

PATRICIA HILL COLLINS' CONCEPTUALIZATION OF THE 'OUTSIDER-WITHIN' PHENOMENON: A STUDY OF JAI NIMBKAR'S NOVELS.

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Abstract: The modern concept of 'New Woman' exemplifies the power of woman over herself through the assertion of her inner strength and convictions. Her assertion embodies her achievement of the 'construction of knowledge' from her own experience. In short, it is the exhibition of her 'standpoint' taken from her mental, social, educational and financial position. However, 'standpoint' as a theory took birth long back in 1807, when Friedrich Hegel, a German philosopher examined 'standpoint' theory in terms of relations between master and slave. Further feminist theorists extended it to studying world from the standpoint of woman where she meets her 'outsider within'. Jai Nimbkar, an Indian woman novelist appears to be very conscious about the notion of 'new woman' in her two novels, *A Joint Venture* and *Come Rain*. The present paper is an attempt of studying how female protagonists in these two novels view the surroundings from the position that they are placed at and eventually rise with the 'constructive knowledge' of their subservient place in the different spheres of life. Nimbkar with her affirmative vision allows her women to identify themselves as feminists, who exhibit their preferences strongly and recognize the 'dynamics of power within'. Hence, Jyoti in *The Joint Venture* resolves to leave her husband, Ram after 30yrs of marriage, whereas Ann, an American wife accepts a desertion by her Indian husband, Ravi quite boldly.

Key words: assertion, knowledge, identity, New Woman, outsider, standpoint, subservient.

Introduction:

*"I do not wish them (women) to have power
Over men; but over themselves."*

Mary Wollstonecraft

A Vindication of the rights of Women

Woman being existed and being forced to exist as a vulnerable one needs to be empowered within. The emergence of number of feminist thinkers have promoted some or the other theory to address the issues of women. The existing male-dominated social structure hinders the women's ways of thinking and understanding the world around. Their perspective differs majorly as they tend to follow the point of view of the powerful masculine group. Hence, while making an enquiry into the effects of power structure on the construction of individual's knowledge the position and experience of an individual remain at the nucleus of the standpoint theory. The standpoint theory took birth long back in 1807, when Friedrich Hegel, a German philosopher examined standpoint theory in terms of relations between 'master and slave'. Further the feminist theorist extended it to study world from the standpoint of woman. Designed in the 1980, by Patricia Hill Collins, Nancy Hartsock, Sandra Harding, Hilary Rose and Dorothy Smith, standpoint theory has its roots in Marxist theory and second -wave feminist move of consciousness-raising. It has been established as a conceptual tool to discard the arguments that 'knowledge produced from women's standpoint is distinctive in form as well as content.' [2016:258] Thus 'a feminist standpoint' theory primarily examined as a feminist epistemology is a challenge to the traditional epistemological assumptions. Sandra Harding

emphasizes a standpoint 'as an achievement.' A standpoint differs in the respect from perspective which anyone can have simply by 'opening one's eyes' to put in the words of Sandra Harding. www.iep.utm.edu/fem-stan

Patricia Collins' conceptualization of 'the outsider within' occupies the major aspect of feminist standpoint theory as it engenders the 'dual perspectives'. The epistemic advantage of 'double vision' is explained by the black feminist critic Bell Hooks' description of growing up in small -town Kentucky:

"Living as we did on the edge we developed a particular way of seeing reality. We looked both from the outside in and from the inside out ... we understand both." www.iep.utm.edu/fem-stan

Jai Nimbkar, an Indian Woman novelists writing in both Marathi and English though less critically acclaimed has three powerful novels to her credit viz. *Temporary Answers*, *Joint Venture* and *Come Rain*. She is a well-known short story writer too. *The Lotus Leaves and Other Stories* is a collection of her short stories. Jai Nimbkar, an Indian woman novelist appears to be very conscious about the notion of 'new woman' in her two novels, *A Joint Venture* and *Come Rain*. The present paper is an attempt of studying how female protagonists in these two novels view the surroundings from the position that they are placed at and eventually rise with the 'constructive knowledge' of their subservient place in the different spheres of life. Nimbkar with her 'affirmative vision' allows her women to identify themselves as feminists, who exhibit their preferences strongly and recognize the 'dynamics of power within'.

Among the various modes of resisting promoted by various theorists and philosophers, 'Standpoint Theory' teaches 'how to think otherwise' and brings the acquired knowledge to the level of cognition. In its application of 'Outsider-Within' Phenomenon, to her novels, Jai Nimbkar seems to be drawing the readers' attention to the close link between the position of her women characters, their experiences, their attempt of seeing the world and emerging from the status of being 'other' to 'other than' and further to the 'epistemic subjects' with the help of 'constructive knowledge'. Woman's place /position is the source of knowledge production and hence starting point of an inquiry into the standpoint theory. Jyoti in *The Joint Venture* is a middleclass educated woman plays a variety of roles like, daughter, sister, wife, mother, accountant, middle, follower and finally an individual. Jyoti being a daughter never noticed compatibility or 'a tie of affection' between her parents. She remembers her father mostly 'as a bad-tempered man'. By standing on the threshold, Jyoti shares her outsider's views about the death of her father as 'probably a release for him' and for her mother too. But her mollifying her mother outrages her mother who attacks Jyoti with bitter words, 'Release! Release, you say. What do you know about it? He was my sole reason for living. And now he is gone.' [P-64] However, she tries to perceive her mother's standpoint and comes up with the concrete knowledge that her tie with Ram is always going to be an unwanted knot for her mother. She draws the conclusion on the status of Indian married woman:

A travesty of a man he might have been, for the past few years, but as long as he was alive, she had the status of a married woman. The moment he died, she was widow, pitied but firmly excluded from all sorts of social and religious functions, relegated to the position of a second-class citizen. [P-67]

Jai Nimbkar demonstrates Jyoti being conferred the status of 'other' by her own sister and mother. Despite her not being showy at her small housewarming party, Jyoti is enforced to occupy the middle position, neither belonging to her husband's new flat nor to her parents' world. Her mother's sarcastic remark is added with her sister, Smita's 'twinge of jealousy' that labels her 'outsider-within' status:

'I suppose we won't see any more of you even though you'll be living in Pune. You are a grand lady now, with a posh flat and rich friends. You won't want to have anything to do with us.' [P-101]

The Joint Venture is a novel that portrays Jyoti, whose desire is 'most often expressed by choosing subordination as an assurance that she can belong and realize someone else's desire.' However, the novel opens with Jyoti, who strongly acquires an optimistic position of 'New Woman' standing on the 'verge of

new awakening' to put in the words of Margaret Fuller.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Woman_in_the_Nineteenth_Century#cite_note-14 She is seen articulating her need to be an individual and distancing herself from the social orthodoxy. She overcomes what Allison Pease [2012:16] observes Mona Caird, one of the scholar's claims that 'Social orthodoxy makes women incapable of individual thought.' Jyoti blurts out directly to Ram, 'I want to leave you.' She further emphasises, 'I just feel I can't continue living with you, that's all.' [P-6] The position that Jyoti is shown holding now allows her a clear view of her present 'dismissive status'. In her attempt to seek to envision her future she finds herself as a distraught being. Her 'outsider-within' feeling is being narrated as follows: She had lived through this scene countless times with a tolerant smile, but this evening she found herself suddenly thinking, 'I've had enough. I want to get out. I am sick of it all, the poses and the dishonesty, the verbal fencing which substitutes for conversation, the one-up-manship. Everything.' [P-5]

Despite Jyoti's contribution to Ram's business as an accountant as per her consent, she doesn't feel 'indispensable', a 'part' of his business. She finds him belonging to a category of masculine domain where Ann Rosalind Jones in her article, *Writing the body: toward an understanding of l'écriture feminine* [1985:87] describes man claiming, 'I am the unified, self-controlled centre of the universe.' Her centre location helps her to see her share in allowing Ram 'to take the lead in everything.' Consequently, she develops a feeling of being 'divorced' and comes up with the realization that 'I feel I am working in a vacuum.' Her standpoint educates her with the lesson that 'Life should be led with conscious intention, not simply allowed to happen.' [P-80] The lack of 'independent acclaim' in her married life is intensified with what Vinnie her friend views on 'marriage'. She remembers her saying,

Marriage is funny. You spend twenty years of your life living with a man. Twenty happy years. And at the end of it you are left feeling cheated. [P-108]

It is somehow because of her daughter, Smita Jyoti takes a cognizant of her role of 'middle' that places her nowhere but surely offers her a standpoint to emerge as an agent of knowledge of reality. On her hesitation to flout Ram's wish and attend birthday dinner, Smita is quite obvious when says, 'Either you believe what Daddy does, or don't. There is no middle ground, Mummy. ... Not just follow his wishes blindly the way you've been doing all your life.' [P-124]

She in the end understands herself as 'a prisoner of her (own) nature', realizes a lack of meaning-making and determines to stop 'floundering in half-truth and compromises'. [P-124] However, in the end, Jyoti's

assertion of her rejuvenated-self mirrors what Sandra M. Gustafson observes in her article, *Choosing a Medium: Margaret Fuller and the Forms of Sentiment* about Margaret Fuller i.e. 'the assertion of the feminine through a female form, sentimentalism, rather than through a Masculine form.' http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Woman_in_the_Nineteenth_Century#cite_note-14As in the end of the novel, it is Jyoti's solidarity during Ram's business crisis that creates the hopes of 'unifying bond between two individuals'.

Ann, a female protagonist in Nimbkar's *Come Rain* is described as 'an idealistic and rather unconventional American girl married to an Indian man, Ravi. From the day, she enters Ravi's house, she is enforced to have placed on the threshold which is relatively a marginal position. As if to naturalize the inferiority of her existence she is being kept deprived of all privileged, religious and warm welcome that a newly married woman deserves. Instead she receives Ravi's mother's 'a long, openly appraising look'. While sharing her knowledge about her mother-in-law from the location that she is placed at, she writes to her mother, 'My mother-in-law is a fairly deadly specimen.' [P-25] Ann observes what Josephine Donovan in her article, *Toward a Women's Poetics* [1987:98] says in her reference to a few feminist thinkers "the 'masculinization' of women's minds" that occurs "where men hold power and define women in relation to themselves". As Ravi's marrying Ann against his parents' wish is looked upon as violating the rigid traditional norms. Hence, everybody silently supports her mother-in-law's accusing words,

It must be very nice for her to have a husband who changes his life-long habits to suit her instead of expecting her to adapt to the ways of his family. ... Overnight you forget all that I did for you and can be rude to me for the sake of this white-faced monkey.' [P-32-33]

Comparing to Jyoti, Ann's judgements are rooted in her self-identified epistemology. She appears to be an objective, epistemic agent when she looks upon Indian society as an American woman. She is shocked to see paradoxical situation of Indian society where Mahesh, Ravi's brother is denied 'to assert his right to share in decision-making, or even she is treated like an outcast without trial.' Her social location forces her to feel nothing but an 'outsider-within'. Her 'autonomous woman-centred epistemology' is narrated as follows:

She thought that if she were offered a choice between a stable society which was run in this authoritarian repressive fashion, and a chaotic one in which everybody was given the freedom to go his own way even if it meant self-destruction, she would choose the latter. [P-43]

Ann is offered such a unique position in the novel that most of the time she judges the things around impartially. She shares her objective views regarding the defending strategies of every country and retorts Ravi's being sneering at India being prepared to defend itself. She voices her sound judgement, A world which is often at strife with you but has as much right to live by its own rules as you do by yours. [P-203]

As a wife, Ann views Ravi's behaviour being casual, or his habit of living always 'on the fringe' or his 'fastidiousness' towards his own son and his strong sense of male chauvinism is enough to negate her position as his better half and to label her as 'a foreigner'. She once opens with her perception before her mother-in-law. She says, 'It's his whole attitude, his refusal to treat me as an equal partner.' [P-264] 'Where men hold power and define women in relation to themselves', the 'androcentric epistemologies' reign supreme and 'woman-centred modes of perception' are sacrificed. For instance, in one of the situations, Ravi strongly disapproves Ann's going out with Mr. Pathak, one of their family friends on the ground that it was not without his 'knowledge and consent'. Ann is further forced to carry the 'outsider-within' feeling in the end of the novel, as Ravi walks out on her to US without even 'a backward glance'. She does resist his 'supreme egotism' by shutting door bolts 'with decisive loud clicks, like a full stop to something.' However, her standpoint nurtures her spirit with the knowledge if explained in the words of Virginia Woolf quoted by Elaine Showalter in her article, *Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness* [1988:332] that while it is 'unpleasant to be locked out ... it is worse, perhaps, to be locked in.' She frees her 'self from 'limbo' and enjoys a feeling of not being 'accountable to anybody'. She emerges to a rational actor in her drawing conclusions based on her experiences that marriage meant restrictions'. The freedom to follow her own inclinations makes her view the world a place to 'open (herself) to the widest range of experience.'

Nimbkar attempts to debunk stereotypical portrayal of her female characters in both the novels. She has depicted her female characters 'alternate between boredom and nascent individualism' though both of them differ from each other in certain matters. Jyoti symbolizes repression of desires whereas Ann symbolizes expression of desires. The application of standpoint theory to the novels under study seems to be a challenge to men's pre-ordained status of elevation that takes them to their acquired state of sublimation. In this regard, both the novels differ from each other as Ram sublimates his image and makes the conventional notion of marriage of being two minds possible. Whereas in case of Ann, Jai Nimbkar deviates from the belief that 'Marriage

above all else is someone's constant presence in your life.' [P-262] Thus, by challenging men's 'situatedness and embeddedness in particular circumstances of their lives' Jyoti and Ann bask into a glory of 'New Woman'. [www.iep.utm.edu/fem.e.n/] Standpoint

theory no doubt can be looked upon as one of the theoretical tools to empower the vulnerable ones in the society as it makes them to navigate from of 'subjugated knowledge' (French philosopher, Michel Foucault's notion) to 'constructive knowledge'.

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