

Exploitation of the Poor in Jai Nimbkar's Short Stories

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Abstract

Jai Nimbkar, an Indian writer in English has presented hard realities of the poor people in society in her short stories. Poverty is a major social evil in Indian society. She has dealt with a very heart touching story of a mother who is unable to give medical treatment to her ailing child due to her poverty. Nimbkar also presents how the poor and downtrodden become an easy prey for the rich people.

KEYWORDS: Female protagonist, artificiality, alienated, abject poverty, grim reality, down trodden.

Jai Nimbkar is one of the eminent short story writers. She had a wide exposure to the western culture. Her educational background and cultural upbringing reflect in her works. She obtained her Masters degree in Sociology and Psychology from Arizona University in the U.S.A. Hence, she had cultural contact with USA. Her family lineage remains equally important to depict interesting themes in her works. Since 1956 she has been living on a farm called 'Nimbkar seeds' in a small town Phalton in Satara district of Western Maharashtra.

Jai Nimbkar is an Indian writer who concentrates on poverty and exploitation problems and narrates each and every aspect of human relationship. Female protagonists in her short stories symbolize the overpowering materialism. Indian English writing or Post-Modern writing tends towards the effect of alienation in the work of art. She is notable for her depiction of the lives of the poorer castes in traditional Indian society. In her short stories, she portrays the human lives which are stagnated in the mire of personal disappointment. She also tries to expose the essential artificiality of the society. All her short stories have a direct, one to one relationship with society. She also draws a realistic and sympathetic portrait of the poor of this country.

Like many other Indian short story writers in English, Jai Nimbkar also made her imprint through weekly and monthly magazines. She started her career of writing short stories began in the noted magazines. Her short stories began to appear in Indian magazines around the middle of the 19th century. She began her literary career as a freelance journalist and contributed to magazines like 'Quest' 'Imprint' 'Femina' 'The Illustrated Weekly', etc.

She wrote innumerable short stories during the period between 1958 and 1978. She published fifty four short stories in various periodicals. In 1971, her first collection of short stories, *The Lotus Leaves and Other Stories* was published. Her next collection of short stories *The Phantom Bird and Other Stories* was published in 1993. Jai Nimbkar has further written many short stories which have been published in various reputed magazines.

Poverty is a condition in which a person or community lacks the financial resources and essentials for a minimum standard of living. Poverty means that the income level from employment is so low that basic human needs can't be met. Poverty has been a major social issue in most of the works of Indian English Writings. Jai Nimbkar also has thrown light on this issue. The present paper focuses on five

short stories from Jai Nimbkar's collection of short Stories, *The Lotus Leaves and Other Stories*. Just as illiteracy separates the uneducated from the educated, poverty too alienates the economically weaker section from the rich class. There is a constant struggle between the haves and the have-nots in which always the haves win, because of their wealth and also the social standing and political influence they have. Though the rich need the poor to do all the menial jobs, they always exhibit their utter contempt for them. The economical, social and political exploitation of the poor has continued even today in India. Jai Nimbkar makes reference to these naked realities in brief in five of her stories in this collection.

In the title story, *The Lotus Leaves*, Sarojini considers the poor as 'the salt of the earth'. She does not find anything interesting in the poor people. She tells Levin, "They are like sheep. All alike Inert, ignorant poor. And people who are that ignorant and that poor aren't interesting." (4) Thus while Sarojini attributes the causes of poverty to inertness and ignorance, the lawyer's wife in the story, finds out increasing population as the cause of abject poverty. She tells the poor woman, who is already the mother of four children and has come to her to ask for twenty rupees for the treatment of her ailing child, "You had four children. What did you want any more for? You people go merrily on having countless children, and don't care to think about how you are going to support them. Why should you expect me to pay for your stupidity and irresponsibility?" (71) Her anger appears to be justified because though she asks the woman's husband to undergo family planning operation after the twins are born, he refuses to do so, may be out of ignorance or may be out of superstitious beliefs he holds.

The Mother brings out the grim realities of poverty and its bad effects. The poor woman, with her four weak children and the husband, who is suffering from tuberculosis and yet doing a petty job, finds it hard to lead her life. The couple are unable even to give proper medical treatment to the child, which is in the death bed. When she tells her husband that the doctor has said that the child needs three or four injections, he helplessly says, "We just haven't the money. The injections are expensive." (70) The child finally dies for want of proper and timely medical care.

In *Cross-Cultural Relations*, the protagonist of the story explains his fiancée about the poor rural Indian scene. He describes his family to her: "... my family lives in a rickety old house. The walls haven't seen fresh paint in a hundred years and they have little holes in which bed bugs live. We cook on the floor and eat on the floor and have a cow and buffalo and their calves sharing the courtyard with us. The whole place smells of cow dung." (22) No doubt, there are lakhs of poor in India who are roofless, who wear rags and do not get square meals every day. But surprisingly this grim reality has been expressed by a young Indian, who himself is enjoying all the luxuries of life in a foreign country. The reader, however, tends to think that he is exaggerating his family poverty just to get rid of his fiancée.

In the story *Unto Each Man His Due*, the writer depicts the fruitless efforts of the old woman to find out her missing husband Sitaram Raut, who has not returned from the bazaar since the previous day. Mr. Patankar, the reporter of Marathi local daily, finds out that Raut has been killed in a road accident caused by the car of an influential person. He tries hard to find out the culprit. Finally, he finds out that Sambhajirao Kadam, a millionaire landowner, a pre-independence activist and also a present political heavy-weight, is behind this incident and is trying to hush-up the matter. As a result, the scales of justice do not tilt towards the poor old woman, and even the inquisitive and enthusiastic reporter is forced to keep quiet, as his own editor rejects to support him. Thus this serious incident, which takes away the life of the old

man and leaves the old woman helpless, becomes just a common incident for the rich and influential people for whom the lives of the poor lost in accidents have no value.

The Death of a Hero also focuses upon the same fact, i.e., the care of children, ‘the spoiled brats’ of rich and politically powerful can do anything illegal and still go unpunished and un-scattered. When More, the boy breaks a windowpane by throwing a stone, it hurts a classmate. The boy, who was hurt, comes from a poor family. His parents were not in a position to do anything against More. This spoilt boy causes a lot of trouble in and outside the class. But they are merely labelled as ‘boyish pranks’ because of his parents’ influence and standing in the society. Even along with some *goondas* he assaults Mr. Tagde, his teacher. Mr Tagde is ready to leave the job also. But when he is threatened that his pension will not be paid and he will not even be allowed to take tuitions, his mind wavers. He finally gets ready to withdraw the report. So this death of a ‘Hero’ in Mr.Tagde is also because of the atrocious and illegal behaviour of the powerful, influential more family.

Thus, Jai Nimbkar successfully brings out the realities in Indian society, where the poor and the downtrodden become an easy prey for the rich and influential class. The poor class is ever troubled by hunger, but raise no voice of protest. Even if they try to do so, it is suppressed by the heavy- weights.

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