

The theme of marital disintegration in *Get Ready for Battle*

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Abstract: *The paper focuses on the theme of marital disintegration in the life-style of the upper middle-class and money-minded urban society. Through the conflicting ambitions, business intrigues and the personal and emotional entanglements, Jhabvala gently mocks the self-seeking nature of this group of people who are ready for battle with each other and themselves. But beneath this humorous and ironic study of personal conflicts, we catch a glimpse of India's terrifying social problems – and of the deep moral consciousness which may prove her salvation. The sense of misunderstanding and incompatibility has taken a serious turn due to ideological differences between Gulzari Lal and his wife, Sarla Devi. The novel delineates the theme of feminine alienation in male dominated society.*

Key Words: *disintegration, conflicting ambition, intrigue, entanglement, glimpse, salvation, incompatibility, alienation.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Ruth Praver Jhabvala, who spent the major and the most fruitful part of her life in India, has taken a keen interest in Indian life. She deals with various life styles of the Indians in her writings. During her stay in India, she assimilated all the Indian customs, Indian languages, Indian cultures, Indian food habits, Indian joint family system and Indian dresses.

2. DISCUSSION:

Jhabvala's *Get Ready for Battle* (1962) is concerned with Indian social and domestic problems. The novel condemns dishonesty, hypocrisy and exploitation of the poor. In the novel, Jhabvala deals with the theme of marital disintegration in the life-style of the upper middle-class and money-minded urban society. In the novel, Jhabvala has explored the inner life of a Punjabi family which is not only too conscious of its social prestige but, considering the mores of an Indian society, is also disintegrating from within. Here Jhabvala draws a sharp yet compassionate portrait of middle-class family life in contemporary Delhi. Through the conflicting ambitions, business intrigues and the personal and emotional entanglements, she gently mocks the self-seeking nature of this group of people who are ready for battle with each other and themselves. In the novel, all the characters are connected with the broken and disintegrated marriage of a Punjabi businessman Mr. Gulzari Lal. The sense of misunderstanding and incompatibility has taken a serious turn due to ideological differences between Gulzari Lal and his wife, Sarla Devi. Gulzari Lal and Sarla Devi are the husband and wife but both are totally different in personal thinking. One is materialistic and the other is idealistic. Gulzari Lal is a businessman who gives big parties to Government officials. On the other hand, Sarla Devi believes in simplicity and high moral principles. She wants to do anything according to her conscience. These differences have destroyed their marriage life. At last, they fall apart. Sarla Devi leaves her husband and goes to live with her brother, Brij Mohan. Due to her political idealism, her husband rejects her.

Gulzari Lal believes in the symbols of power and authority. While Sarla Devi is engaged in fighting for the rights of the poor people of Bundi Busti against Government and moneyed people like her husband Gulzari Lal and son Vishnu who always concerned with their power-base or money-making. Thus, she accepts her fate and involves herself in the social work and does not battle with the circumstances of her life.

Sarla Devi has left her husband's house with the decision not to go back there again. She becomes a champion of the poor and this separates them. She wishes that her son Vishnu would not follow the footsteps of his father. But Vishnu is more concerned with his father's commercial world than with the cause of the poor. Here Jhabvala deals with the high civilization and its corrupt values which make the life of the poor miserable.

Though Jhabvala highlights the selfish and materialistic people, she is also aware of the miserable lives of the poor and the downtrodden. In Delhi, the municipal authorities wanted to evict the people of Bundi Busti where they have been living for the last fifteen years. Secretly the land was to be handed over to Gulzari Lal on sale. Though Sarla Devi lives separately from Gulzari Lal, she seeks his help and uses his good office-connections and sees to it that the people of Bundi Busti are not evicted. But being a businessman, Gulzari Lal manages all the matters at the Government level and by giving bribe to the labour leader Ramchandran, purchases the land. Thus, Sarla Devi loses her battle against her husband. Yet, she does not leave the battle-field but gets ready for another battle in the red-light area of Delhi. She

is the “symbol and epitome of what Ruth Praver Jhabvala regards as the opposite reaction to Indian greed and callousness [1].

Gulzari Lal is also a morally degraded person. He believes in frankness and wants to enjoy his whole life. He has a mistress, Kusum, a widow of an Army officer. Though she is selfish and hypocritical, she appears charming to him. She spends most of her time at Gulzari Lal’s house. Gulzari Lal does not feel that there is something wrong in having a mistress in his house. After a day at the office:

Gulzari Lal had been used to finding Kusum when he came home in the evenings, and it was hard for him to do without her. For eight years now she had been always there: she would have his bath ready for him, serve him with drinks, massage his legs; and at the same time she entertained him with accounts of all she had been doing during the day . . . She was always lively and entertaining. Now there was only Mala, but she lacked that womanly sparkle he felt he needed after a day at the office [2].

Kusum seeks stability by her second marriage with Gulzari Lal. She wants to bring in divorce between Gulzari Lal and Sarla Devi so that she can marry him. The legal document for divorce is completed on Gulzari Lal’s next visit to Sarla Devi. With the help of Brij Mohan and no objection from Vishnu, finally they succeed in their plan because Sarla Devi unhesitatingly signs the divorce papers. Thus, Sarla Devi becomes ready to surrender her own privilege without any hesitation to Kusum. At this stage it proves true why Brij Mohan compares Sarla Devi with a saint and says: “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 [3].

Sarla Devi’s renunciation is not only because of her husband Gulzari Lal, but her son Vishnu and daughter-in-law Mala who behave with Kusum, the mistress of Gulzari Lal, in such a way that they always want her presence in the house. Vishnu is very much impressed with his father’s materialistic nature. He always dislikes his mother because of her social work.

There is also a hint at the disintegration between Vishnu and Mala. Mala is a nice young woman who is reserved by temperament and yet, is ready to perform the role of the loving wife and an affectionate mother. She is very sensitive and respectful for all. Above all, Vishnu is not much impressed by her because he secretly keeps flirting with Sumi. Vishnu’s westernized friends also annoy Mala, still she remains quiet. She always feels tedious, as she wants to go to Bombay where her parents live. But, Vishnu never gives a little heed to her proposal. She also wants to go with Vishnu at Chandnipat where he is going to start his new business with his friend Joginder Singh. As a result, they often quarrel and at that time Kusum becomes mediator to solve their problems. The battle between Vishnu and Mala is only at superficial level.

Jhabvala discusses different kinds of people. Sarla Devi is rejected by her husband for her social and political idealism. She is always engaged in fighting for the rights of the slum-dwellers of Bundi Busti. On the other hand, her husband Gulzari Lal and son Vishnu are always engaged in increasing their power-base or money. They are materialistic in nature. While Kusum, the mistress of Gulzari Lal wants her stability by marriage with Gulzari Lal. She uses all her powers to bring in divorce between Gulzari Lal and Sarla Devi. Jhabvala’s portrayal of Kusum shows her insight into the psychology of the aging women. Mala, who is an emotional and charming wife of Vishnu, always feels dissatisfaction with her husband. Jhabvala deals with marital disintegration as one of the major themes in the novel.

3. CONCLUSION:

To conclude, Jhabvala through her fictional world wants to throw light on social reality. The novel delineates the theme of feminine alienation in male dominated society. Lourie Sucher has rightly pointed out in the novels of Ruth Jhabvala: “The outrage, the concern with social injustice that will appear later, is for now put aside, as if to acquaint the western audience with the urban middle class and aspects of Indian life that come less readily to mind”.⁴ Through the novel Jhabvala represents the clash between the two sects of society: the materialistic, as represented by Gulzarilal and the humanistic as represented by his wife Sarla Devi. Through the conflicting ambitions, business intrigues and the personal and emotional entanglements, she gently mocks the self-seeking nature of this group of people who are ready for battle with each other and themselves. But beneath this humorous and ironic study of personal conflicts, we catch a glimpse of India’s terrifying social problems – and of the deep moral consciousness which may prove her salvation. *Guardian* observes, ‘One questions whether any western writer has had a keener, cooler understanding of the temperament of urban India.’

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