

Personal Alienation In Jhabvala's To Whom She Will

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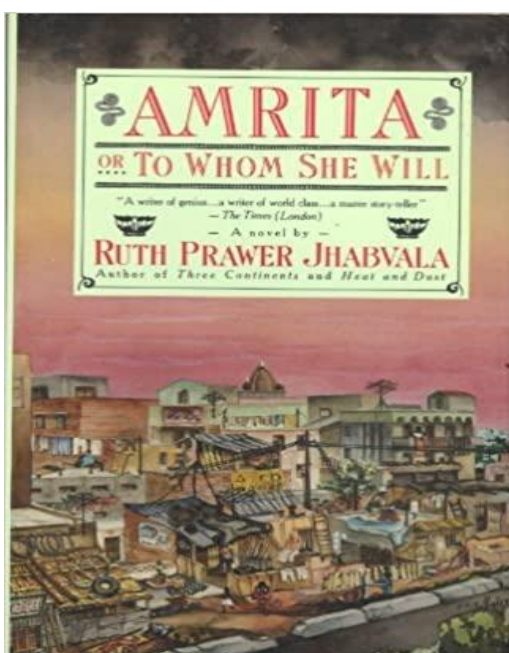
Abstract:

India in the fifties was in a state of transition. Ruth Prawer Jhabvala left England in 1951 to encounter an India engaged in the mighty experiment of bringing its four hundred million people into the mainstream of modern life. An era of science, technology and modern economy was being ushered in. Education in general and the women in particular were gaining momentum. A new generation of Westerners, drawn by Indian spiritualism, started coming in. Unlike their predecessors, they came not to conquer but to be conquered. Jhabvala wrote this novel in 1955 when India was still adjusting itself to its newly acquired freedom and problems which came with it. The novelist seems to have a good dig at the Indian mentality of showing off. The novelist's treatment of the comic may easily warrant her being rated as Jane Austen of Indo-English fiction. This paper discusses about the tragic central figure Amrita.

Key words: modern, education, western, Indian, transition

Introduction

Ruth Jhabvala's first novel portrays world order in which a determined identification with one's inborn culture is both desirable and realistic. This identification has its beginning in the ancient code of laws laid down in the Dharma Shastras. This observance retained over the centuries to have the social order created thereof, with its consequences of caste and class and separations associated upon them, still colours and shapes the outlook of India as Ruth Jhabvala sees it [1]. Ruth Prawer Jhabvala's character identify with a well-defined area, predetermined by birth and heritage and share a common conviction that only disruption and unhappiness can result from a violation [2].



To Whom She Will (1955) is Mrs. Jhabvala's first venture in the world of Anglo-Indian fiction. She came to India as a bride in 1951, and published her first novel within a short period of time. She observed this unknown society closely and was fascinated by its social and familial setting, which was entirely different from the world she came from.[3] The things that intrigued her were Indian traditions, customs, food, dress and most of the entire clash between the modern and the traditional-bound Indian society. Jhabvala always depicts the younger generation of India in a humorous way that always thinking themselves to be western and modernized attempt to do things which conventional Hindu culture will not accept, falling in love with a girl or a boy outside one's own community, caste and social status. They face a violent obstruction and the irony is that modernization is always wins over by the tradition.[4]

Methodology

The central figure of the novel is an apparently tragic figure called Amrita who is in her last teens, a very suitable marriageable age for girls in modern India. A fatherless child, she is the only granddaughter, on her mother's side, of an aristocratic barrister, Rai Bahadur Tara Chand. It is he and his family who represent the modern Indian society. He has three daughters, Radha, Tarla and Mira. He, in his days allowed Radha a free marriage. She married a Bengali revolutionary, who was below her status. Amrita is the daughter of Radha. Jhabvala clearly portrays that the educated women follow western culture and their thoughts are modernised.

A graduate from the most prestigious Women's College of Delhi, Amrita takes the job of a radio-announcer to while away her leisure. At the radio-station she cultivates a liking for a boy-announcer named Hari and starts loving him with a view of getting married. Hari, on the contrary, is a timid, traditional boy who is fully aware that he is not free to contract a love or choice marriage for himself [5]. Amrita's love for Hari borders on tragic dimensions that of Hari for Amrita have a sportive character.

Amrita has been portrayed as a strong character when compared to Hari. Though ultimately she gives into the wishes of her mother and agrees to marry Krishna, their paying guest, yet she fights for her love more bravely [6]. She not only faces the opposition of her mother Radha, who all along disapproves Hari, but also her grand-father, Pandit Ram Bahadur Chand. He is not quite averse to her marrying outside the community and is opposed to match with Hari on grounds, which are primarily social and cultural. He feels that Hari as a match for Amrita is total misfit in every way [7]. Amrita finds herself at a loss. Her affection for Hari is based on an idealised concept of the Indianness she supposes him to represent. That her idealism is misconceived is perceptible from the way her quest for the simple and the natural leads her to the people whose dividing lines are just as uncompromising as her grandfather's and whose rejection of her is as total as the Rai Bahadur's rejection of Hari.

Hari possess neither Amrita's honesty nor her strength of will, the weak and well-meaning is caught between her love for him and his family's determination to see him suitably married. Wishing to please everyone and offend nobody, he eventually surrenders himself to fate.

Amrita is strong and ready to give up her family, money and status for the sake of her love. She then even goes to the extent of asking help from Tarla's husband Vazir Dayal. She plans to marry Hari in England where there would be no one to oppose them. She is so enthusiastic about their

plans for going to England that she sends Krishna to Hari, to tell him of her plans. But Hari's response is against her hopes. In their dealings with Amrita her grandfather, mother and aunts draw a blank and it is Hari's family in whose hands the power of separating the two really rests.

Amrita's family generates tensions and exercises authority but radiates little warmth and offers less protection. Radha's fiery exhortations, the Rai Bahadur's measured orations and the endless round of family conferences to decide Amrita's fate contrast effectively with the smooth adroitness with which Hari is brought around. The Sahnis it is true have to deal with a much feeble brand of revolt. Hari's half-hearted remonstrance and his mild protestations of love for Amrita are easily subdued by alternate coaxings and gentle reprimands. Amrita notwithstanding her soft voice and courteous manners has a will of iron.

Amrita is, quite understandably, repelled by the attitudinizing, selfishness and malevolence she sees around her and mistakenly believes them to be the products of Western sophistication. Her affection for Hari is only based on Indian concept present in him. It is the Indianness and imagined simplicity that attracts the romantic side of Amrita and endears Hari to her and it is clearly portrayed when they two have lunch in the radio station canteen. Amrita, who has to do all the loving and planning is forced to delude herself continually in order to explain away Hari's inexplicable attitudes and keep the romance going. Hari for whom loving is composed of thinking vague pleasurable thoughts of Amrita and uttering sentimental nothings from time to time would like nothing better than a status in their relationship. That however is not to be, Amrita urges him to take a definite decision regarding her, and his mother and sisters conspire to marry him off to Sushila Anand, a girl from a distant branch of their own family.

Hari and Amrita are drawn to each other by virtue of polarities. Amrita believes she recognizes a delightful Indianness in Hari's habitual unpunctuality- an unworldliness and impracticality so truly Indian that it could not be governed by hard-set European things [8]. His undistinguished love of food and unselfconscious enjoyment of it makes her think of him as simple in his ways as the traditional, which is lost in her family. Hari, on the other hand, is attracted to Amrita for her westernized sophistication and her wealthy background. Both of them have not the slightest notion of each other's aspirations is established.

Amrita's own choice of a lover belongs to a typical traditional family and who cannot be expected to have even, the seriousness of loving independently for fear of his family ties [9]. It is obvious that he could have initiated the love process; it is Amrita who fancies all the time that Hari loves her while the truth is that it is she who has to do all the loving; she has occasionally to rebuke Hari for not thinking seriously of his love for and marriage with her. But Hari characteristically thinks of the emotional gamut as a game or at the most a level of intimacy, which is fostered on Amrita's side. He is the typical fancy-free child who is more attentive to food and friendship than to the serious business of making love or choice marriage [10].

Result and Discussion

The plot furnishes a series of events and incidents-the embattled family conferences on both sides [11], the mischievous interference and unreliable withdrawal of VazirDayal Mathur, the strategies employed by Radha and Prema-which function as tests by which the strength of the love between Amrita and Hari is tried. In both though Amrita's courage and resolution are shown to be so

greater than her lover's-that strength is found wanting, and Amrita and Hari retire with relief into more promising relationships.

The gradual shift in the focus of Amrita's affections from Hari to Krishna is delicately portrayed-so subtly, indeed, that it has frequently been overlooked[12]. Amrita in love with Hari but still more with the idea of love has become accustomed to Krishna's company as a lodger in her mother's house. He also does not pause to examine the implications of her wish to be seen by him when she was nicely dressed. The latter incident and the feelings of annoyance and shame it provokes in Krishna and Amrita respectively indicate, though not to them that each places an unusual on the others good opinion [13]. Amrita becomes aware of Krishna's importance in her life only when she learns that he is planning to leave Delhi. This interview delicately brings out the honesty of Amrita's nature. The news shocks her. She takes time to come to terms with the loss of her friend and confidant. She has not yet realised the true meaning of her concern-that she has been falling, without suspecting it, in love with Krishna.

Krishna and Amrita discover their love for each other almost simultaneously-Krishna when Amrita innocently asks him to be her go-between and Amrita when Krishna announces his intention of loving them. Absence distils their awareness of each other and soon Amrita notices that it is not Hari and the fear of losing him that is occupying her thoughts but Krishna and the letter that he has not written. Krishna's love for Amrita becomes the quintessence of a sense of affinity- arrived at slowly and painfully-with his environment.

Amrita had been made to realise by her family that she has to hunt out a husband for herself without expecting a dowry. What she however fails to grasp is that her choice must be approved by her family. In other words, she is free to choose from anywhere a Hindu boy who is rich and respectable enough to be accepted by her family. Amrita, being comparatively innocent[15-19], fails to catch these later subtle implications of choice marriage in the Indian context [14].



Conclusion

Girls are not likely to make the correct choice; modern education hardly equips them either with the temperament or the wherewithal to choose wisely; quite often it works the other way. Girls cannot be expected to go out hunting for sufficiently rich or well-to-do husbands who could provide for them the required standard of living; since their marriage affects in subtle ways the social position and status of their parents, the role of the latter cannot be dismissed. To that extent tradition in India is eternally new. Jhabvala casually skillfully brings out the fact from this novel is

that, older generation still stick on to tradition though the younger generation like Amrita in the higher middle-class educated society are courageous and emancipated.

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