jyoti. During their meeting, Ram explains Jyoti the type of life she would have after marriage. He also asks her about her expectations from him. But Jyoti is compelled to accept everything submissively. She doesn't dare to ask Ram about what he may expect from her. She replies Ram's questions in the way a woman is projected to reply and not in the way she would have liked to. In spite of Ram's insistence, Jyoti does

not ask him even a single question in return. She is bound by the societal attitudes and financial limitations therefore she has developed negative approach in her mind.

Besides, we can say that she has developed an inferiority complex in her mind. Jyoti has some ideas deeply rooted in her mind. She thinks of herself as a drab, ugly and unattractive woman. Therefore, she is ready to accept her fate without any grudge. Her impression is that what she is receiving from life is not less than a miracle. It is more than she could expect.

“She had thought of herself as a drab, ugly, totally unattractive woman, and had, as a result, expected so little from life that what she received never stopped seeming like a miracle ^[3].”

Meeting Ram and getting married is like a fairy tale for her. She feels chosen. She feels herself to be privileged because she is going to marry a man who is superior to her in every way. After marriage, Jyoti feels that she must mould herself to fit in to the pattern of the Ram's family. Therefore, she observes and tries to know the traditions of her in-law's family. She also tries to know the expectations of members of the family from her. She does it very carefully because she doesn't want to hurt any member of the family and also feels scared that Ram's family may be dissatisfied with her.

She thinks that the essence of marriage is the negation of a woman's life and accepting the situation whatever it is, is the duty of a woman. For her, marriage is a fresh beginning of life for woman. Jyoti is born and brought up in a patriarchal family setting. She is taught not to question husband but to follow him blindly. She feels that after marriage a woman has to adjust herself to the new people, new ideas and values and a new life style. She thinks it to be natural and therefore accepts it without any resentment but rather with pride and pleasure. She echoes:

“That was the essence of marriage, the negation of a woman's life up to that point, and a fresh start made with new people, new ideas and values, a new style of life. This was all in the natural order of things, and Jyoti accepted it without resentment, with pleasure and pride, in fact ^[4].”

After marriage, Jyoti acquired a new perspective about her life in Shirgaon. Jyoti felt proud as a peacock. She accepted inadequacies of village life as Ram had given her prior intimations about the possible troubles of rural life. She was happy with her married life and maintained good relations with her in-laws. She happily accepted everything and soon molded her life in the new role of married woman. Jyoti in trying to adjust her to the pattern of in-law's family and accepting new way of life is in fact obliterating herself. But she does not understand this because she is taught in that way by her parents. Besides, the tricks for woman subjugation set by the male-controlled society are very indirect. They become so easily a part of woman's everyday life that nonconformity to this custom and proclamation of the self seems to be odd. And therefore, she very eagerly accepts the life that Ram and his family members would admire. After marriage, in a very short span, Jyoti adjusts herself to her new role as well as to the family of in-laws. She gets adjusted so easily to everything there as if she is born for that.

Here in Shirgaon, the surrounding and nature is so beautiful that she begins to hate her parents' small two-room apartment, the continuous traffic, its noise, the small backbiting in the house and her father's continued illness. She remembers all these but with aversion. She is happy here in her husband's house and becomes entirely integrated. Like a typical Indian girl, she makes every possible effort to please her husband's family.

She is totally assimilated with her surroundings and she loves it as well as Ram. Consequently, when Ram with a sense of guiltiness exposes his secret that he is not an agricultural graduate, she only laughs it away. She considers it as an unpremeditated revelation. For her, it is not something awful. Ram also tries to defend his failure by giving reasons for the state of affairs which made it tough for him to take the examination. But for Jyoti it seems to be insignificant at this point.

It never occurs to her mind that now Ram is aware of his incompetence to get a degree only because his wife is a graduate. Traditionally, it is not approved that a husband has less education than a wife. Therefore, being a man Ram finds it difficult to accept this lesser position than his wife. He also feels it necessary to defend his disappointment. When Ram relates the whole story, Jyoti feels relieved and she laughs. Her response to it is very casual one.

“She said, is that all?”

“What do you mean, is that all?” he said, a little offended that his dramatic disclosure meant so little to her. What did you think I was going to confess? Something awful ^[5].”

Jyoti wants to be in her husband's errand therefore her chief concern is not Ram's disappointment but her desire to be in his errand. She doesn't want to lose Ram because she thinks it to be the highest disaster for her. She, therefore, constantly tries to mould herself as per Ram's outlooks, his preferences. Ram is very conscious about the status and position of his family in the society. He always used to advise Jyoti to be cautious about it. Once, accidentally she goes out in an untidy sari, Ram feels very insulted. Therefore, he cautions her to be mindful of their status in the society. It seems that he is not concerned for Jyoti but for his image in the society. He says:

“If someone saw you dressed like that, they would think our business had failed or something. I mean, you are not just nobody ^[6].”

Right from the marriage with Ram, she has been doing the things asked by Ram. In the beginning, she works as a supervisor and when the business prospers, she works as an accountant and looks after accounts of the business. Even though she doesn't want to come to Pune, she comes when the office is shifted to Pune. It is very clear that she has been doing everything possible to please Ram though she herself does not like them. Though she feels it to be illogical to take salary she accepts it to outsmart the income tax officer and because of Ram's request. When Jyoti ponders over all this, she remembers:

“Almost literally, she had merely done what Ram wished her to do ^[7].”

References

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