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Original Article

Feminisim in the Novel of Ruth Prawer Jabvala's Get Ready for Battle.

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Abstract *Ruth Prawer Jhabvala writes about the satirical situations that find in the urban middle class Indian life, mainly in whole Hindu families, as also about the influence of East West encounter in India. It is also true that R.P. Jhabvala cannot be measured an 'insider': nevertheless, it is because of her long stay in India that she has to be considered as a writer who has seen and written about this country from the inside. In her novels, the women characters feel that they grow smaller everyday stuck in a myth of the role of wife and mother.*

The present research paper analyses Jhabvala's novel Get Ready for Battle (1962) from the feminist point of view. Mrs. Sarala Devi is the wife of Gulzari Lal, a rich Punjabi businessman. She boldly raises her voice against male dominance and manipulation of women by men. In the course of this fight she opposes openly the dishonest ways of her husband and her own brother. She opposes her husband's try to buy the land of Bundi Busti and evict the inhabitants for his own economic gain. She lashes out at her brother Brij Mohan who leads immoral life and keeps relation with housemaids. Jhabvala advocates for freedom for women. It is also seen in the case of Sumi, a young marriageable girl of the novel

Jhabvala as a major woman novelist is less concerned with personality delineation of her women characters.This paper attempts to show how her some of her female characters don't go against tradition without any firm conviction

Keywords*: Feminisim Tradition, Insider-Outsider, modernity, matrimony, Mutiny, Sati Savitri Image Intense encounter*

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Introduction

Ruth Prawer Jhabvala is an eminent woman novelist, story writer and script writer for films. She has a long and distinguished writing career. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar aptly comments on the creative genius of Jhabvala: "It is, however, only after the Second World War that women novelists of quality have begun enriching Indian fiction in English. Of these writers, Kamala Markandaya and Ruth Prawer Jhabvala are unquestionably the most outstanding." (Iyengar 438) Booker Prize winning novelist and two times Academy Award winning screen writer, Jhabvala was born on 7th May 1927 in a comfortable middle-class German-Jewish family in Germany. She came to England in 1939 when she was twelve and took an M.A. degree at the London University. She married Cyrus H. Jhabvala, an Indian Parsi architect in 1951 and settled in Delhi and lived there with her family till 1975. She settled in New York, USA in 1975. In 1986 she took American citizenship. Khushwant Singh rightly calls her "the adopted daughter of India" (Shahane 23). Her prominent novels are – *To Whom She Will* (1955), *The Nature of Passion* (1956), *The Householder* (1960*), Get Ready for Battle* (1962), *Esmond in India* (1958), A *Backward Place* (1965), *A New Dominion* (1973), *Heat and Dust* (1975), *In Search of Love and Beauty* (1983), and *Three Continents* (1987). *Heat and Dust* won Booker's Prize for fiction in 1975.

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She studies female problems and states her concern and sympathy for the female folk. Ruth Prawer Jhabvala has a feminine contemporary urban responsiveness. With her power of close observation, she presents her experiences with educated urban middle class of Delhi in the post-independence India. Like Jane Austen, she presents microscopic studies of a orthodox India. She has close observation of very limited class of educated middle class Indians in and around Delhi. It is often satirical while presenting the Indian family life and struggle of the urban middle class to adapt to new social mobility. She also depicts marital discord in Indian society, whose reasons lie in the rigidness of the male behaviour. M. A. Waheed aptly says: "Marital dissonance is definitely a reality, a painful disturbing fact of conjugal life, but its causes are rooted in the rigidity of male behaviour and consequently in seemingly abnormal relations of women" (Waheed 176). As a feminist, she advocates for women's freedom and equality. She has experienced that in this patriarchal society women are given secondary treatment. They have to follow the dictates of their fathers and husbands. Her women characters raise voice against male domination. Jhabvala's feminist concern is seen in her novel Get Ready for Battle, and it makes us apply the term feminism in broad sense to this work.

Jhabvala not only presents the 'Sati-Savitri' image of Indian woman, she also presents woman who wants to change the age-old conventions While portraying women in Indian society. This is evident in her Get Ready for Battle. In this novel, Sarla Devi is the wife of Gulzari Lal, a rich Punjabi businessman. She comes into direct conflict with her husband who wants to buy land at Bundi Busti for his economic gains. Gulzari Lal also leads an immoral life and lives with his mistress, Kusum, a widow of an army officer, Major Mehra. Kusum has two daughters already married off and has grandchildren as well. Similarly, Gulzari Lal has a son Bishnu and a granddaughter Pritti. Sarla Devi is a social worker, an idealist and Gandhian in temperament. She cannot abide by the immoral pursuits of her husband. She has been living a lone life for ten years in her brother, Brij Mohan's house, devoting her time and energy in serving the poor. She is not afraid of divorce if Gulzari Lal intends to do so. Even Gulzari Lal contemplates to divorce her so that he can live with his mistress, Kusum, freely and legitimatize his relation with her. When he proposes to start legal process for divorce, she calmly tells Gulzari Lal that she will sign all papers leading to divorce: 'If you like, she said meekly. 'I am ready to sign anything you want.' (39)
She declares her aim while talking to Mrs. Bhatnager and Mrs. Das: "People of Bundi Busti are my duty and responsibility and I have never yet shirked my duty and responsibility." (128) Mrs. Bhatnagar is a widow of a rich industrialist and President of the All-India Society for Bringing Hygiene to the Depressed Classes. She also wishes that the slum dwellers of Bundi Busti to be shifted to a place miles away from the present site. Sarla Devi argues that after eviction the poor people will have to walk ten miles for work and come back every day. Fact is that the rich people will make fortune out of eviction of the slums. Even Kusum has sympathy for the slum dwellers. She reveals her feelings in these words: "There is nothing worse than to make your profit out of the suffering of the poor people. When I hear of such behaviour, I ask myself how is it possible for man's heart to be so full of greed that he has no feelings for others?" (128)

As a social worker, Sarla Devi has to bear a lot of hardships. She lives a very simple life in her brother's house. She does her all household works. Her only concern is the poor and the helpless. She walks miles on footpath all day long; passes her time among slum-dwellers trying to solve their problems and sharing their good and bad days. She does not care the sarcastic comments and criticism accorded to her by the rich. Even her own people such as Brij Mohan, her brother, Bishnu, her son and Mala, her daughter-in-law have no favour for her. Often her brother Brij Mohan becomes angry to see her devotion for the poor and the destitute. Certainly, her boldness, independent thinking and benevolent nature are well appreciated by all. Kusum reveals her appreciation for Sarla Devi: "I have heard how independent she is, what a fine free spirit! I admire her so much and often I think of her and love her also." (93) Brij Mohan calls Sarla Devi a saint

She is a saint! 'Brij Mohan cried.' For herself she wants nothing, only for others, always for others. If someone comes to her and says give me your jewels, give me your clothes, your food, the house you live in, she would give without one thought, she would strip herself of all (91)

Jhabvala expresses her displeasure at the exploitation of women in male dominated society. Brij Mohan, Sarla Devi's brother also leads an indecent, lustful and immoral life. He even abuses his maidservants to satiate his lust. This is the reason why Sarla Devi rebukes him. One morning Brij Mohan throws out Tara, his young maid-servant along with her old woman, alleging that she wants more and more presents and gifts. This act of her brother enrages Sarla Devi. She requests him to allow her to stay again. But her plea has no effect on him. She is very much angry with him at his immoral habits and vices. She does not hesitate to remind his brother of his immoral act. She boldly tells her brother the way he exploits the maidservants:

But what do you want from her? She is ready for all your pleasures. She will sing for you. When you want her, she pours your drinks for you, she serves you. She lies on her back for you..... What more is there you want? (137)

Sarla Devi has deep sympathy with the poor girl/woman like Tara and her old woman. The old woman also accuses Brij Mohan of abusing Tara: "Such a beautiful girl, and see how he has taken her youth and innocence" (143).

Brij Mohan uses women like Tara to satiate his physical desires. He even confesses before Kusum: "I have had to make do with the company of low women…What pleasure could there be for me with such people?" (145) Here the novelist reveals her concern how women are exploited by men in patriarchal society.

In the concluding part of the novel, we find that Sarla Devi's efforts to stop the eviction of the Bundi Busti go waste as the rich people like her husband succeed in their scheme of eviction the same by bribing Ramchander, a leader of the Busti. Ramchander is a person whom she has trusted but he turns his side to the rich for money: All other dwellers of the Busti are persuaded to vacate that place. In spite of this failure, her determination to champion the cause of the poor is least affected. On the contrary, she renews her spirits after

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every failure and with vengeance plunges into a fresh mission to serve the people.

Ruth Prawer Jhabvala expresses her concern with regard to the treatment given to the girls in tradition bound Indian society. Sumi is a young unmarried girl and the sister of Mrs. Shankar. Sumi lives with her sister, though her parents live in Mathura. Mr. Shankar is a middle class man holding a government job in New Delhi. Sumi wishes to lead a life of freedom. She denounces Mala's objection to her free moving with Vishnu, Mala's husband and Gautam in strong words:

Sumi began to pout. She decided that Mala had no right to talk to her in this way and it was time to stand on one's dignity. 'I am not a child.' She said. What is wrong? We are not in purdah, we are free like western women. I can go where I like with my friends. (77)

Conclusions

It is important to note that while on the one hand MS. Jhabvala writes in her novels about the joys and sorrows of urban middle-class undivided Hindu families, and presents in them a picture of cultural conflict, a conflict between tradition and modernity, that plagues most of these families, on the other she describes India as a backward place, a place where the westerners can get no peace and where they have only to suffer and suffer unmitigated because of disease and sexual abuse. However, here is a novelist who gives us a host of individuals, types and caricatures in the form of her female characters who are sometimes caught up in the coils of East-West encounter and sometimes in certain conventions on the name of society. Ms. Jhabvala may claim, as she does, that she is a European writer and that she is not at all an Indian writer, but the truth is that she cannot be looked upon as an outsider. There is absolutely no doubt about the fact that she has experienced and understood Indian culture as per her own point of view. Obviously we cannot overlook her experience in India as the wife of an Indian Parsi Architect. In any case, it is indeed ironic that these female characters have their own dreams and desires but they have to sacrifice them on the name of our tradition and culture. This silent submission of these characters from emancipation's very well executed by R.P.Jhabvala in her novels.

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Conflicts of interest

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