



Social Injustice In Ruth Praver Jhabvala's Get Ready For Battle

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Abstract

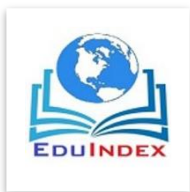
The present paper focuses on the disintegrated marriage depicted by Ruth Praver Jhabvala in her novel Get Ready for Battle. She depicts extreme materialism of rich, corrupt, bourgeoisie of contemporary India. Sarla, the protagonist is determined to fight for her rights. Jhabvala has delineated the theme of marital dissonance in the upper middle class, money minded urban society. She represents the modern woman with powerful and strong ideals to be fulfilled, irrespective of the consequences.

Key words: corrupt, marriage, battle, social life, women self-sacrifice.

Ruth PraverJhabvala (1927-2013) is a novelist of the socio-economic problems, a novelist of the human conditions and predicaments. Her temperament to lead a simple and peaceful life is evident in her novels. She explores the themes of loneliness and isolation and also constantly explores the sensibility of the western expatriates in India. She gives her personal history of displacement. She has been called an outsider-inside from the European point of view as well as an inside-outside from the Indian artistic view point. She is an alien insider. Born of Polish parents in Germany, educated in England, and married to an Indian, she has lived in India for a long time and goes back to New York. Her personal experiences of diverse cultures and social values are reflected in her novels one by one.

In Indian fiction in English, women are portrayed as silent-sufferers. They are presented as the upholder of Indian culture. They are expected to play various roles as mother, wife, daughter, sister, lady love, and so on. This is mainly due to the prevailing patriarchal society. Indian women took pride in service and self-sacrifice. Prasanna Sree remarks on Indian women as: "The Indian woman she is the one who is torn between tradition and modernity, she is one who is in search of self-identity, she is the one who tries to give shape and content to individual existence in a sexist society" (Sree 12).

First, the significance of the title itself, *Get Ready for Battle* is apparently a quotation has taken from the second chapter of the Bhagavad Gita (Verse 38). Lord Krishna, while explicating the Yoga of knowledge, calls upon Arjuna to shed all his fears, and treating alike



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pleasure and pain, gain and loss, victory and defeat, *Get Ready for Battle* then. In the original scripture the Kshtriya's duty is to engage himself in fight, in Jhabvala's novel it is Sarla Devi's duty to fight against every form of social injustice and oppression of the poor.

Get Ready for Battle is her fifth novel where Ruth Praver Jhabvala pokes gentle and mostly affectionate fun at an urban Indian family. Gulzari Lal is a prosperous property owner and the easy-going and kindly patriarch. He has long been separated from his wife Sarla Devi, but is content with his mistress, the plump, wily and honey-tongued widow Kusum. She would like to marry him, but that would involve a divorce from Sarla Devi which her brother, Brij Mohan, forbids as an insult to his family's honour. So one thread in the novel is how Kusum attempts to secure her heart's desire. Another strand concerns Gulzari Lal's rather ineffectual son Vishnu who works in a desultory way in his father's office and who mixes with the 'modern' younger generation, to the dismay of his very traditional and limited wife Mala, an unhappy and lonely figure. A third strand is about a colony of very poor people living in Bundi Busti, a slum area on the edge of the town, and who face eviction by property speculators: Gulzari Lal and Vishnu, though not wicked or unscrupulous by nature, become drawn in this scheme, while Sarla Devi, who sees herself as a social worker, is working hard to save them from eviction. She and another character in the book, Vishnu's friend Gautam, represent the ascetic side of Indian life, critical of what materialism is doing to modern India. There is also a mystical side to Sarla Devi. All these characters are well and richly drawn (Kusum in particular); they frequently argue, but as nearly frequently make up afterwards: it's sometimes a little hard to keep up with the complications of their relationships. And the Indian settings, indoors and out of doors, are of course very well observed.

Mrs. Bhatnagar is a little outdated in the world of high class and fashionable society of Delhi because she belongs to the older generation. Banubai, the spiritual Indian 'mother' in the novel hates the Swami, and labels him 'dangerous'. Viewed ironically by Jhabvala for the sexuality, she generates under the guise of spirituality as Asha's spiritual counsellor in Benaras, with a weakness for 'nice-looking boys' as much as for sweets, she is able to command devotion from neither Asha, nor Lee from Gopi consistently.

Women characters are portrayed as silent-sufferers in "Indian fiction in English". They are presented as the upholder of an Indian culture. They are expected to play in various roles as mother, wife, daughter, sister, lady love, prostitute and so on. This is mainly due to the prevailing patriarchal society. Indian women took pride in service and self-sacrifice. They followed the images of Sita, Anasuya, Kantari and so on. However, Indian woman's freedom from all the shackles of illiteracy, subjugation, and ignorance heralded the dawn of independence for them. The western education served as the transitional phase, when the Indian woman had to face the struggles between tradition and modernity. In a patriarchal world, a woman is never regarded as an autonomous being. She has been always assigned to a subordinate and relative position. Simone De Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* holds:



Man can think of himself without woman. She cannot think of herself without man. And she is simply what man decrees. She appears essentially to the male as a sexual being. For him she is sex absolute sex, no less. She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not with reference to man and not he with reference to her, she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential (Beauvoir, 534).

Woman represents only the negative as is defined by limiting criteria without reciprocity. Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* admits: "One is not born but rather becomes a woman it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature described as feminine" (Beauvoir 267). Considering women as passive and voiceless beings, Beauvoir also says:

A woman can never be angry. She can only be neurotic, hysterical, frustrated. There is no room for despair, either. There is only order and routine, today Marriage subjugates and enslaves woman and it leads her to aimless days indefinitely repeated life that slips away gently towards death without questioning its purpose. (Beauvoir, 500)

Women's narratives in India revolve around the institution of marriage which is the most glorified and sacrosanct pattern of existence socially, religiously and sexually. The virtues of an ideal wife are encoded. Fidelity to her husband, ungrudging service, and enduring hardships for his welfare, ready obedience and sacrifice of her own interests are the essential duties of 'bharya', the wife, towards the 'bharta', the husband. The 'Pativrata' ideal is grounded in Indian psyche and is subtly exploited by man in the dialectics of sexual relations to control woman. In the mythical tales of Savitri-Satyavan, Damayanti-Nala, Sita-Rama, Gandhari, Arundhati and Ahalya, women are seen in the contexts of their husbands as paragons of chastity, faithfulness and devotion.

Every novel has the significance of the title itself, *Get Ready for Battle* is apparently a quotation derived from the second chapter of the Bhagavad Gita (Versa 38). Lord Krishna, while explicating the Yoga of knowledge, calls upon Arjuna to shed all his fears, and treating alike pleasure and pain, gain and loss, victory and defeat, *Get Ready for Battle* then . . . In the original scripture the Kshtriya's duty is to engage himself in fight, in Jhabvala's novel it is Sarla Devi's duty to fight against every form of social injustice and oppression of the poor.

Jhabvala's mode of inducting this quotation into a scene of the meeting between Sarla Devi and her son, Vishnu is rather ambiguous and ineffective. Vishnu has called on his mother who lives apart in a solitary house, and who is estranged from her husband, Guljari Lal. While Guljari Lal's favourite notion about him is that he ought to become a successful man of the family, and the mainstay of a comfortable and happy existence of this domestic entity. However, his materialistic pursuits and value-patterns are diametrically opposed to the values of the spirit that his wife, Sarla Devi, cherishes. And therefore they live apart. Consequently, Guljari Lal develops an intimate relationship with Mrs Kusum Mehra, a



middle aged, though attractive, is the widow of an army officer. Kusum looks after all his comforts, shares his bed as well as his small household problems. She naturally wants this relationship to be sanctified by marriage and Guljari Lal, too, is willing to marry her. But the main problem is the divorce; at first he is unwilling to ask Sarla Devi to agree to this course. Brij Mohan, the irresolute and gay brother of Sarla Davi, is opposed to the idea of divorce. Later, he relents and, in fact, tries to arrange a meeting between Kusum and Sarla Davi to talk things over and agree upon the problem of divorce.

Divorce alone can clear the way for Kusum who is intent on marrying Guljari Lal. Sarla Devi in speaking to Vishnu about divorce shows no rancour or anger against Guljari Lal or even Kusum, Sarla Devi has indeed reached a stage which is far beyond the bounds of worldliness and the shackles of self interest. She is almost a saint who treats pleasures and pains of this world alike, and who is not attached to the ephemeral gains or losses of this earthly paradise of the poor and the downtrodden. She is determined to fight for their rights. In the novel the poor people are to be ejected from their tiny hutments in Bundi Busti, a slum area under a pretentious plan of 'Slum Clearance' or providing them a better environment far away from their place of work, and their land is being acquired by the industrialist. Guljari Lal, the husband of Sarla Devi himself is the prospective buyer of this piece of land. Sarla Devi, who appeals to her son Vishnu to land his hand in alleviating the miseries of the residents of Bundi Busti, Vishnu is irresponsive to her appeal.

Oh, Vishnu, Vishnu, why are you like that? You are my son, you are as beautiful as Krishna and Strong as Arjun. But your conduct is that of a little Merchant's son. (GRB, 146)

This novel portrays the new problems confronting the modern family and the consequent dissonance in the husband and-wife relationship. The clash of attitudes appears to be the cause of the dissonance. Guljari Lal with the scum of traditional ways with them modern views is a strong believer in genuine idealism. For ages, it has been the tradition of Kshatriyas that the women were not permitted to move out except for performing religious ceremonies and for dispensing charity. Jhabvala's characters have a fixed mode of existence in the modernity and the uneasiness in traditional values. The novel has the series of incidents widen and diversify the social picture with the traditional culture and set the characters in different relations.

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