

CHAPTER - IV

THE OTHER THEMES

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Jai Nimbkar's short stories in *The Lotus Leaves and Other Stories* are also written with a purpose. The life selected by her in these stories is semi-urban life in the Western Maharashtra. As a short story writer she has great sympathy for the poor and helpless low-middle class and middle class protagonists. She tries to reciprocate the same sympathy in readers. She discusses in her stories most of the post-colonial problems in Maharashtrian middle-class life in general and middle-class women's life in particular.

Some of the problems are the contemporary problems at the same time they are also universal problems of the middle-class.

Vilas Salunkhe observes,

“Jai Nimbkar has written about a variety of themes and problems concerning the Indian woman particularly in the socio-economic context of the post Independence India”¹

1. The Theme of Political Control :

After the Independence, India adopted democracy. The political leaders got immense importance in the public life from Delhi to galli. There is no field unleft without the interference of the political leaders. Most of them became the chairmen of the private management schools. They dominated almost all the public departments including the police department. They cultivated many unhealthy practices in these public departments. In fact, they are not supposed to do so. But they have been doing it since long. This has adverse effects on the public life. Such a dominance victimise the poor but deserving helpless middle class people who crave for justice and redressal of their grievances. The public life in the rural and semi-urban Maharashtra is more affected by such political control of many public departments.

Jai Nimbkar portrays the depressing reality of the political control of educational institutions and the police department in her two short stories. In *The Death of a Hero*. Mr.Tagde, a sincere and a good teacher is the victim of political control of the academic world. In *Unto Each Man His Due* Mrs. Raut, a poor working class woman has become a victim of political interference in the police

investigation of her lost husband. These two viz. Mr. Tagde and Mrs. Raut suffer in their personal lives due to the political control of the public departments.

The Death of a Hero is the seventh story in the collection occurring on page 47. The story narrates the futile struggle of Mr. Tagde, a sincere and determined teacher, for expulsion of a nuisance student, Veerendra More from his private school. Ramrao More, the political leader of the town is the chairman of the school and he totally controls the management of the school as well as the entire public life in the town. Veerendra is Ramrao's nephew.

The story concentrates on the political control over the schools run by private managements in the rural and semi-urban areas of Maharashtra. The school in which Mr. Tagde has been working for the last fifteen years is run by a private management headed by Ramrao More as the chairman. Mr. Tagde is a sincere and service minded good teacher. Mr. Deshpande, the Principal has very good opinion of Tagde as :

“A solid teacher , a mature and rational man, suitably diplomatic in his dealings with those in authority, a good man to work with.”²

Mr. Tagde has been annoyed by the continuous misconduct of a student named Veerendra More. On the event of the recent mischief by Veerendra, he has written a report against Veerendra demanding his expulsion from the school. Principal Deshpande is not free from the control of the Chairman, He tries his best to convince Mr.Tagde in this or that way to withdraw the report as he thinks Veerendra has not done anything serious and harmful. The Principal is not ready to forward the report to the school committee because he thinks it as “Damaging report”.³ Indirectly the Principal tries to pressurise Tagde with his own stand.

But Tagde is determined to submit the report needless of its any repercussions because :

He was sick of doing the bidding of the petty politicians and manoeuvrers who ran the school, and of always being afraid of losing his job if he punished or failed their delinquent children.⁴

The political leaders, their managements and the school administration do not care for the rules and regulations made by the government for the security of teachers. The Government of Maharashtra has passed The Maharashtra Employees of Private schools Act (MEPS Act) 1977 and the rules thereunder viz. MEPS Rules 1981. The private managements of political leaders either violate them or find out loopholes in the rules protecting teachers. They harass and exploit them. Mr. Tagde reflects on this point :

There were rules for the protection of employees of long - standing But unfortunately private schools had a way of getting around such rules.⁵

Principal Deshpande sends Thakar to pressurize further Tagde. Thakar convinces him saying :

You know and I know that your report is not going to serve that purpose, because of circumstances you know very well. Then why commit suicide needlessly ? ⁶

In reply Tagde expresses the cause of his determination :

I think the whole system is rotten, by which politicians control educational institutions somebody has to strike out against it. ⁷

Next Vishupant Joshi, a brahmin bagaitdar and a politician comes to Mr. Tagde to settle the issue. Mr. Tagade questions him :

Why should a father's money and political power protect his child from punishment which he richly deserves ? ⁸

Mr. Joshi ultimately threatens Tagde when he doesn't agree. He says :

“You are aware that the school committee has powers to stop your pension ?”⁹

In spite of such pressures Mr. Tagde is firm in his decision and there is a least chance of the withdrawal of his report.

The climax of the situation is that Veerendra and his friends attack Tagde and beat him with sticks, stones and fists. This incident has frightened Mrs. Tagde. She worries that “she will be ‘a helpless’ widow for nothing”.¹⁰

Nobody visits Mr. Tagde after he is wounded due to Ramarao More's pressure on everybody in the town. Nobody wants Ramarao More's displeasure.

The turning point in the situation is Veerendra's father is contesting the ensuing election. They fear the recent incident of Tagade's beating will be adverse publicity for the election. So Thakar comes with a compromise plan of immediate withdrawal of Tagde's report and instead of expulsion Veerendra will be sent in June to another boarding school in Solapur. The plan has

been accepted by Tagde out of frustration but at least with a hope of his three more years service and retirement benefits.

This is the dismal end of Tagde's aim of improving the school and teaching a lesson to mischievous sons of the political leaders heading the school and who badly control the school and the social life in the town.

Mr. Tagde's failure, according to Jai Nimbkar, is the victimization of a devoted and disciplined teacher who craves for the better academic life in schools. Indirectly she suggests that the better academic atmosphere in the private management school will prevail provided the schools are free from the clutches of the political leaders.

Naturally, Mr. Tagde represents a poor helpless good teacher struggling in vain against the political control on the schools. Ramarao More represents the political leaders heading the private schools in Maharashtra. While Mr. Deshpande represents a feeble and yielding principal of the school.

With a few exceptions of government schools, almost all schools in Maharashtra are run by private managements headed by political leaders. Naturally, Mr. Tagade's struggle against Ramrao and the management is a universal story of

political control of private schools in Maharashtra and may be of such schools in other states in India.

Unto Each Man His Due is the eighth story in *The Lotus Leaves and Other Stories* appearing on page 56. It narrates the tale of woe of a helpless poor working class woman who desires to report the sudden loss of her husband in the Pimpalgaon police station. But she does not know her husband is killed in a jeep accident. The police treat her indifferently. However, Mr. Patanakar, the newspaper reporter to *Maharashtra Vritta*, collects with hard work the information of the death of her husband in a jeep accident done by Sambhajirao Kadam, the political leader of Pimpalgaon.

After some days he comes to identify that Sambhajirao Kadam did the jeep accident from the information got from Inamdar, one of the local Congress leaders.

This is the story of an old woman who does not get justice in her husband's accident case due to political dominance. The story deals with a common problem. What

has happened in this story may happen in any other place. But the tragedy is that nobody raises a voice against this.

An old woman goes to report to the Pimpalgaon police station about her missing husband. But she is not given proper attention by the head constable, Pawar. He takes it very lightly. He asks her :

“What do you want ?” he asked. “I want to report something.” “What do you want to report ?” Well, get on with grandmother”. “It’s about my husband”. “What about your husband ? Be quick about it. Do you want to waste the whole day ?” “How can I be quick about it if you won’t let me speak? I don’t want to waste the whole day. I am a working woman. Not a do-nothing like you.” All right, all right. Get on with it. These old people love to talk.”¹¹

Her husband has gone to the weekly bazaar in the city and does not return. He is a night blind. Patanakar, the reporter taking sympathy with her decides to search for Sitaram Raut, her husband. Shirke, a local bum informs Patanakar about the death of an old man in a jeep accident near the canal. Patanakar investigates about it in the government hospital as well as in private hospitals.

Sambhajirao Kadam is a typical post-independent congress leader. He is described as :

Sambhajirao Kadam,
millionaire landowner, onetime
leader of the terrorist
movement in the pre-
independence days, now a
respectable aspirant to political
power, was no stranger to
newspapermen. He had high
hopes of winning a seat in the
Maharashtra Assembly from
the Wade constituency on a
Congress Ticket.¹²

The editor of *Maharashtra Vritta* is aware of Sambhajirao's political dominance. He says : "He

(Sambhajirao) is a pretty influential man”.¹³ The editor is interested in his case for not availing Sambhajirao a ticket for election. However, he will not write a news against him without sufficient proof from Patanakar.

Patanakar comes to know that Head constable Pawar also knows that accident. But he refuses to tell its details to Patanakar.

Inamdar ascertains the description of the jeep driver that suits to Shinde, the farm Supervisor of Sambhajirao. Patanakar goes to Sambhajirao’s farm to see Shinde all alone.

Patanakar loses hopes of the search. But after three days Shinde comes at midnight with an extreme fear to inform him about the accident. Shinde has been locked and starved by Sambhajirao as Patanakar had visited the farm. Sambhajirao has harassed him and has threatened Shinde. “He told me it was just a taste of what I was going to get if I blabbed to the police”.¹⁴ Sambhajirao has whipped him so much that Shinde’s back “looked like an unevenly cut slab of raw meat”.¹⁵ Shinde is not prepared to go next morning to the police station to give his statement about the accident. He is afraid. He says, “I can’t do that he will kill me”.¹⁶

Shinde does not believe in the temporary police protection.

He is afraid of his future. He says :

“The police will protect me
as long as they need me, what
will happen after that ?”¹⁷

Shinde knows the political dominance of Sambhajirao. He says :

“He won’t stay behind bars
forever I don’t even think he
will be put behind bars”.¹⁸

Shinde worries about his own life, his wife and children at home in Karnatak. He says, “For the sake of a dead man do you want me to risk my life ?”¹⁹

Shinde has decided to go away to his far off place in Karnatak to escape from Sambhajirao’s clutches. He says,

“You think the law is
everything . But a man like
Sambhajirao can back the
law. And he will ”.²⁰

Shinde offers two hundred rupees to Patanakar as a help to Sitaram Raut’s wife. He repents and goes out.

In the end of the story the writer suggests that Patanakar's investigation of the accident is futile in spite of the full knowledge of the accident. He is unable to print the news of the accident in *Maharashtra Vritta* with a proof as his editor has expected. Sambhajirao's hushes up his crime and the accidental death case of Sitaram Raut. On the contrary, the story ends with the political success of Sambhajirao, The writer ends the story with a statement.

“I almost forgot to mention it. Sambhajirao got his nomination. Eventually he was elected”.²¹

Patanakar, Mrs.Raut and Mr. Shinde are helpless before the political dominance of Sambhajirao.

2. **The Theme of Motherly Sensibility:**

The role of a mother in woman's life is very respectful and sacred one. The motherhood and the motherly sensibility are the greatest divine gifts to a woman. Indians respect, therefore, the role of a mother in woman's life only next to God. There is a traditional saying as 'Matru Devo Bhav' which means the mother is God.

Indian mothers are known for their fine sensibility towards their sons. They with all their minds and hard work seek the well being and comforts of their children.

Jai Nimbkar has presented the rare sensibilities of two mothers in this collection. In *The Mother*, the writer shows a poor Indian mother trying her best to save her sick child in odd situation. However, she fails. In the next story *In Memoriam*, another mother is trying to keep the memory of her dead son alive through the performance of his death anniversary.

The instances of these two mothers definitely represent the unique but conventional Indian women's motherly sensibility.

The Mother is the ninth story in the collection appearing on page 67. It narrates the tragic story of a poor middle-class woman who is unable to provide medical facility to her baby due to poverty which is suffering from high fever and it dies.

This is a representative story. It has universal appeal. What happens in this story may happen in any rural Indian woman's life. The woman has anxiety about her small baby's fever while she does her domestic duties. She puts a wet cloth on the child's forehead :

For a few moments she hovered near the crib as though trying to think of something to do. Then she damped a piece of cloth folded it and put it on the forehead.²²

She is very happy to feed the child with her breast. The other child which is not ill begins to suck her breast. She is angry with the boy but is happy when the little baby sucks.

The boy started sucking on her breasts really hard. "Four years old. You ought to be ashamed of yourself you brat". She muttered viciously when his teeth hurt her. Then her face relaxed abruptly as her breasts felt relieved of the milk the baby had not been able to drink for two days.²³

Mothers in India show the same love to all their children. She worries about her ill child's health. As a

mother she tries her best to provide medical treatment to the suffering child. It is seen when her husband says that Dr. Monay is costly. She questions :

You don't want to
let her die do you ? ²⁴

The mother always worries about the sick child. When her husband seems to be passive she asks him whether he takes the child to the doctor or gives her money. She says after he completes meals.

Her husband takes the child to the government doctor and he is told that there is something wrong with the child's chest. But her husband is unable to provide her medical facility in private dispensary as it is very costly. The woman asks her husband to go to his employer for some money for the child's treatment. When he does not go, she herself goes to his employer and requests his wife to give her twenty rupees for the sick baby.

She is beaten up by her husband for going to his master's house without telling him. She tolerates his beatings for the sake of a child. She defends herself saying,

“My baby is dying” ²⁵

Though her husband has beaten her for going to his employer's house, her motherly love does not allow her to keep quiet. She again goes to his employer's house when her child's fever has increased. She begins to weep before the employer's wife showing the bruises :

“Bai, you are also a mother”, you can't turn me away. The child is dying Bai”²⁶

At her repeated requests, she is given twenty rupees. She happily takes the money and dreams of taking the child to Dr. Monay and get it done better. She takes the child to the doctor. But all is in vain. The child dies on the way. She begins to weep with madness for the dead child,

She clutches the still warm body to herself and began to cry with jagged dry sobs.²⁷

She has planed for better health of her sick child, but the baby dies. Man supposes and God disposes. The story narrates beautifully the motherly sensibility of the woman.

The sick child cannot create the same sensibility in the father. After all the mother is mother.

In Memoriam is the tenth and the last story in this collection, appearing on page 74. This story narrates the motherly sensibility of a woman performing the death anniversary rites of her son Girish against the indifference of her living son Shri to the performance. The conflict is between the living son's desire to avoid the death anniversary for his picnic pleasure and the mother's desire to avoid the picnic by the living son for the sake of the rites. The conflict effectively presents the motherly sensibility of the woman for the dead son.

Shri is interested in his own life and the present pleasures. In spite of his love for dead brother Girish, he does not want to spoil his picnic pleasure on account of brother's death anniversary. The impact of traditional rites on mother sensibility is the theme of the story.

This traditional mother wants to perform the rites of the death anniversary of her son named Girish who died in a truck accident six years ago. The living son does not understand mother's intention. So there is a conflict of ideas. But unless the death anniversary rites are performed the mother is not content.

The woman has attached more importance to the death anniversary of her son. She thinks it a holy day and one can notice it by her face.

Mother was naturally in
one of her “holy” moods,
he could tell by her
pious face²⁸

The mother is shocked to hear Shri wants to go to a picnic to Khandala on this day. She says that he should not go anywhere, because people come to the house and they have a Kirtan that evening. It does not look nice if he goes out of the house :

You can't go on a
picnic , There will be
people coming later and
in the evening we
have a Kirtan²⁹

Women in India shows deep love for their dead sons and feel their rooms as if a temple. The mother has not allowed any one to use Girish's room or his belongings. She has kept the things as they were. Girish's room is open

only on his death anniversary. On all other days it is closed.

Shri observes :

Since he died, mother had refused to let anyone use his room. She had tried to keep it almost exactly the way Girish had left it, a sort of temple to him.³⁰

Shri knows, she (The mother) cleaned the room and kept it closed.

Shri declares that he is going to picnic. The mother feels it. She is very sensitive on the point of Shri's picnic on Girish's death anniversary. She starts weeping. She calls Shri thoughtless which he denies. Shri wants to live his own life as he likes. She questions him can he not prevent him from living his own life on one day i.e. on Girish's death anniversary ? or has he forgotten Girish ?

“But does anyone prevent you from living your own life ? It's just one day Shri One day in a year. How can you

be so petty ? How can
you grudge him this one
day? Is that too much to
give for your dead
brother ? Have you
forgotten him already”³¹

Shri gives arrogant answer to her and goes out to
picnic. The mother sobs and sobs :

“Mother sobbed loudly.
Her face crumpled and
dissolved”³²

To sum up, in this chapter the theme of political
control and the theme of motherly sensibility are discussed.

CHAPTER - IV

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