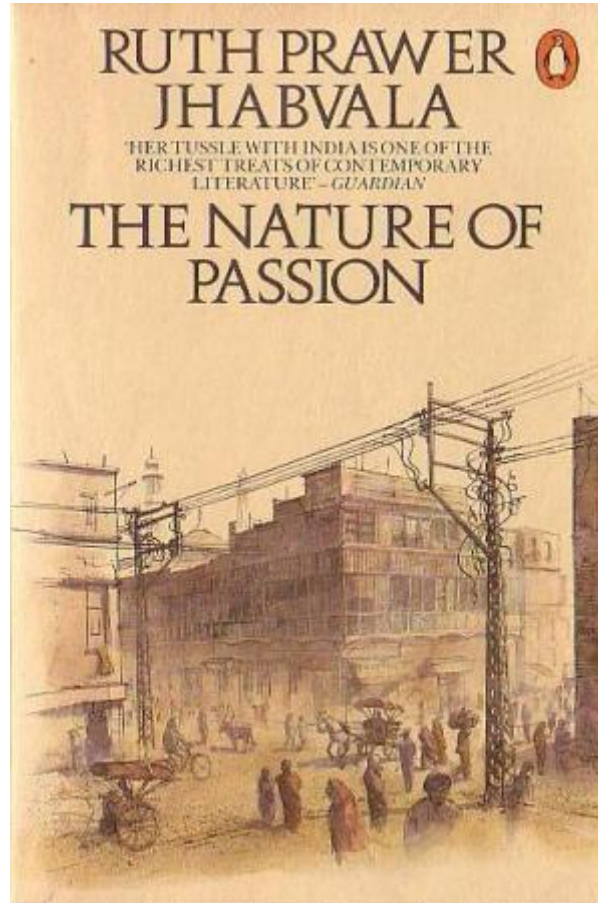


**Domestic Discord in Ruth Praver Jhabvala's
*The Nature Of Passion***

I. Poornima, M.A., M.Phil.



Abstract

Ruth Praver Jhabvala confines her attention to the Indian middle classes and the expatriates and her novels deftly ring the chimes on the same themes, tracing numerous permutations on family conflicts. The second novel *The Nature of Passion* opens with several scenes of tensions and domestic discord for which Lalaji's wife, his sister and elder son hold him responsible. Their complaint is that instead of confining his younger children within traditional moulds he has not only educated them beyond all reasonable limits but allowed them to forget the real business of life. In a society in which young men must be absorbed in business before they can develop any specific choices and women be married off at a tender age, too much freedom to the young has jeopardized his family's unity, making him a failure

as a paterfamilias. *The Nature of Passion* is pseudo-modernism, which loses ground as soon as it faces real problems of life. Jhabvala deals with a wide range of the Indian middle classes, from wealthy westernized intellectuals to poor teachers and government clerks clinging to status and respectability. Her scenes of domestic life range from emancipated England returned intellectuals to the suffocating women's quarters of traditional Hindu household. Much of her subject matter is the outcome of domestic conflicts of a changing society. She is particularly good at describing the characters, of their homes, which vividly reflect their personalities and lifestyle of their owners. She presents an accurate picture of Indian life.

Key Words: Ruth Praver Jhabvala, *The Nature of Passion*, dominant, tradition and modernism, Indian middle class, familial conflicts.

The Nature of Passion

The Nature of Passion (1956), Jhabvala's second novel, deals with the tussle between the old and the young. It is both a novel of manners as well as morals. The novelist's art of characterization has minor psychological overtones. In fact its familial, social, cultural and moral aspects are more dominant and pervasive than its psychological trend.

The Nature of Passion opens with several scenes of tensions and domestic discord for which Lalaji's wife, his sister and elder son hold him responsible. Their complaint is that instead of confining his younger children within traditional moulds he has not only educated them beyond all reasonable limits but allowed them to forget the real business of life. In a society in which young men must be absorbed in business before they can develop any specific choices and women be married off at a tender age, too much freedom to the young has jeopardized his family's unity, making him a failure as a paterfamilias.

The title of the novel *The Nature of Passion* has been derived from "Swami Paramanad's translation of Bhagvad Gita", XIV, 7 (quoted by the novelist):

Know thou Rajas to be the nature of passion,
giving rise to thirst (for pleasure) and attachment.
It binds the embodied by attachment to action.

Jhabvala also quotes a passage from Radhakrishnan's comments on these aspects of *The Gita*:

The three modes are present in all human beings, though in different degree. No one is free from them and in each soul one or the other predominates. Men are said to be 'Satvika', 'rajasa', or 'tamasa' according to the mode which prevails....while the activities of a 'Satvika' temperament are free calm and selfless, the 'rajasa' nature wishes to be always active and cannot sit still and its activities are tainted by selfish desires. (TNOP 7)

Focus on Worldly Passion

Lalaji's is a nature of 'rajasa'. The main emphasis in the novel is in delineating the process of 'Rajas' the worldly Passion is marked by thirst for pleasure and which culminate in attachment. The 'Satvika' (the saintly) or the 'tamasa' are merely hinted at in the novel in the behaviour of a few minor characters such as Phuphiji, Om Prakash and Viddi. It is the worldliness of Verma or Lalaji's desire for money, his keenness to get Rs. 25lakhs contract for the new building of the Happy Hindustan Trading Company, which is an evidence that 'Rajasa' rules the universe of Lalaji.

In *The Nature of Passion* Lalaji's six children, three daughters and three sons, very aptly portray the different types of girls and boys found in these Punjabi families. Lalaji's three daughters, Rani, Usha and Nimmi are poles apart from each other. Rani is married to a rich man and is well-settled. His second daughter Usha is ready to get married. She does not go to school she passes her time at home, eating sweetmeats and wasting her time without doing much. In fact, she represents a normal Punjabi girl, coming from a rich family. Their ultimate aim in life is to get married and produce children. Meena Shirwadkar *In Image of Women in Indo- Anglian Novel*, describing Usha writes: "Usha is the symbol of womanly fulfilment, loving, placid, looking forward to marriage and children." (42) Though Usha seems to be happy with her life, Lalaji's wife is worried about her. She knows that after marriage she cannot continue with this type of life, and one day she tells Usha:

I pity your husband and also your mother-in-law.

They will think that they have got a very bad bargain

and they will blame us for sending such a bad girl
into their house. (TNOP 87)

The Power of Money

But all this does not bother Lalaji, as he with all his simplicity, realizes the power of money and the important role that money plays in Indian marriages. He knows that the amount of dowry, he will give in her marriage, will cover all her shortcomings. He tells his wife that: “They will be content enough when they think of the dowry they have got with her”. And with these lines Jhabvala touches that aspect of Indian marriages which she has not done previously. In her first novel she writes about the marriage ceremony, but not about dowry. Here she makes it clear that, Indian marriages are more of business deals than anything else.

Nimmi

In contrast to Usha, we have Lalaji’s third daughter, Nimmi. She is an antithesis not only to Usha, but to her entire family, except Vidhi, her youngest brother. Describing her Meena Shorwadkar very aptly writes:

Juxtaposed with her (Usha) is Nimmi, her sister enjoying college life, friends having modern ideas, toying with English poetry, influenced by a parsi because he is member of a westernized club. She is ashamed of her parents whom she thinks unfashionable and orthodox . (42)

These lines appropriately describe Nimmi a young girl, aspiring to be modern and bent upon breaking all the shackles of old Hindu traditions. She goes to the college has a best friend Rajan, who comes from a sophisticated, modern rich family. She goes to the club with him and keeps it a secret from her family. She plays tennis in the club and wears a dress which her family will never approve of. The most important thing is that Nimmi is aware of all this and knows that what she is doing is not according to the norms of the society she belongs to. She knew that:

It was so strange, showing bare legs in public.
She felt uncomfortable every time she thought
what her family would say if they could see her,

so she did her best not to think about it. Her tennis costume was a great secret. She had bought it out of her own money. (TNOP 91)

In these lines Jhabvala pointedly shows the young generation's fighting against the old tradition and customs. Another fact that these lines signify is that though the young people are revolting against their families, yet their stance is not pronounced and challenging. Nimmi does many things which she knows her family would disapprove of, yet she does them in front of her family members.

Her revolt reaches its climax when she develops friendship with a Parsi boy, Pheroze Batliwala. She accepts his invitation and goes out to dinner with him and after the dinner Pheroze proposes a drive to Kutub Minar. Nimmi knowing well that this is not proper for her, accepts the invitation and they drive down to Kutub Minar where Pheroze tries to kiss Nimmi. The entire episode is ridiculously humorous, and brings out clearly Jhabvala's sense of humour. She writes:

A bird moved in a tree, and suddenly Pheroze turned around and look her into his arms and kissed her. It was sudden and not very successful. Ridiculous, but their noses got in the way, so he tried again and this time brought his mouth firmly down on hers. (TNOP 137)

The description appears to be absurd and brings out the fact that howsoever these refugee may try to become modern and imitate the western world, they remain the same, backward and crude; on the other hand, this mad race for modernity makes them abnormal, for they remain neither Indians nor Europeans.

Nimmi was earlier attracted towards Pheroze for his life-style and his regular visits to clubs. But when Kuku is chosen for her by her family, she seems happier and says: "Pheroze is so boring, he does not know how to make conversation at all"(TNOP 258). She at once gets excited to know that after her marriage with Kuku, Kuku's father will let them to go to Europe. In the words of Kuku: "We will go next year; we will go to England and also to the continent and live in hotels" (TNOP 258).

Lalaji's youngest daughter Nimmi is almost similar to the character of Amrita's the heroine of *To whom she will*. Amrita falls in love with Hari, a Punjabi youth, who belongs to a different community and is also beneath her social status. In *The Nature of Passion*, Nimmi falls in love with Pheroze Batiwala, a Parsi boy, who also comes from a totally different community and family background. But the ultimate result in both the novels is the same. Amrita gives up Hari and marries Krishna Sen Gupta, a Bengali youth from her own community. Similarly, Nimmi has to give up the idea of marrying Pheroze and she succumbs to the wishes of her family members. She feels quite contented in getting married to Kuku, a boy from her own caste and social status.

Lalaji's eldest daughter Rani, and Usha and daughter-in-law Shanta, all of whom are securely assimilated into the family's mainstream. Rani the eldest, though married, identifies, and is closely involved in her father's family. She is an ardent supporter of tradition but is flexible as she protects her sister Nimmi from Phuphiji's wrath. Usha, the second daughter of Lalaji and Shanta are typical women who are the passive against male oriented society for them marriage is the ultimate reality in the life of woman and child- bearing the supreme fulfilment.

Lalaji's three sons, Om Prakash, Chandra Prakash, and Viddi, are like his daughters, different from one another, and through them Jhabvala has successfully projected three different aspects of Indian society.

Lalaji's Eldest Son

Om Prakash, the eldest son is a traditional young man following his father in every respect. He is not highly educated. He married a girl Shanta from his own community and settled down in his father's business. He lives with his father in his house and works with him in his business, and as a result he is totally dependent on him for all his requirements and has anything to worry about. Lalaji maintained two offices for his business purposes. The one in New Delhi was small and it was quite suffocating in there due to heat in summer. Om, who worked in this office constantly reminds Lalaji to install an air- conditioner in the office, but since Lalaji visited this office for a short time, he keeps putting it off by saying "yes, we will get air- conditioner. You go and order it soon". But Om knows only too well that, this was

only a way of putting off the thing. He just could not order anything on his own initiative. Once, years ago, he had ordered a wooden desk on his own initiative, but when Lalaji came to know about it, he asked Om, “Am I dead already”, and cancelled the order.

This clearly brings out the fact that when a son works with his father, he is totally dominated by him. But Om did not seem to mind this, and the main reason for this submission is his lack of education. He had no college education and could not speak English well. Hence he could not move in the modern westernized society. He was only mixing up with people of his own class and community. His own brother Chandra Prakash described him in these words: “Om is quite uneducated....He has not been to College and speaks bad English....”

Lalaji’s Second Son and Inter-caste Marriage

Chandra Prakash, Lalaji’s second son, had also gone abroad for his education and he certainly did things which were very unusual in Indian society. Firstly instead of joining his father’s business he took up a job and then married a Kanta a girl who did not belong to his caste and community. As a result, Kanta is not well received by his family members. The dislike of course, is natural and Kanta in her turn detests Lalaji’s entire family for their crude manners and orthodox living. She does not want to maintain any relations with them, and this is the reason that she does not go to the hospital immediately, as was expected, to see Shanta, her sister- in- law, who had given birth to a baby girl. The entire household assembled there but for Chandra and his wife Kanta. This fact was much criticised by the ladies of the house, and the only reason they could guess was Kanta’s belonging to another community. Lalaji’s wife was confronted with the same question over and over again, as to why Kanta did not come. Lalaji’s wife had no answer and she thinks:

...The girl has very strange ways...
Of course, she had always known that it
would be the same, and Kanta’s ways would
be different from their ways but she had not
suspected that they would be so different... (TNOP 29)

These lines establish the fact that an inter-caste marriage is not accepted kindly in Indian society. The most interesting thing is that it is mutual. If the in-laws do not like the

girl, she equally dislikes her in-laws. Kanta does not like any relation with anyone in Lalaji's family, except for the financial help they have been receiving from Lalaji on so many occasions. The house in which they live and all the expensive furnishings come out of Lalaji's account. Chandra's salary is not sufficient even to provide them with a yearly holiday in the hills, and for that also they depend on Lalaji's generosity.

Lalaji's Youngest Son

Lalaji's youngest son Ved Prakash, or Viddi, is altogether different from his two elder brothers. It is through him that Jhabvala juxtaposes the old tradition and the young generation of India. Like Nimmi he runs after western culture. He and Nimmi in this novel are agents who make people aware or conscious of the western influence on the modern generation. Describing this aspect, R.S.Singh in his article on Jhabvala writes:

Here the juxtaposition of the traditional mode of life against the modern accentuates not only the changes that have become perceptible in the cultural complex of the country, but also the superficiality of the so-called modern life (154)

Viddi is a graduate and now his ambition is to go abroad for higher studies. He wants to be either an art critic or a journalist, but knows well that he cannot fulfill his desire, as Lalaji wants him to join his business, and when Tiwari asks Viddi why he wants to go to England, he himself sits and broods over this question:

...he wanted to go abroad himself, to England or America, and lead a very gay life there drinking and ballroom dancing and sleeping with English girls. Perhaps also he would go to a University and study some more. He would learn about modern art and literature, and then when he came back he would be also to speak about these things with authority... (TNOP 35)

These lines are very significant, as Jhabvala clearly brings out the reason why young Indian boys are keen to go to western countries. It is not so much the studies they think about, it is the free life they would be able to lead there, eat, drink and sleep with girls and the study part comes only after all this. Viddi also dreams of England and all these pleasures. His repeated requests to Lalaji and Om to send him to England are turned down, and this make

him frustrated. He totally detests Lalaji because of his love of money, and when Viddi's artist friends praise Lalaji for his hard work and intelligence he loses his temper and tells them:

You do not know what he is like. He is so crude.
He is crude in his manners, and his ideas are also
crude. He does not know anything except eating
and sleeping and making money. When I speak
of anything else he laughs and picks his teeth. He is
quite uneducated; even reading and writing he cannot
do easily, and he speaks very bad English. (TNOP 36)

This description is quite revealing. It unveils the crude side of Lalaji's character and at the same time signifies the prevailing generation gap in modern society

Viddi – Jhabvala's Mouthpiece

Viddi's frantic condemnation of his father, brother and the entire family at times makes the reader wonder if it was Jhabvala's own impression about this nouveau riche class of refugees. Jhabvala has used Viddi as her mouthpiece to criticize them. It is quite obvious from her first novel *To whom She will* and also from *The Nature of Passion* that whenever she wants to criticize India or Indians, the criticism always comes through one of her Indian characters. In *To Whom She Will*, it is Krishna Sen Gupta, the Bengali youth who had been to England, who has been used to bring out the shortcomings of Indian society and in this novel it is Viddi.

Viddi's condemnation of Lalaji and Om Prakash is so vehement that at times it appears a bit unnatural, considering the fact that in the Indian society no son would go to the extent of describing his father as an animal, and we often wonder whether it was the novelist's personal view regarding these refugees.

Jhabvala used Viddi not only to expose Lalaji's personality, but also to expose their entire life style. Viddi tells his friends how the radiogram in their house is merely a showpiece. No one ever uses it, and if he wants to play it, it gives them headache and he is immediately asked to turn it off. Books are another thing which have no place in his household. The only book they ever possessed was 'Gita' or some commercial registers and

whenever he wants to read something else, he has to borrow it from his friends because his father would not give him any money for them. He tells them:

We have a radiogram....it is very big in walnut case
and of course like everything in our house, it cost a lot
of money. Nobody ever listens to the radio...
Several times I have tried to listen to a concert of classical
western music, but each time they have told me that such
noises they cannot bear turn it off. (TNOP 52)

The above lines once again reveal the fact that though these Punjabi refugees have acquired wealth, yet basically they remain uneducated and crude with no taste and no sophistication at all.

Art and Artists in Indian Society

Jhabvala has also written about art and artists in Indian society. In this novel she has tried to establish the fact that art and artists have no value in Indian society. The artists do not get employment and hence they have no money and waste their talent and time by setting in cheap restaurants, drinking coffee and thinking of ways to earn some money for their livelihood.

Zahir-ud-din is an artist who has nothing to do. He is not employed anywhere. He wants to use Viddi as a means to get money from his rich father, Lalaji. Tivari is a journalist, who has government job, but hardly ever goes to his office. Bhawa is a dramatist, who writes plays on social problems and sometimes stages them, but somehow never succeeds in his attempts. It is through these characters that Jhabvala has emphasized the unemployment problem in India. At the same time she has shown how talent is wasted in this country.

A Novel Written in a Light Mood

The Nature of Passion is a novel written in a light mood. Jhabvala has written about the Indian society and its problems as she saw them. The main theme of the novel is to project the nouveau-riche class of Punjabi refugees in Delhi, their awareness of the power of money, and the clash between the old and the new generations.

Lalaji's passion for money and love for Nimmi- the two focal points in the novel have been highly exaggerated. Lalaji's awareness of the value of money is also more than normal. Viddi's aversion to money and his entire family in the beginning of the novel is also not normal and the way he gives in to the temptation of money and forgets all about his ideals and higher studies abroad also appear ridiculous. Nimmi's quest for modernity and her adolescent sentimental love for Pheroze Batliwala is also exaggerated by Jhabvala; their drive to Kutub into the night and the kissing incident, in fact, the entire description is ridiculous and exaggerated. The characters which appear to be normal and life-like are the characters of Chandra, Kanta and Pheroze Batliwala, and it is interesting to note that all three are under western influence and do things which are against the set norms on Indian society, and hence their intrusion on the Indian society causes all the conflict and disorder.

Jhabvala is matchless in her keen observation of contemporary Indian behaviour and for documenting the life as actually lived by her characters. Jhabvala deals with a wide range of the Indian middle classes, from wealthy westernized intellectuals to poor teachers and government clerks clinging to status and respectability. Her scenes of domestic life range from emancipated England returned intellectuals to the suffocating women's quarters of traditional Hindu household. Much of her subject matter is the outcome of domestic conflicts of a changing society. She is particularly good at describing the characters, of their homes, which vividly reflect their personalities and lifestyle of their owners. She presents an accurate picture of Indian life. In this regard, her novels appear to be more compact and convincing. Jhabvala's worldliness and down-to-earth approach to life indirectly helps her in avoiding the pit-falls of sentimentality or superficial involvement with varieties of Indian ways of thinking. Her attitude towards traditional Indian family life is ambiguous. On the other hand, her satiric pain finds plenty of snobbishness, hypocrisy and materialism to attack. Apart from this, she endows her conventional Indian characters with greater warmth and humanity. The humour of the gossiping women in Lalaji's rich and yet essentially homely household in *The Nature of Passion*, the rivalry of Hari's family and the Anands', Radha's splendid descent on Hari family to encounter an upset Prema, the desperate attempts of both families not to be shown up at the railway station, can be cited as examples of realistic portrayal of life.

WORKS CITED

Bijawat, Radha. *The Evolving Image of India in the Novels of Ruth Praver*

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 17:10 October 2017

I. Poornima, M.A., M.Phil.

Domestic Discord in Ruth Praver Jhabvala's *The Nature Of Passion*

- Jhabvala*. New Delhi: Classical Publishing Company, 1997. 10-44. Print.
- Chakravarthi, Aruna. *Ruth Praver Jhabvala: A Study in Empathy and Exile*. New Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation, 1998. 285-292. Print.
- Gooneratne, Yasmine. *Silence, Exile and Cunning: The Fiction of Ruth Praver Jhabvala*. Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1983. 71-87. Print.
- . *The Nature of Passion*. London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd 1956. Print.
- Jha, Rekha. *The Novels of Kamala Markandaya and Ruth Praver Jhabvala*. New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1990.132-150. Print.
- Pandey, Miti. *Feminism in Contemporary British and Indian English Fiction*. New Delhi: Sarup & sons, 2003. 95-112. Print.
- Prasad, Amar Nath and Nagendra Kumar Singh. *Indian Fiction in English Roots and Blossoms*. New Delhi: Sarup and Sons, 2006. 67-90. Print.
- . "An Artist's Experience of india: Jhabvala's Fiction in R.K. Dhawan." *Commonwealth Fiction*. New Delhi: Classical Publishing Company, 1971. 234-245. Print.
- Shahane, V.A. *The Comic Mode: Attempt at Affirmation* Ed. Vsant A. Shahane *Ruth Praver Jhabvala*. New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann, 1976. 32-83. Print.
- Sharma, G. B. *Nationalism in Indo- Anglian Fiction*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1978. 306-315. Print.
- Shepherd, Ronald. *Ruth Praver Jhabvala in India: The Jewish Connection*. Delhi: Chanakya Publications, 1994. 58-74. Print.
- Shirwadkar, Meena. *Image of Women in Indo-Anglian Novel*. New Delhi: Sterling Printers, 1979. 42-67. Print.
- Singh, R.S. "Ironic Vision of a Social Realist." *Indian Novel in English*. New Delhi: Gulab Vazirani for Arnold Heinmann Publishers, 1971. 154-160. Print.
- Williams, Haydn Moore. *The Fiction of Ruth Praver Jhabvala* . New Delhi: Arnold- Heinemann, 1973. 9-60. Print.

I. Poornima, M.A., M.Phil.
 3/167, Raja nagar
 Enjar vilaku
 Sivakasi
 Tamilnadu
 India
poornimailango28@gmail.com