



A New Woman's Battle to Preserve Her Identity in Ruth Jhabvala's *Get Ready for Battle*

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Abstract: Women writers attempted their hands at the new genre of fiction as early as 1879, though it is not till a later date that they could occupy a position of importance. The theme of modern woman's existential struggle to establish her own identity in order her individuality surfaces quite often in the novels of Indian women novelists of post- independence age as can be seen in the works of Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Anita Desai and Nayantara Sahgal. Women Writing in English in India present the dilemma which modern women are facing nowadays. The women have to suffer due to their self-will and individual ideas. In the novels of Jhabvala, there are girls who have to suffer due to the blind imitation of western culture. Jhabvala presents their modernity with great irony. Through the description of the Indian woman, which Jhabvala gives in her different novels. Jhabvala wants to highlight vivid facets of women's nature. Her women characters try to be modern and refuse to comply with their surrounding because of their fascination for modernity. Here, Jhabvala in her novel *Get Ready for Battle* presents a vast picture of modern Indian society through her female characters. The paper throws light on the new woman who thinks and performs the work according to her own wishes. The modern woman does not believe in traditional convictions but sticks to her own convictions and is ready to sacrifice a few things to preserve her identity.

Index Terms - Existential struggle, blind imitation, western culture, fascination for modernity, traditional convictions, sacrifice, preserve, identity.

Introduction

Traditionally, the Indian woman obeys her husband's wishes. She always follows the footsteps of her husband and never tries to raise her head against her husband's order. She believes in the view that her husband is her God and whatever he orders her; she is to follow him without opposing a bit. Sometimes the husband beats his wife and threatens to drive her away from his house, yet the woman bears everything without speaking a single word and surrenders to his legs and tells him that his order is everything for her. By the end of her life she sticks to a make-believe rule that the woman comes to her husband's house sitting in a palanquin and leaves the house only when she dies. In this way, the life of the traditional Indian woman is totally bound to her husband's order till the end of her life.

In contrast, the new woman thinks and performs the work according to her own wishes. The modern woman does not believe in traditional convictions but sticks to her own convictions and is ready to sacrifice a few things to preserve her identity.

I. DISCUSSION

Jhabvala, in most of her novels, displays a deep understanding of her women characters. Especially, oriental women are adjustable, gentle, accommodative and service-minded. The Indian woman does not bother about her own happiness and comfort. She is totally bound to the happiness of her family. Moreover, Indian women are passive and self-sacrificing. Though, nowadays there are some kinds of changes in the manners of modern Indian women due to the impact of the western culture. In Indian culture, woman acquires a place of respect. Yet, it does not mean that the Indian women are safe and secured in their position. As Romila Thapar points out, “the role, status and position of woman has been far from static, ranging from what is thought to have been a position of considerable authority and freedom to one of equally considerable subservience” [1]. There are various factors, such as sociological, psychological and historical – to decide woman’s fate and place.

In this novel, *Get Ready for Battle*, Jhabvala tries to highlight the modern woman who is ready to sacrifice her house and her husband to preserve her own identity. This modern woman is Sarla Devi, a social reformer, who leaves her millionaire husband only for the sake of the poor people. She believes in simplicity and high moral principles. Having stayed away from her husband, Sarla Devi wants to turn her attention only to social work. Sarla Devi’s husband Gulzari Lal who is a materialist by nature always enjoys his own parties and likes being a host and entertaining them by his expensive drinks and food. Sarla Devi is totally against her husband’s nature. Sarla Devi is totally dissatisfied with her husband. Jhabvala highlights Sarla Devi’s inner frustration to her husband Gulzari Lal as follows:

You have the office, you have your friends, you drive off in your car and do what you like; while I sit here only and wait for the day to be finished [2].

She wants to live by her conscience. Vishnu’s friend Gautam gives his opinion about Gulzari Lal to Vishnu:

He is to me the worst type of man, attached to money and money-making and existing not as a man but only through the things he possesses, like his car, his house, his mistress. Women and gold, as Sri Ramakrishna has said, these are the worst temptations in the life of man, and your father has not only tasted them but has swallowed them whole [3].

Gautam admires Sarla Devi to Vishnu: “How I admire your mother, she has shaken off everything, all the things that due to her station in life had been piled on to her” [4].

All these lead to a clash between the husband and wife. Gulzari Lal, thinking of Sarla Devi’s hundreds of interests away from him, her Swamis and politicians, her refusal ever to be a wife as he thinks and asks her: ‘Did you ever live any other way?’ In her answer, Sarla Devi tells him, “Please don’t start to quarrel with me now. It is all over, and where was your fault and where was my fault, that it is better not to discuss any more” [5]. In this way, Sarla Devi leaves her husband and goes to live with her brother Brij Mohan.

Sarla Devi believes that having stayed away from her husband she can pay her attention completely to the poor and the miserable people. Now her only work is to help the poor people of Bundi Busti. She is engaged in fighting for the rights of the poor people of Bundi Busti against Government and moneyed people.

Jhabvala here throws the light on the character of Sarla Devi who is ready to give up her house and her husband for the sake of the poor people. She also at last, gives divorce to her husband so that he can never come in her way of social work. Sarla Devi for the preservation of her own identity never bothers about her family. Sarla Devi does not like and love her family less but when her husband is totally an anti-thesis to her own personality, she does not mind giving him a free hand, provided she is able to carry out her own humanitarian interests. Thus, when her family, particularly, her husband and his selfish motives come in her way, she gives up that family and fulfills her own wishes. She has to lose her husband, his wealth and property among many other things. She does it with tremendous courage. Here, Sarla Devi follows Gandhian idealism. She does not bother about her husband but she only bothers about social service. She never resists against her husband in the matter of divorce. She easily signs the divorce papers without uttering a single word.

Jhabvala's female characters are more effective than her male characters in the novel. "The women characters Sarla Devi, Kusum, Mala and Sumi all are ready for an ultimate battle for their freedom and preserve their identity. These characters are ready for separation and divorce when these become necessary. Unlike traditional Indian women, they are not meek surrender but are always ready to stick to their own convictions and are ready to sacrifice a few things to preserve their identity" [6].

II. CONCLUSION

In the present novel, Jhabvala interprets a new woman who only cares for her own interest and never surrenders to the wrong expectation of her family members. Though here Sarla Devi's interest is totally for the welfare of society, as a new woman she sticks to her own convictions until the end of the novel and never surrenders to her husband and his materialistic way of life. She is so different from Gulab who accepts the words of husband as the command of God. Sarla Devi has her own independent convictions and she would not surrender to the short cuts.

III. REFERENCES

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