

# DOMESTIC LIFE OF RUTH PRAWER JHABVALA'S FICTION

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## *Abstract*

The present most available criticism on Indo-English literature is the themes of domestic's life, which is having much value, looks upon it as a part of Indian literature. Contemporary theories have stress over its Indianness, which is the main issue of approving focus and Indian authors have used Indianness or a lack of it as their primary criterion for judgment. This approach is quite in line up with the Indo-English writer's own sense of his being a part of the Indian literary scenario. At the same time, most of them would take away from defining Indianness in a special way and they even excluded it in analyzing the motifs of Indian English literature. They see nothing an Indian in their use of English for creative expressions. The Indo-English writers must keep in view the needs of the time while writing either a novel or writing a poem. According to K.D. Katrak, "there is no necessary or unbreakable relationship between Indianness and the use of English for creative expression".<sup>1</sup>

The underlying belief has been that in all Indo-English writing, there is a gap between the cultural knowledge that is showed and the languages chosen to express it. The writer may exploit this gap to his advantage in his work to heighten the clash of cultures (the East -West encounter in the work of Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand, Arun Joshi, Anita Desai or Ruth Prawer Jhabvala). Present article will be dealing with domestic life in the novels by Ruth Prawer Jhubvala.

**Key Words:** Domestic Life, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala,

## **Introduction**

The present research article entitled 'Domestic Life of Ruth Prawer Jhabvala's Novels' proposes to investigate the various issues of Domestic life such as household, house affairs, integration of family, disintegration of family, indigenous society, social hegemony, identity crisis, and its impact on the society and culture. It also degraded the personal and family values.

Primarily, the phrase 'domestic life' tends to signify the family affairs, relating household and consists of duties and pleasures of society. Domestic life is consisting of a feeling of warmth, safety and comforting smoothly. When we look at the history of the term 'Domestic life' it describes about the family is ruled by domestic lives that would satisfy the people who are practicing indigenous society and integration family.

Indigenous is more powerful than disintegration of family. Many people believed that it has started in eighteen century America but it is the part and parcel of an Indian life and society.

The allocation between two cultures, European and Indian is Ruth Praver Jhabvala's forte. It forms the substance and also shapes the process by which her personal experience in India is transformed into the art of fiction. In a describing autobiographical essay "Living in India" Jhabvala writes:

"I have lived in India for most of my adult life. My husband is Indian and so are my children. I am not, and less so, very year."<sup>2</sup>

Jhabvala in this essay has expressed her varied relations to India and its people. She declares that India reacts strongly on foreigner and they either love it or hate it or do both. She has herself passed through this cycle and her fiction is a part of this cyclical growth. Jhabvala's world signifies space—the space that is India, the India moulded by her experience and fictional art. Her Endeavour should be chosen as time-art, since her narrative mode is conceived in terms of history or a sequence of time. Her mode of narration follows the traditional time span, the individual's and family's cyclic development or decline. Jhabvala writes about India and its culture and presents it in a visual way. Her fiction is a part of what she has experienced and seen and it is for this reason that we feel drawn towards her world in spite of the fact that most of the things that she talks about in her fiction do not win our approval. That Ruth Praver Jhabvala is an interesting writer and is beyond any doubt and conflict.

Ruth Praver Jhabvala was born in Cologne, Germany on May 7, 1927. She had to immigrate to England in 1939 with her family because of their Jewish faith. She earned a degree in English literature from London University. In 1951, she married an Indian architect, aggravated to India and raised three daughters. She began writing in 1955 and has written a dozen novels. Several novels were set in India such as *The Nature of Passion*, *Esmond in India*, *Travelers* and *The Householder*, which was also her first motion picture project. Shakespeare Wallah was her first collaboration on an original project. She also wrote screenplays such as *Roseland* and *Jefferson in Paris*. Her other fiction works envelope *In Search of Love and Beauty*, *Three Continents*, *Poet and Dancer*, *Shards of Memory*, *East into Upper East* and *My Nine Lives: Chapters of a Possible Past*. She won numerous awards including Britain's Booker Prize for her novel *Heat and Dust* in 1975, the BAFTA award for Best Screenplay for the filmed adaptation of *Heat and Dust* in 1984, an Academy Award for Best Adapted Screenplay for *A Room With a View* in 1986, the Best Screenplay Award from the New York Film Critics Circle for *Mr. & Mrs. Bridge* in 1990, an Academy Award for Best Adapted Screenplay for *Howards*, the MacArthur Foundation Award in 1984 and the Writers Guild of America's Screen Laurel Award in 1994. She died on April 3, 2013 at the age of 85.

Jhabvala's important novel is *Heat and Dust* is especially effective as a novel of social criticism. Jhabvala smartly began to acute search to the nuances, tensions, and frustrations of Westerners, who is living under stress in an alien setting, artificially maintaining a facsimile of an English country village with its manners

and traditions. It is suitable that the British residential area should be called “the Civil Lines.” The British are superficially “civil” towards the local population but remain socially aloof and among themselves, disdainful.

The British ruling class is marked by its smugness and disdain: “like good parents they all loved India whatever mischief she might be up to.”<sup>3</sup>

“When Olivia speaks in shielding of the Indians’ right to practice their traditions, her countrymen “sportingly discussed her point of view as if it were one that could be taken seriously.”<sup>4</sup>

Dr. Saunders, who is openly hostile to Olivia and considers any sensitivity towards Indian culture as a sign of weakness, condemns the Indians for their “savagery and barbarism.”<sup>5</sup> Most of the English characters are more showing than Saunders and his wife, who are extreme cases, more openly frustrated and less practiced at veiling their hostility and contempt for India. The usual tolerance is a part of the royal image and a consequence of conditioned civility. The “proper” Englishmen, such as Douglas, Crawford and Minnies, will be protected by their smugness and strength of character. It is no wonder that Nawab delights in spiting them.

This theme is best communicated through the character of Major Minnies, who realizes that there are many reasons for loving India: “the scenery, the history, the poetry, the music, and indeed the physical beauty of the men and women.”<sup>6</sup> Major Minnies adds, however, that it is “dangerous for the European who allows himself to love [India] too much” and warns that the “proper” Englishman “has to be very determined to withstand—to stand up to—India.”<sup>7</sup>

The successful European will know, like Beth Crawford, “where lines had to be drawn, not only in speech and behavior but also in one’s thought.” Olivia does not know where to.

Next important novel *Three Continents*, All of their lives Harriet and Michael have had a special nearness to each other, caused in part by the troubled circumstances of their upbringing: Their equally irresponsible parents were soon divorced and now lead less than model lives, while their grandfather’s relating career meant frequent and disruptive travels for them around the world. The siblings begin drifting apart, though, when Michael’s search for a cause an important of his idealism leads him to bring the Rawul and his followers home to Propinquity, their mother’s valuable estate.

At first unhappy with the movement and its representatives, distinctly Crishi, Harriet gradually becomes involved as well, so that the growing loss of her relationship with Michael matters less than her increasing physical need for Crishi. The description of this relationship -- seen, as is everything in this novel, through Harriet’s eyes--is painfully discreet, yet its power over her must be accepted by the reader for the novel to seem plausible. Although there is a certain inevitability to the novel’s horrific close, it may perhaps be a mesmerizing longing for a different conclusion that will keep the reader going to the end.

Jhabvala's style has been an expression for its economical elegance, and her theme of the growth and dissolution of family ties certainly has its attractions. There is, however, a creepy coldness to, *Three continents* that will put off many readers who are not already bored by the cast of characters that Jhabvala has assembled. It is hard, finally, to care very much about these willfully self-destructive poor little rich kids, just as it is occasionally hard not to feel that Jhabvala's unrelentingly low-key narrator is unnecessarily coy, not only in her description of the relation with Crishi but also in her description of the events that she says were "very long ago." There is, though, a consistency to Jhabvala's writing, and for those who have enjoyed the Merchant-Ivory films based on her scripts, *Three Continents* may provide the same sort of pleasure.

Next novel *The House holder* Jhabvala's most recurrent theme is the difficulty of reconciling traditional belief with contemporary life in modern India. The householder is the traditional third stage of four in Hindu philosophy. The other three stages are: the child, who must learn patience and love from the model of the family and who delights in his innocence; the student, who expands his knowledge and learns to accept a disciplined existence; and the fourth, the solitude, who, leaving family and friends behind, must pursue a solitary path toward religious growth. As a householder, Prem is not yet ready to relinquish his student life, which was secure and at which he was very good; he fears his marriage because it demands that he consider others beside himself. He is tempted by the guru's appeal and Lal's example to leap to the fourth stage, but, in a manner, it is both the guru and Lal who indirectly assist him in realizing the devotion that is a necessary discipline for a healthy household.

Providing the theme is the further conflict between greediness and spiritualism. Prem teeters on extremes: when he is materialistic, he is obsessed with ambition and status but rendered helpless by the obsession; when he is spiritual; he is relieved of his worries but unable to repress his growing love for Indu. His sense of failure comes, ironically and comically, from his failure to see that house holding teaches a balance between material and spiritual concerns, the delay to develop...

Jhabvala writes about one part of India which she knows by firsthand experience. She happens to write about day-to-day problems of living, discharging more obvious sensational, melodramatic or heroic subjects and avoids political controversy. The background and history of Jhabvala is sufficiently distinctive to invite comment at the outset. Jhabvala is Indian neither by blood nor by birth. She is of polish Jewish educated in England where she took a degree London University and she came to India (Delhi) after the world war second as the wife of a Paris architect. By declaring the setting of her novel to be Delhi Jhabvala declared her desire to remain within the confines of naturalistic fiction. Jhabvala returns repeatedly to the same subjects, the joint family houses, agreed marriages, romantic love affairs, children and parents, divorce and keeping mistress among the ideal rich. Her first novel *To Whom She Will* (1955) shows a girl in love with a boy whose parents arrange a marriage with someone else more suitable to their class and way of life. This is also one of the plots

of *The Nature of Passion* (1956). Expatriate bohemian artists appear in *Esmond in India* (1958) and in *A Backward Place* (1965).

Jhabvala's main occupation in her fiction is her exclusion of imagination poetry and exaggerated comedy. Jhabvala seems to be cool, detached and often sardonic. Love and Marriage in Indian family life are Jhabvala's favorite subjects. Indian family life 'in particular exerts considerable attraction on her and she comes back again and again to the subject. Jhabvala treats young fascinating love with violent of irony and in her first novel *To Whom She Will* her foolish young people, Amrita and Hari, fall in love and then out of love with same ease and the system of arranged marriage does not appear to be so tyrannous after all, especially when Amrita falls in love in the end with someone approved by her own mother.

Similarly, the young female resisting in *The Nature of Passion* Lala's favorite daughter Nimmi who goes out and dates with a man of her choice and even has her hair cut short - all to the scandal of her orthodox family — falls out of love with one boy friend and into love with another who also happens to be the husband arranged for her. Romantic love is ephemeral and comic. Arranged marriages work out just as well or just as badly as ones that depend on falling in love. It amuses Jhabvala to manipulate her plots to proposal this. An apparent love marriage like that of Esmond and Gulab in *Esmond in India* (for no other explanation is offered of this strange marriage except love) can be completely disastrous.

It is interesting that some of Jhabvala's more extreme characters are amorous and adulterous, Esmond and Gulzari Lai, for example. Sarla Devi's materialistic son has an eye for the ladies like her brother Brij Mohan who keeps a prostitute as his mistress and quarrels with her violently and noisily. In only two of her novels does Jhabvala show a marriage turning out successfully Prem and Indu achieve a kind of harmony by the end of *The Householder* (1960), and the marriage of Judy and Bal is saved after being imperiled in *A Backward Place* by the 'example of heroic acceptance of life shown by an old Indian woman aunt Bhuaji. Jhabvala chooses classes of the Indian community where impure and divorce are not unknown, the rich upper middle class of Delhi and the circle of artists, bohemian and expatriates. Etta , one of the central characters Of *A backward Place* has had a failed marriage and has been I lie mistress of several men since the break-up. Kusum is the mistress of Sarla Devi's estranged husband. Jhabvala presents in *Get Ready for Battle* the life of a fast living group of young people who drink, dance and have affairs in Delhi. Even innocent girls like Shakuntala in *Esmond in Indian*, fall easy victims to ambiguous sexual charms. Love is a destructive force sharply in opposition to the peace and security of marriage as in the life and literature of medieval Europe, love and marriage do not mix.

## Conclusion

The present article highlights the effects that caused in the Indian fiction to be enriched by the concept Domestic life. It is observed that modern Indian novels are influenced from effect of Domestic life on the Indian society, and some responses of it from some thinker and philosophers.

This research highlights that the writer Ruth Praver Jhabvala writes about the social problems and harms in the present day India. Jhabvala's novels are full of local color and glamour, dealing with the young who are still, romantic and foolish, and the old who are cool, calculating and rigid. She describes the head-on collision between the traditional and the modernism, the East and the West and the puzzlement that follows in the wake of these collisions. Mrs. Jhabvala's world is upper class North India. The world she portrays is peopled by sophisticated and Anglicised, where husbands make love to their wives in broad day light. It is a world crowded with people who make a virtue of decay, depravity and coarseness: people who are indolent, luxurious and violently emotional; people who have not intellectual interest, and in the absence of this they lead a sort of life emptied of any quality in it. Mrs. Jhabvala does not write about one of two persons.

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