



# GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN THE NOVELS OF RUTH PRAWER JHABVALA

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## Abstract

The post-independence Indian writing in English literature focuses on many different themes and issues like colonialism, imperialism, diaspora, gender discrimination and quest for identity. Gender discrimination is one of the most important themes of English literature. Famous Post-independence women novelists are Kamala Markandaya (1924), Ruth Praver Jhabvala (1927), Nayantara Sahgal (1927), Kamala Das (1994), Anita Desai (1937), Shashi Deshpande (1938), Bharati Mukherjee (1940), Manju Kapur (1948), Shobha De (1948), Arundhati Roy (1961), and so on. These women writers talked about every aspect related to women and society. They have been presenting women as the center of concern in their novels. A woman's search for identity is the main theme in their fiction.

Ruth Praver Jhabvala was a writer of European origins who lived in India and wrote about India. Her migration from one country to another country gave her varied experiences which can be seen in her works. In her novels, she depicts racial discrimination, East-West encounter, the quest for identity, and cultural dominance, etc. She presents women as a victim in a male-dominated society. This paper aims to bring light on gender discrimination in the novels of Ruth Praver Jhabvala.

**Keywords** - Postcolonial literature, Colonialism, Diaspora, Discrimination, Ruth Praver Jhabvala

**Research Paper**

Ruth Praver Jhabvala is one of the most famous women writers of English Literature who is internationally recognized for her masterpiece 'Heat and Dust' published in 1975. Her works portray women's predicament in a male-dominated society and their quest for identity. Ruth Praver Jhabvala was born in 1927 in Germany to Jewish Polish parents. At the age of twelve, she migrated to England and lived there till her marriage. In 1951, after her marriage to Cyrus Jhabvala, an Indian architect she left England for India. In India, she got plenty of subject matter for writing and she wrote her first novel *To Whom She Will* (1955).

*Esmond in India* (1958) is the third novel of Jhabvala that with the theme of racial discrimination and marital discord. It shows how an Indian woman follows customs and traditions blindly and considers her husband like God. Jhabvala portrays the clashes and adjustments of interracial marriage. Esmond is an English man who marries an Indian girl Gulab. Both have different attitudes towards life and like their own culture. Their married life ruins because of their different attitude. The main cause of their marital dissonance is not only racial discrimination or cultural gap but also temperamental differences. The whole novel revolves around the life of this couple. Esmond has a good knowledge of India and Indian culture and teaches the wives of ambassadors. Esmond as a tutor teaches Hindi, especially, to the wives of ambassadors and gives Sunday classes in Indian art and culture. He also works as a guide and visits historical places in Delhi and elsewhere. He is proud of his knowledge of Hindi and Indian culture.

According to Esmond, Gulab does not know the value of the English lifestyle and treats her as a slave. He thinks that she is a foolish and uncultured girl who does not know living standards. Gulab is not his wife for him, she is a servant and he is a master. He does not like her meeting with her mother. Whenever she goes to her mother's house, she has to give explanations to him. She fears if she has done any crime to going there. Once she visits her mother's house while he told her to stay at his flat, he tortures her.

He shouted aloud, 'Animal' and then grabbed her upper arm and began to twist the flesh. 'You animal' he muttered through clenched teeth, 'why did you go away when I told you to stay at home', but he was hardly thinking what he was saying because all his consciousness went into twisting the flesh of her arm. He felt it soft and full in his hand and he twisted harder and harder. She had given only one cry of pain, which shock had forced out of her. After that she kept quiet; she did not want to frighten Ravi. (P.164)

Esmond has extramarital affairs with Betty, an English woman and Shakuntala, an Indian girl. Gulab knows about his affairs still she does not react and tolerates all without any complaint. Esmond expects her to stay at home and engages herself in household activities while he himself enjoys parties with the girls. Esmond is a typical Englishman who considers his culture superior. Neither he respects his wife nor his mother-in-law. They have no importance to him. He is so dominated that he never allows Gulab to love her son Ravi though he is just three and a half years old. she loves Ravi and wants to hug him, kisses him again and again, puts a lot of oil in his hair, and dressed him in Indian style but Esmond terribly hates all these habits of Gulab and he imposes his discipline and mannerism on Gulab. Gulab wants to sleep with her son but Esmond wants his son to sleep in a separate bed. Though she does not like it, she tolerates everything only for the sake of her

son Ravi. In the absence of Esmond, Gulab and Ravi love each other and do whatever they want to do. Like her mother, Ravi also likes Indian food and uses scent. Gulab is not happy in his house but she has no choice in obeying him as he was her husband. She is a true Indian woman who is ready to sacrifice everything for her family. although she wants to live in a free atmosphere which is in contrast to her husband's desire as Jhabvala presents:

“Gulab lying on the floor felt as comfortable as she ever felt in that flat. It was not really convenient to her way of living. In her mother's house she had been used to vast room and little furniture, so that she had been able to lie on an old string bed in the middle of an otherwise empty room, floating as on a great sea of cracked marble flooring under a high, high ceiling fretted - a sky with clouds - with flaking frescoes.” (15)

Gulab tries her best to adopt his lifestyle and adjust to his house but it is not easy for her to change her lifestyle. Despite her disliking of the Western lifestyle, she tries to follow Esmond's lifestyle because he is a typical Indian wife who regards her husband as a God and thinks that she has to obey her husband. Gulab's mother Uma knows very well the miserable condition of her daughter so she constantly insists on her leaving him but Gulab refuses because she loves him wholeheartedly and does not want to leave him. One day when Esmond goes out to meet his friend, his servant molests her. She feels humiliated and thinks that Esmond is responsible for this situation because he always abuses her in front of his servant. She thinks that she is being ill-treated by the servant because her husband never gives her respect. She says,

“It was a husband's right, so her instinct told her, to do whatever he liked with his wife. He could treat her well or badly, pamper her or beat her - that was up to him, and it was not her place to complain. But in return there was one thing, only one that he owed her, and that was her protection: It was his duty to see that she was safe in his house and that no stranger could cast insulting eyes on her. Esmond had failed in that duty; so now he was no more her husband. Nor she his wife: Since she considered herself defiled, she could not remain in his house any longer but she had to return, as was the custom to her own people”. (200)

Gulab knows very well that Esmond never feels any need to say sorry to her that's why she decides of leaving Esmond and his flat.

Her other novel Heat and Dust tells the story of Olivia Rivers and the narrator, Anne. Both are the main characters of the novel who travel to India. Oliva is a beautiful woman who comes to India with her husband Douglas. In India, she feels lonely and suffocated in her house. Douglas does not give her much time because of his busy schedule. he does not have the time to talk to her leisurely and pleasantly. She spends most of the time in reading, playing piano and visiting other Britishers' houses. This kind of loneliness increases her suffering.

“She (Olivia) had by that time been in Satipur for several months and was already getting bored...Olivia was alone in her big house with all the doors and windows and shut up to keep the heat and dust. She read and played the Piano, but the days were long, very long...” (p.14)

She wants a baby and thinks that a baby will solve her problems but finds it more difficult. although she enjoys all the comforts which were provided to her. her house is cool whereas outside her house there is extreme hot. Douglas understands her problem and suggests her go to the hills, Shimla. He tells Olivia, “Because the climate is making you irritable. That’s only natural, it happens to all of us. And of course, it’s much worse for you having to stay home all days with nothing to do. That’s why I wanted you to go away”. (40) After some time in Satipur she gets bored and starts looking for entertainment. she is fed up with her life and wants the freedom to do anything. When she meets the Nawab of khatam, she falls in love with him. Nawab seduces her and impregnates her. She fears and the nawab suggests to her the idea of abortion. she becomes ready for abortion and Indian midwives abort her baby. Olivia agrees because of her fear that the baby might look like an Indian. Jhabvala discovers how midwives of India use harmful ways of abortion. these midwives were experts in aborting the child but still, sometimes women lost their lives. when Olivia faces this process of abortion, she thinks that it is like gang rape and comments:

“The midwife with the twig came towards her, holding it. Olivia understood that it was to be introduced into herself. The two women opened Olivia’s legs and one of them held on to her ankles while the other her to watch...For a moment they gazed into each other’s eyes and then Olivia had to shut hers, as the pain down below was repeated. (164) online 50thesis

when at night Olivia feels uncomfortable, Douglas takes her to the hospital. dr. Saunders examines her and understands everything as he was familiar with the means used for abortion, “The most common of these was the insertion of a twig smeared with the juice of a certain plant known only to Indian midwives. In his time Dr. Saunders had extracted many such twigs from women brought to him with so called miscarriages”. (169) Douglas comes to know about this incident, he leaves her and divorces her. Olivia leaves everything and goes to the Himalayas to get peace.

The second story is that of the narrator, a granddaughter of Douglas. She comes to India to discover more about the mysterious life of her grandfather’s first wife, Olivia. She has a collection of letters that Olivia had written to her sister, Marica. She wants to know what motivates Olivia to change her life so drastically. Anne stays in the same town where her grandfather lived with his wife fifty years ago. Like Olivia, she also faces the same problems in India. She too falls in love with an Indian man who is already married. He is a clerk named Inderlal. He belongs to a lower-middle-class family. he seduces her and impregnates her but unlike Olivia, she decides to have her baby.

In this way, Ruth Praver Jhabvala shows women’s condition and their survival for existence. Mrs. Jhabvala has made a significant contribution to Indian English fiction. She presents women’s problems and their sufferings in a realistic way. Her aim is to create awareness among women about their condition.

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