



Ruth Praver Jhabvala's Acumen For India: An Artistic Reverence Of Domestic Life In 'The Householder'

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Abstract : Ruth Praver Jhabvala's novel '*The Householder*' is a nuanced and realistic portrayal of middle-class domestic life in India. This paper explores Jhabvala's artistic reverence for domestic life in the novel, examining how her experiences as a European living in India have shaped her portrayal of Indian family life. Through a close reading of the novel, this paper reveals the ways in which Jhabvala captures the complexities of Indian domestic life, exploring the tensions between traditional social norms and modernizing influences. The paper argues that Jhabvala's artistic reverence for domestic life is characterized by her attention to detail, her sensitivity to the nuances of Indian culture, and her ability to capture the complexities of human relationships.

Keywords: Domestic Life, Indian Culture, Middle-Class Family, Artistic Reverence, European Perspective, Traditional Social Norms, Modernizing Influences.

Exploration of India's Culture and Society

Ruth Praver Jhabvala's literary career is a testament to her unique perspective on India, a country she adopted as her home for over two decades. Born in Germany to Polish-Jewish parents, Jhabvala's experiences as a European living in India have significantly influenced her writing, particularly in her novel 'The Householder'. This paper will explore Jhabvala's artistic reverence for domestic life in *The Householder*, examining how her experiences as an outsider in India have shaped her portrayal of middle-class domesticity. Jhabvala has been writing about India's customs and traditions, its caste system and backwardness, its hot and heavy climate, its dire system and backwardness, poverty and dirt and dross, its disease and illiteracy, its beggars and paupers, its sadhus and saints, and its child marriage system etc. She has also written a number of scripts for film and television, many with Merchant Ivory.

Ruth Praver Jhabvala has chosen the aspect of marriage without love and love without marriage in the contemporary Indian life as the subject matter of her novel. Jhabvala has recollected her sweet bitter experience during her stay in India and has reproduced them in her works. She has passed twenty four years of life in India and also established herself as a great personality of India in the field of fiction. Her marriage to Mr. Cyrus Jhabvala, an Indian architect is the result of her love- hate relationship with India.

Ruth Praver Jhabvala's '*The Householder*' is a nuanced and realistic portrayal of middle-class domestic life in India. Published in 1960, the novel is set in Delhi and explores the complexities of Indian family life, cultural traditions, and social norms. This paper will examine the cultural and social context of the novel,

exploring the ways in which Jhabvala's experiences as a European living in India have shaped her portrayal of Indian society.

India in the 1950s and 1960s was a country in transition. The country had gained independence from British colonial rule in 1947, and was in the process of building a new nation. The government, led by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, was committed to modernizing the country and promoting economic development. However, this process of modernization was not without its challenges. Traditional social norms and cultural practices were being challenged by the influence of Western values and the growth of urbanization.

In this context, Jhabvala's novel *'The Householder'* provides a unique insight into the lives of middle-class Indians living in Delhi. The novel is set in a small, middle-class neighborhood, where the characters are struggling to make sense of the changing world around them. The protagonist, Prem, is a young man who has recently married and is trying to establish himself as a teacher. However, he is struggling to balance his desire for independence and modernity with the traditional expectations of his family and community.

Jhabvala's portrayal of Indian family life is one of the most striking aspects of the novel. She explores the complexities of relationships between husbands and wives, parents and children, and the extended family. The novel highlights the ways in which traditional social norms and cultural practices shape family relationships, and the challenges that individuals face in trying to balance their own desires and aspirations with the expectations of their family and community.

One of the key cultural practices that Jhabvala explores in the novel is the concept of joint family. In traditional Indian society, the joint family was a common arrangement, where multiple generations of a family lived together in the same household. However, in the novel, Jhabvala portrays the joint family as a source of tension and conflict, particularly for the younger generation who are trying to establish their own independence and identity. Jhabvala's experiences as a European living in India have also influenced her portrayal of Indian society. Her outsider perspective allows her to observe the intricacies of Indian culture and society with a fresh eye, highlighting the ways in which cultural traditions and social norms shape individual behavior. At the same time, her experiences as a wife and mother in India have given her a deep understanding of the complexities of Indian family life, one that is both personal and relatable.

Despite her European background, Jhabvala's writing is deeply rooted in Indian culture and society. Her novels are characterized by their Indian settings and characters, and she has been praised for her nuanced portrayal of Indian life. However, some critics have argued that Jhabvala's writing is not truly Indian, citing her European background and her outsider's perspective. This criticism overlooks the fact that Jhabvala's experiences as a European living in India have given her a unique perspective on Indian culture and society.

Portrayal of Marriage and Domestic Assonance

Ruth Prawer Jhabvala's novel *"The Householder"* is a nuanced and realistic portrayal of middle-class domestic life in India. In the novel, Jhabvala explores the theme of domestic assonance, which refers to the harmony and balance that exists within a household. Through her analysis of domestic assonance, Jhabvala reveals the complexities of Indian domestic life, highlighting the tensions between traditional social norms and modernizing influences.

One of the key aspects of Jhabvala's analysis of domestic assonance is her portrayal of the relationships between family members. The novel centers around the relationship between Prem, the protagonist, and his wife, Indu. Prem is a young man who is struggling to establish himself as a teacher, while Indu is a traditional Indian housewife who is expected to manage the household and care for their children. Through their relationship, Jhabvala explores the tensions that exist between traditional Indian values and modernizing influences.

Jhabvala's portrayal of Indu is particularly significant in this regard. Indu is a complex character who is both traditional and modern. On the one hand, she is expected to fulfill traditional Indian roles, such as managing the household and caring for their children. On the other hand, she is also a modern woman who is educated and independent. Through Indu's character, Jhabvala highlights the tensions that exist between traditional Indian values and modernizing influences, revealing the ways in which women in India are caught between these two competing forces.

Another key aspect of Jhabvala's analysis of domestic assonance is her portrayal of the relationships between family members and their servants. In the novel, Prem and Indu employ a servant named Raju, who is responsible for managing the household and caring for their children. Through Raju's character, Jhabvala explores the complex relationships that exist between family members and their servants, highlighting the ways in which servants are both integral to the household and yet also marginalized and oppressed.

Jhabvala's analysis of domestic assonance is also significant in terms of its portrayal of the Indian middle class. The novel is set in a small, middle-class neighborhood in Delhi, and Jhabvala's portrayal of the relationships between family members and their servants reveals the complexities of middle-class life in India. Through her portrayal of Prem and Indu's struggles to establish themselves as a middle-class family, Jhabvala highlights the tensions that exist between traditional Indian values and modernizing influences, revealing the ways in which the Indian middle class is caught between these two competing forces.

Quest for Identity - Drama of Self- Illusion

The quest for identity emphasizes the importance of communal belonging, but rejects the view that one ought to belong to the community one was born to. It suggests that the quest for identity may lead individuals to follow many avenues: while some individuals might affirm their “inherent” affiliations and traditions, others may remain within their community of origin and strive to change its ways, or choose to leave their social group and opt for membership in a new one. This analysis suggests that choice, characteristic of the liberal conception of the person, and rootedness, characteristic of the communitarian conception of the person, play an important role in the formation of personal identity.

Jhabvala in her literary career presents a drama of conflict and resolution in terms of quest for identity. In the novel *Householder* Jhabvala deals with the dominant Hindu view of life. The Indian joint family is essentially patriarchal in character, which is kept alive by satisfying two vital needs of its male members, the patriarch's love of power and the young man's need for financial security. By undertaking to support the family, the system enabled young men to marry and raise a family before attaining financial independence. In perpetuation of the male line being a primary goal of the joint family, early marriage and reproduction were

encouraged. By 1960 the structure was crumbling and the pattern of Indian life was changing, but many of the tradition that it had built it up, among them the tradition of early marriage has remained.

In *The Householder*, Prem's entire journey of attaining manhood can be seen as a process of replacing his mother by his wife as a subject of desire and finally, he learns to love his wife as a man. His troubles increase as he also finds it difficult to control his students. His inability to control his students, his feeling of homesickness and his expectation regarding how should Indu, treat him like the way his mother is used to treat her husband show that he is yet to grow as a man. In the novel *The Householder*, Jhabvala has given an insightful portrayal of Prem's character, his psychological problems, the way he grapples with his psychological complexes, his difficulty in coming to terms with the outside how he and finally, attains manhood.

A Financial Accord

'Poverty' and 'want' seem to have haunted Mrs. Jhabvala's own thoughts throughout her stay in India. She just could not reconcile with the enormous giant of poverty and here Prem appears to be a mouth piece of what Mrs. Jhabvala wanted to tell this world: and hence it is not only Prem's problem, but of the entire lower middle class Indian society and particularly the youth. They constantly struggle to conquer this enormous curse of want which mars their happiness. They know no pleasure in their lives; marriage, baby and the other responsibilities come to them as extra expenses. Prem is no exception. His basic problem is poverty and want and it is this curse which makes him a coward and which makes him an all-around failure as husband, teacher and father.

In the end when Prem's friend Raj comes with his family to have dinner at Prem's house on his invitation and comments, "it seems your wife is a very good cook" (TH 168), both Indu and Prem feels a sense of achievement. The fate of a true seeker is fraught with alienation. As Ruth Praver Jhabvala's literary career advances, this conviction crystallises. Her narrative tone also changes and becomes darker and darker with each successive novel.

Artistic Excellence of Ruth Praver Jhabvala

Jhabvala's writing style is characterized by her European irony and detachment, which allows her to observe Indian city life with a unique perspective '*The Householder*' she achieves a sympathetic insight into middle-class domestic life, exploring the nuances of family relationships and the struggles of everyday life. The novel is a tender and melancholic portrayal of domesticity, one that is both relatable and authentic. One of the key aspects of Jhabval's writing is her ability to capture the complexities of Indian family life. In '*The Householder*', she explores the relationships between husbands and wives, parents and children, and the extended family. Her portrayal of these relationships is both nuanced and realistic, revealing the intricate web of emotions and obligations that bind families together.

Jhabvala's experiences as a European living in India have also influenced her portrayal of domestic life. Her outsider's perspective allows her to observe the intricacies of Indian domesticity with a fresh eye, highlighting the ways in which cultural traditions and social norms shape family relationships. At the same time, her experiences as a wife and mother in India have given her a deep understanding of the complexities of domestic life, one that is both personal and relatable.

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Conclusion

In conclusion, Ruth Praver Jhabvala's *'The Householder'* is a nuanced and realistic portrayal of middle-class domestic life in India. Her experiences as a European living in India have shaped her writing, giving her a unique perspective on Indian culture and society. Through her novel, Jhabvala reveals the complexities of Indian family life, exploring the intricacies of relationships and the struggles of everyday life. Her writing is a testament to her artistic reverence for domestic life, one that is both relatable and authentic.

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