CHAPTER III

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Genrically speaking, Jhabvala's fiction presents the Indian characters, culture and socio political milieu in a comic mode and Get Ready for Battle seems to be no exception. The comic sense is focussed not on marriage-negotiations but on the trapped married couple who either struggle within the network of the family for the better understanding as in The Householder and in A Backward Place, or break loose to live their separate lives as in Get Ready for Battle. In this novel the rich Gulzarilal lives with Kusum, a widow of Major Mehra, who had three married daughters and a grand-son. Gulzarilal's affair with Kusum may satisfy his vanity, but endangers his position. He is known for his position and he is too much materialistic in his outlook. His understanding of the world is purely materialistic and selfish. He likes Kusum's company always in his house and he also likes her way of management, and how she behaves with his daughter-in-law, Mala, and his grand-daughter Pritti. Mala also likes her much because nobody is there in house to talk to her for recreation and to prevent boredom. Mala's family and her friends
are in Bombay. She wants to take her husband along with her to Bombay. But Vishnu does not feel like going to Bombay. He develops a muted sort of affection for his mother Sarala Devi, who does not divorce her husband, Gulzarilal. Though not absolutely detached from the worldly affairs, she is passionately interested in her son and tries to improve his spiritual and social awareness. Vishnu and Mala are always at loggerheads over petty issues. Moreover, Vishnu's interest in Sumi, makes him averse to his wife's proposal to leave for Bombay. Kusum says, "We are all modern now, we have a Hindu code of Bill, we have divorce."

Thus Kusum indirectly points out her difficulty to Mala, who is on the verge of separation from her husband. Kusum also feels unhappy for her position in the house and in the society, because she is the mistress of Gulzarilal. But she wants him to take divorce from his wife Sarala Devi and marry her. Consoling Mala and Vishnu not to quarrel further and suggesting not to go to the court of law for divorce, she says.

No divorce is only when people don't live together any more, and perhaps one of them has found someone else to be happy with ...

I am old now, perhaps it is no longer fitting to speak of happiness. It is only that your father needs me so and he does not understand that my position here is very bad. 

Thus Kusum is conscious of her position in the society. She only blames Gulzarilal for his contact with her, but she does not blame herself. Gulzarilal never thinks of his wife and he never forgets Kusum. But he cares for the social prestige and at the same time he wants to keep Kusum always with him. Kusum is a clever manipulator of men and she knows how to have a hold on men like Gulzarilal. She tells Meeta,

You see child, sometimes it is necessary to be a little strict with men. It is not good always to say yes to them, it spoils them. Sweetheart, men are like children in this, one can spoil them with too much kindness.

and adds,

A woman's happiness can only be where her husband and children are


\(^3\) Ibid., p. 15.

\(^4\) Ibid., p. 16.
From this it is clear to us, that Kusum is a well experienced woman in many ways. She tells Mala, that wife's happiness is always attached to the husband and children.

Gulsarilal wants Vishnu to go to Bombay and start a business on his own. He says in hearty voice to Vishnu,

"No, no, you must learn to stand on your own feet."  

The son has tender feelings towards his father, but he hesitates to say yes to his father's proposal. Gulsarilal is always proud of his ancestry and status. He asks his son to maintain it by establishing a factory of his own in Bombay. He tells his son to consult his wife and says that "it is important for a man's happiness that his wife also should be contended and happy."  

Gulsarilal's maxim is not at all true, because he does not care for the love of his wife, even he does not want to see her. He realises the fact and he feels embarrassed. Vishnu is tried of comfortable and cozy living. Gautam, a friend of Vishnu is a man of ideals and he wants Vishnu to


6Ibid., p. 18.
participate in the kind of social service he proposes to initiate. Gautam admires Vishnu's mother, Sarala Devi. He says that Vishnu's mother is the ideal for him. She has been serving the people selflessly ignoring her comfort in her life. Gautam says, "How I admire your mother. She has shaken off everything, all the things that due to her station in life had been piled on to her." His opinion of Vishnu's father is not complimentary. He says "He is to me the worst type of man attached to money and money making and existing not as a man but only through the things he possess, like his car, his house, his mistress. Women and Gold, as Sri Rama Krishna has said these are the worst temptations in the life of man and your father has not only tested of them but has swallowed them whole."

Telling the truth, Gautam praises his mother and condemns the life of Gulzarilal. He pleads with Vishnu not to follow the way of his father. Sarala Devi wants her son to lead a life based on principles. She admonishes her son,

8Ibid., p. 21.
and says that "you are becoming like your father. In everything you are like him. You care for nothing but money and clothes and business-Oh! Vishnu, Vishnu."  

Here, we find a kind of aversion towards her husband Gulsari Lal. Regarding the illicit contact between Kusum and Gulsari Lal, the narrator nicely explains that Kusum is seeking a permanent place in the family of Gulsari Lal. She suggests her intention to Gulsari Lal by saying "please don't have your car parked, outside my house. It creates a very bad impression."  

She wants Gulsari Lal to take legal divorce from his wife, Sarala Devi. She thinks of her position and his position in the society. She tells him that the whole world is taking divorce why can't he. She feels unhappy because Gulsari Lal does not take any active step in this matter. Just to taunt him, she further says that "What am I to you? A moment's pleasure, a two anna toy to be played with and broken and thrown aside."  

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10Ibid., p. 30.  
11Ibid., p. 31.
This offends Gulzarilal and he proceeds further to get a legal divorce from his wife. The married life of Gulzarilal and Sarala Devi from start finish goes wrong. They are poles apart in their attitude and in their understanding of the world. She is always active and has many interests and fails to include her husband interest in her scheme of things. This causes frustration in both. Gulzarilal comes to Sarala Devi to seek her opinion on divorce. She wants to lead a lonely life, free from all the worldly things, which are obstacles for a person to achieve something, which is above the mundane sphere. So she tells her husband "I am grateful, that I am alone atlast, and can live the way I like."12

Sarala Devi wants to have a life which is not possible for an ordinary woman. She says she is grateful to her husband if he leaves her alone to lead a life according to her wish and desire. Gulzarilal tells Sarala Devi,

"We have a Hindu-code Bill now."13
She replies,

"If you like she said meekly. I am ready to sign

13 Ibid., p. 51.
Sarala Devi is firm in her detachment from her husband and she wants to be attached always to the people who are in need really. She asks her husband to help the Bundi Busti people, for which Gulzarilal does not respect her word, nor speaks of such poor people. His world is classical and aristocratic and he does not have any interest in his wife world. She criticises the world of Gulzarilal and says "I know what you mean when you speak of society, you mean the people like yourself who have houses and cars and go clubs, for you only these people are society, only they are human."15

When Sarala Devi asks her son Vishnu, to help poor people in Bundi Busti, then Brij Mohan interrupts their conversation, and says: "Why do you trouble the boy? These are the things are all very well for old women like you whose life is finished, but this boy has something better to occupy his time."16

15Ibid., p. 52.
16Ibid., p. 144.
Brij Mohan is not at all interested in Sarala Devi's words and he wishes her to go to her husband and have a happy life with him. Vishnu asks his mother about her divorce. After having a positive response from his mother, he does not make any comment on it. He turns the pages of the 'Gita' and feels unhappy, though in principle he had nothing against divorce. Reading the Gita, he finds "Treating alike pleasure and pain, gain and loss, victory and defeat, then get ready for battle."\(^{17}\)

The philosophy embodies in the above citation is unquestionably true. But, for Vishnu, there is not battle to enter in. Sarala Devi wants him to do good to the poor without any selfish interest. She asks him not to be the son of merchant. She asks him to fling into the world and render selfless service to the humanity. Vishnu cannot understand the words of his mother. He reflects: "Fling yourself where, how? Then get ready for battle - but there was no battle he could take part in, achieving with unspent strength though he was. "That is all I ever hear, great long words which sound so beautiful but when you want something more, there is nothing, nothing."\(^{18}\)


\(^{18}\) Ibid., p. 146.
Vishnu, the son of a mother, of very high idealism like Serala Devi appears as a character not innocent but bewildered and vassillating. Married to a temeprmental young women and caught between the money-making ways of Gulzarilal and the social ethic of a highly emotional mother, Vishnu appears a sort of comic character or in other words spiritless hero. Satirical in parts Get Ready for Battle once again demonstrates that Jhabvela, with each novel, goes from strength to strength in dramatising the tensions within the society. The title of the novel under review comes from the Gita and ironically suggests that all situations are not Kurukshetra situations and all are not capable like Arjuna to feel the complexity of confrontation. The narrative strategy in the novel is such that trivial issues like the relationship between Gulzarilal and Kusum are placed in a design which absorbs into itself more serious issues like marriage and divorce, selfishness and self sacrifice and culture.