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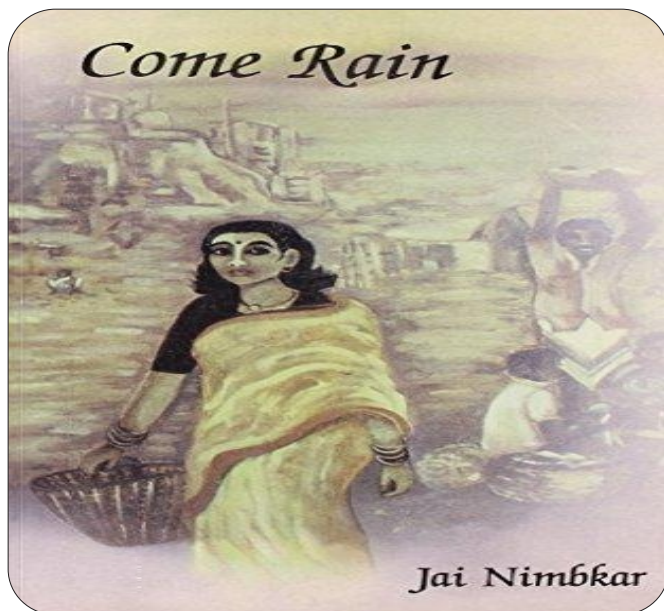


'CREATION OF HER OWN SPACE BY AN AMERICAN WOMAN IN INDIA: A STUDY OF JAI NIMBKAR'S NOVEL *COME RAIN*'



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ABSTRACT

The cross-cultural migration has been continued for centuries and it has increased during the previous couple of decades. The Information Technology in the twenty-first century helps to bring together the people from different countries in search of better education, services, commerce, material success, prosperity and so on. As a result of it, the issues related to even other cultures, religions and geographical locations have not been alien to the people belonging to certain place. Thus, cross-cultural interaction and migratory movement are the issues prominently attached and interlinked with the cultural, social, psychological, gender-related, economic, political and geographical concerns. It has resulted

in emergence of problems related with identity awareness and aspects of assimilation. Thus, the people in migration face various problems with the people and the land they visit, which results in the sufferings in their life. In this context, it is necessary to acquaint the contemporary educated young generation with the problems emerging due to cross-cultural migration. It has been a need of time to increase awareness among the Western young generation about the possibilities of and the problems emerging in the Eastward cross-cultural migration.

KEYWORDS :American Woman, Indian Culture, Immigrant, Cultural Crisis, Identity, Cultural Problems, Assimilation, Foreigner, Predicament and cultural difference.

INTRODUCTION

The predicament and problems of women due to cross-cultural encounters in immigration have remained an issue of discussion for the women writers. The present paper undertakes an analysis, from cultural point of view, of the predicament of woman protagonist in immigration presented in the

novel *Come Rain* by Jai Nimbkar. It presents the problems of cross-cultural immigrated American woman. It is to be done with an aim of acquainting the young Western generation, particularly American women, with the problems emerging due to cross-cultural Asian marriages and Eastward migration.

The women writers, particularly, face many problems themselves and present these issues through their writings. But when they present those in their writings that must be appearing universal. One must agree to Anita Desai, who points out, *"The writer's interests should be purely literary, his one concern his writing. If he does it well, the book will belong neither to India nor to England but to everywhere in the world where books are read, appreciated and valued. He should be able to say with Emily Dickinson: 'My country is Truth; it is a free democracy.'"* (Desai 68) The most important feature of it is stricken realism. The last few decades have witnessed a remarkable change in the perspective of women in fiction mainly because of numerous female writers who follow their own unique way. One must agree with R.K. Mishra, who evaluates the contribution of women writers as, *"As the women novelists of India were moved emotionally and psychologically by the plight of the depressed women, they felt impelled to externalize their repressed psychic mind and highlight their issues in the novels with a view to arousing public consciousness in favour of women's emancipation and amelioration of their condition in the prevailing social situation."* (Mishra 163) The case of the immigrant women is more pronounced and prominent as they carry the burden of cultural values of their native land with them to their new country, thus making it more difficult and problematic for them to adjust.

Especially diasporic identity composed of various factors and sub-factors becomes the core issue in any exploration. Jasbir Jain in her article focuses on the concerns for identity building as, *"Identity is the external layer related to colour, race, class, social position, economic status, nationality and a whole lot of other outward indicators, while 'self' is the deeper layer, the 'core' self, constituted through cognitive process, reflection, memory (or in some cases forgetting), education media, exploration and exposure."* (Jain 77) The women writers of Diaspora have the real strength of the modern literary imagination in the evocation of the individual's predicament in the context of alienation, immigration, expatriation, exile and the quest for identity.

The cultural conflict is an important issue of the Jai Nimbkar's literature. A person leaves the homeland carrying with him the deep rooted cultural habits, which are never guaranteed to suit to the atmosphere in the adopted land. The cultural conflict begins first in the mind which is always trying to cope with the original and situational cultural pulls, and this is strengthened by the actual experiences with society of the host land.

There is a need to realize the significance of the cultural encounter which takes place in diasporic writing, the bicultural pulls and the creation of a new culture which finally emerges. It is equally important to understand the dynamics of reception at both the ends for reception is also rooted in cultural contexts. (Jasbir Jain 15)

Jai Nimbkar's novel *Come Rain* is story of an American woman who marries an Indian scientist and comes with him to India. Ann Palmer is an educated American young woman who wants to have something different in her life than the ordinary American women. She feels infatuated with an American man named Jack, but realizes that there's nothing charming and extraordinary in the life with him. Thus, after break-up with him, she imagines her dreams true with an Indian young scientist named Ravi Gogte, who is pursuing his research degree in America. Ann represents the American culture. Her struggle in India is a kind of conflict between two cultures. She is an 'independent modern women' in its true sense. She has lost her father and her mother's domination in the family gives her lessons of the female dominance and freedom. She is free and courageous enough to decide her life partner. She goes

against her parents' will and marries an Indian. The freedom in decision making, living and doing what one likes, rejecting dominance, self dependence, liberal attitudes, rebel against injustice, practical approach to life and so on are the principles of American culture which she carried with her to India. These principles do not suit in the Indian culture. So there is conflict between the American culture and Indian culture.

In the beginning, Ann faces many difficulties. She suffers due to the tension between two different socio-cultural environments, the feeling of nostalgia and rootlessness. It makes her angry and rebellious, but she knows well that sudden rebel would throw her out of the family and even out of India. In the very beginning we come across the Husband and wife complex as Ravi asks Ann: "Ann, you are not going to act the neglected wife because I spent a few hours with my family, are you?" (1) Ann has always expected something exciting in her life and out of that quest only she has married Ravi and come to India. Ann is not disappointed. Lying on the unfamiliar hard bed under a rough heavy blanket, she tells herself that she is finally here in India. But she feels nothing, neither elation nor disappointment. Her feelings of excitement are presented in the following lines: "On the contrary she felt rising within her the excitement of being in a strange land, where everything waited to be explored and assimilated." (4) She has changed her attitude and thinks that if she is looking at something familiar, she is more likely to be affected by the depressing aspects than charmed by the novelty of it. All the migrated people carry their cultural practices with them to the adopted land. Similarly, Ann too carries her cultural beliefs with her to Indian. When she finds the two beds attached to each other in her bedroom, she says; "Twin beds along opposite walls are not conducive to spontaneity in the conjugal relationship." (4) Indian culture is basically patriarchal culture. When Ann first sees Ravi's father, she come to reveal the dominance and control of him over the entire happenings. His first impression on Ann is as follows: "He was an imposing looking man, tall and heavy, with a long straight nose, prominent, slightly protruding eyes and skin as dark as mahogany but without its sheen. His voice was that of a man used to command and his manner that of one used to arranging and directing the lives of those around him. He carried his authority easily and its exercise was casual and relaxed, as though he did not expect opposition." (5) Ravi's mother and Ann's mother-in-law, Mrs. Gogte's attitude to look at her foreigner daughter-in-law as an enemy is very keenly observed by Ann: "The day before she had watched with curiosity this woman who, despite her shortness and plumpness, managed to look patrician. Ann had felt the cold scrutiny of those gray-green eyes, the complete absence of welcoming warmth, and recognized an enemy." (5-6)

Belonging to a different culture and being neglected and put out of conversation, Ann feels like an outsider and her feelings are very accurately stated in the following lines: "She had found that a lot of people thought it unnecessary to talk to her. To them she was not a person to be explored, understood, responded to, but only an adjunct to Ravi, to be looked at, sized up and then relegated to the background. She was particularly irritated when someone talked to Ravi about her as though she was not there at all, the way you might discuss a small child in its presence." (12) Ann wants to take Marathi language tuitions from a private tutor and acquire it to participate fully in the native Indian culture. She wants to learn systematically, better and faster that way. But her mother-in-law is not happy with it as it costs so much to bear the expenses. She thinks that it is wastage of money. Ann demands to be independent by finding Ravi a job himself and not depend on his father. When Ravi asks her to find a job herself, she reveals her purpose behind having Marathi tuitions. She says: "Oh I intend to. That's one of the reasons I am learning Marathi. Don't think it's my intention to live off your earnings." (24) She is forced to stop very expensive lessons but she continues them by her own money. At initial stages she adjusts without crying for her helplessness, but at the next stage she succeeds in

separating her husband from his family. It is not mere victory of daughter-in-law over mother-in-law, but a rebel and victory against the Indian Mother-in-law dominance system. In this not only Ann wins but also her modern American civilization achieves victory over the great Indian tradition of mother worship. Ravi angrily suggests Ann to leave her American ideas and try to adjust to the Indian cultural milieu. He advises: "You had better get rid of some of your American ideas if you want to live happily in this country." (24) There is very little concern for individual's privacy in the Indian culture. Ann observes the cultural difference as: "Where she came from, it was understood that if a door was closed you shouldn't go in without knocking. Here people apparently felt that a closed door was an accidental circumstance, especially if it was not bolted." (26-27) In American culture a child once outgrows the childhood attachment and dependence, he/she is anxious to get away from mother's suffocating possessiveness. The children arrange their own marriage themselves and their parents have to accept it, because the children won't listen to them if they say no. On the other hand in India parents don't arrange children's marriages.

The cultural clash between Indian and American is inevitable in Ann's life. The gestures which in America have seemed natural and endearing, here the same seemed childish. Ravi feels that especially in front of servants Ann should behave in a more decorous fashion. While sympathizing with maid servant Geetabai, who lives in one room with the children, her mother-in-law and her husband who occasionally gets drunk and beats her, when Ann speaks freely with her, Mrs. Gogte criticizes; "His mother had commented, she has nothing to say to us, but she seems to have a lot to say to Geetabai. These Americans go overboard with their ideas of equality. I don't mean you have to treat servants as though they were dirt under your feet. But fraternizing with them is never a good idea. They will take advantage of you every time." (28) The real cause of dislike for Ann is her belonging not their caste and religion. When Ann tries to probe in the details, Ravi explains her: "Ours is a very rigid society in which parents traditionally arrange their children's marriages. Naturally a very traditional woman like my mother feels hurt because I didn't even consult her about my marriage. And then the fact that I married a girl who doesn't belong to our caste or religion or race compounds the insult." (33) In Ravi's family only Ravi's father wishes to discuss the topic with Ann. He is happy because of her interest and takes her round his factories, but the others communicate with her only when absolutely necessary, and then in the minimum possible words. She thinks it strange that they have so little curiosity about her life before marriage, her country, her family. Even her brother-in-law Mahesh feels hesitated when Ann asks him to take her to his farms. Being a typical Indian mother, Mrs. Gogte predicates the possibility of losing her son to her foreigner daughter-in-law. She is very confident that in all ways Ann will fail to adapt to the Indian culture. She expresses her feelings to Ravi: "It is not that I am against it. I think only in terms of your happiness, and I know that in the long run such marriage can't be happy. An American girl can never adjust to our way of life. She will take you away from your people." (45)

The actual purpose of Ann's coming to India is that she wanted to live for a while in a society which is very different from the American, because she thinks that living in a country like U. S., she will get lulled into believing that there's only one way of life, and that's the American way. She wants to get out of that rut, to find out what makes other people tick, what their motivations are. But Ann's attempts while adapting to the Indian culture lead Usha to think that in the Indian get-up Ann is the usual Indian-cultural-stuck American who thinks that Indian culture is contained in gorgeous saris and quaint rituals. Ann is happy to know Usha's exploring beyond the first impression, because nobody else other than Ravi in the family wish to give her the time of day. Usha explains the cultural difference to Ann. According to Usha, in the Indian culture looks means colour and without a fair skin beauty of features counts for nothing. Usha, an Indian character, is a well-educated young woman. She is master

in English Literature and is researching in the same subject. She is widow of Arvind Kanetkar and living with her daughter Rasika. She seems to be inspired by the English Literature, which made her courageous, independent and intellectual. She is modern, educated, civilized and emancipated woman in the Western sense. She wishes to marry Arun and courageously accepts the tolerance of the separation from her own daughter Rasika. This is a type of Western cultural impact on the orthodox India where widow-marriage is not socially acceptable. Even the great love of mother for her daughter is defeated by the Western cultural impact.

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