

THINGS FALL APART: FAMILIAL DISRUPTION IN RUTH PRAWER JHABVALA'S NOVEL INSEARCH OF LOVE AND BEAUTY AND THREE CONTINENTS

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Abstract: Ruth Praver Jhabvala enjoys wide popularity as a novelist devoted to the domestic and quotidian life of people. Yet she also excelled in portraying the political dimensions of colonized India in her Booker-winning novel Heat and Dust. She wrote about human relationships, institution of family and marriage, the problem of assimilation into a different culture and the never ending Western quest for realizing the self and acquisition of peace. The institution of family acquires a special place in her fictional world as is evident from her novels and stories written during her fairly long time span of almost twenty-five years spent in India or after her permanent settlement in the U.S. after 1975. In the context of institutions like family and marriage, the novels written in India and dealing with India reveal a marked difference in contrast to the novels written after she left India. Through the novels Three Continents and In Search of Love and Beauty, this paper seeks to study the causes and aftermath one experiences within incomplete families via exploring the pattern of disruptiveness that often emerges in the novels which focus on Western families.

Keywords: Colonized, Assimilation, Institution, Disruptiveness. Search of Love and Beauty, this paper seeks

Introduction

Ruth Praver Jhabvala enjoys wide popularity as a novelist devoted to the domestic and quotidian life of people. Yet she also excelled in portraying the political dimensions of colonized India in her Booker-winning novel Heat and Dust. She wrote about human relationships, institution of family and marriage, the problem of assimilation into a different culture and the never ending Western quest for realizing the self and acquisition of peace. The institution of family acquires a special place in her fictional world as is evident from her novels and stories written during her fairly long time span of almost twenty-five years spent

in India or after her permanent settlement in the U.S. after 1975. In the context of institutions like family and marriage, the novels written in India and dealing with India reveal a marked difference in contrast to the novels written after she left India. Through the novels *Three Continents* and *In to study the causes and aftermath one experiences within incomplete families via exploring the pattern of disruptiveness that often emerges in the novels which focus on Western families.*

Both the novels are set in the United States, and as an inevitable consequence of this transformation in setting of the novels, we are left with the generation of those people who are often deprived of traditions and significant institutions of family and marriage. Such degeneration of a civilization and culture, as is apparent in *Travelers*, (initially published as *A New Dominion*), *In Search of Love and Beauty*, *Three Continents*, *Poet and Dancer* and *Shards of Memory* is attributed to the malfunction and degeneration of social institutions like marriage and family, as the valuable human ties within these society are either weak or disregarded. The domestic sphere and the complex relationships within it are now intruded upon by the evil external forces, thereby dissolving the personal into impersonal and social.

Here it would be imperative to see Ruth Jhabvala's art of characterization, where she breaks and modifies a particular model to suit her theme: "The same types come out again and again. I use one character and split that character up. I have certain leading figures in life and I seem to use them again and again, presenting different facets of their personality, so one person can play the role of fifty" (qtd. in Crane, 109).

In the novel *In Search of Love and Beauty*, one of the major characters Louise had been unresistingly beautiful and had many young admirers but Bruno was the only one to win her through his letters which referred to her in poetic ways. They marry after courtship, yet the perfect accord in which they live gets interrupted by Louise's admiration for a pseudo-spiritual personality Leo, who drags her admiration to the point of enslavement. It is also suggested that Louise has a lesbian partner Regi. Together Regi and Leo draw her attention to their individual intriguing aspects and concepts while in the meantime the gentleman Bruno embraces a stoical poise only to be marginalized within the family. Such apathetic behaviour for an idealistic man like Bruno repels us for a while towards Louise who allows herself as well as the family to be dominated

by a man who does not belong to the family. Yet Ruth Jhabvala has successfully managed to present Louise as innocent, directing our resentment towards a culture which is “ripe for disease” (Shepherd 150). One wonders at the predicament of the amiable personality Bruno who devotes himself to the cause of family and also at his resigned disposition which does not revolt when ousted by her wife’s beloved Leo. He is seen pacifying their daughter Marietta, who tries to counter against her mother and Leo’s secret liaison. Was Bruno feeble or does he owe some patience, is an intriguing question for which one could derive many answers since the novelist does not suggest any reason to account for such forbearance on Bruno’s part. One major cause that strikes through is that Bruno was eighteen years elder than his wife and hence the marriage is characterized by a “childlike attachment”. The sexual aspect of this marriage was most likely feeble as Ronald Shepherd refers Bruno as “non-sexual” (139). Since Bruno is Jewish and Louise a protestant, Ronald Shepherd derives that in Ruth Jhabvala’s fiction “Jewishness is somewhat associated with impotence and Protestantism with virility” (138).

Bruno’s death is a traumatic experience for Louise as the harmonious ambience of the family too ends with Bruno. Their marriage is referred occasionally, as the novelist’s preoccupation is to perceive the psychological response of women towards relationships outside marriage. Leo Kellerman is an entirely dubious personality who has the knack of concealing his true self. Also, he is endowed with the skill to penetrate other’s personality, thereby discovering the inner urges and suppressed longings. The disappointing aspect of all his talent is “that everyone had wanted a share in him” (1), a fact with which he is familiar and shrewdly takes advantage of it in establishing himself, be it at the expense of victimizing others.

Yes, he had that wonderful gift of making each one feel— even those of them who were no longer so very young or good-looking— that he was in intimate contact with her, on the deepest and most thrilling level; and moreover, that he had absolutely no difficulty in understanding as well as condoning whatever secret, or secret longing, she might be harbouring. (2)

Leo enters Louise’s home and from there executes his plan to establish his Academy for Potential Development. Louise and Regi are not simply Leo’s

followers rather both love the same man Leo who is a “master of technique of exploitation”(Sucher 19). The truth that they are neither tolerable as followers nor as beloveds remain concealed. At the same time, she is reckless about his preying disposition that makes her daughter Marietta his sexual target. “He loved it when people resisted him, nothing pleased him more. “It’s like fishing,” he said” (21).

Louise’s love is chaste, but the man whom she loves is undeserving as he does not value love, lacking the proper manner to reciprocate love. Being in love with someone who could not respond is in no way disconcerting but being in love with an exploiter is perilous Louise enters the “D phase- Depression, Discouragement, and Disgust (with self)” (72).

In *Three Continents*, marriage becomes a means for reaching extremely selfish ends difficult and distant to avail by sincere modes. Exercising authority to extract the desired end is certainly a less deadly manner in comparison to assailing over by means of love. The three continents are occupied by a group of three criminals who camouflage themselves as spiritual angels to victimize the twins Michel and Harriet Wishwell, without much effort because these twins lack a sense of family.

The twin’s parents Lindsay and Manton Wishwell are shown to be already separated at the beginning of the novel. Both descend from wealthy ancestors who have left them big estates and a large share in their property. Eventually, after separation Lindsay lives at Propinquity owned from her mother’s side, while Manton could hardly be found at a particular place and with a particular woman. At Propinquity Lindsay live with her lesbian partner Jean and the twin children. No particular reason is given for their separation yet, it is implicit that both of them did not regard marriage as precious enough to be protected and sustained. Partners outside marriage have always been a threat to this institution, which remains intact when mutual honesty persists. Like Manton, Lindsay too had relationships outside marriage, but this is the only similarity existing between them. Signs of a strong bonding between parents and children are hardly visible, though there exist a sense of liability. Lindsay and Manton are in no way inspirational personalities to them. Michel is averse to Manton while Harriet holds a sympathetic view for father who has a girlfriend Barbara of almost the same age of hers. Manton realizes the absurdity of his marriage: „“Oh hell really indeed! And it is, I know, psychological hell for children not to have proper parents. There I sinned

against you even before you were born– in choosing your mother” (222).

Michael and Harriet belong to a deprived generation which lacks a substantial culture and tradition to lean upon. The twins get psychologically imprisoned under the spell of pretentious group which claims to launch a Fourth World Movement or Transcendental Internationalism. The fund required for the Movement is raised by forgery and conspiracy, performed at an extensive level, and hence the twins become the nearest and the easiest targets, as the conspirators are aware of their legacy Propinquity from their mother’s side and the Macrony estate from the father’s side.

The eighteen year old Harriet stands alone in suspecting the motives of the group and recedes the decision to relinquish Propinquity for this group. Crishi and Rani see Harriet as a hurdle in usurping Propinquity and sense the urgency to manipulate and persuade Harriet to bring her in accord with Lindsay, Manton and Michael who wish to donate Propinquity. As part of their private scheming, sex would be employed as a means to enslave Harriet. Crishi unabashedly initiates a sexual relationship with her while at the same time he is the sexual partner of Harriet’s homosexual brother Michael. Sex becomes a manipulative tool to ensnare the twins and as anticipated by them the twins give free rein to Crishi.

A premeditated marriage proposal for Harriet is designed as the subsequent step to gain control over her and to achieve those targets which are stuck chiefly due to her prudent interference, with an anticipation of extracting the maximum out of this scheming proposal. The proposal is executed as planned, where instead of Crishi, Rani pampers Harriet, subsequently disclosing her that shyness restricted Crishi to propose and so she was entrusted to convey his wish. Since this is a scandalous marriage, it is entirely different from any ordinary marriage, as here, the sacred purpose becomes rather fatal. Harriet’s life after marriage is essentially the life of an imprisoned being who has no significant function to perform but to wait for the end of endless hours of expectations.

If we draw a comparison between Harriet’s married life with that of Indu’s in *The Householder*, we may realize what and how much Harriet is deprived of in this marriage because she is not a wife but a scapegoat. In their marriage we witness only long sessions of love making, for which Harriet is

deliberately made to wait for alternate days which later becomes entirely unpredictable. Although, soon after marriage Harriet discovers many secrets about the “self- serving master of deception” (Sucher 214), she does not retreats, disappointing her guardians, Lindsay and Manton who suspect the deceitful marriage. She disregards the young Barbara’s suggestion, as well as grandmother Sonya’s mute disapproval of this marriage, reaching the climax by repudiating brother Michel’s ultimate stance to disown the marriage, and the Movement steeped in „dhoka“. She herself has almost a dozen reasons to end this marriage, yet she longs to be with a man who brings her to such low level where she tolerates the sexual liaison of her husband and Rani- seen as his mother- in her own room.

Rawul’s first wife, Bari Rani, though herself not involved in any relationship outside marriage, does not experiences the bliss of married life. Renee has already usurped her husband and lives with him in another building while Bari Rani with her three teenaged daughters in another building. But Bari Rani does not accuse Rawul for her present state rather Renee is blamed. Bari Rani soon emerges with the role of a wife when Rawul arrives India. We find that none of the marriages within the novel are complete. All relationships are intruded by a it clear malignant force. Most particularly the women characters are discontented as they are starved of warmth, protection and the sense of being into a family which only marriage could provide. The marriages deteriorate as the partners are either adulterous or develop homosexual relationships.

Ruth Jhabvala has made it clear that when marriage and family function properly, the involved members within these institutions experience a complete and contented life. Here, the various characters like Louise, Marrietta, Harriet and Crishi are mislead by fraudulent people who exploit their particular situations of having incomplete families where mutual love and guidance does not exist. A family holds immense power to safeguard its members through various subtle ways. Ruth Jhabvala’s novel *To Whom She Will*, *The Nature of Passion* and *A Backward Place* amply justify the significance of family which protects its member in manifold ways.

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