CHAPTER TWO

SOCIETAL DEROGATION OF WOMEN

She [woman] had been a creature trampled through the centuries, living a silently suffering, sacrificing, shadowy, supine existence, just bearing and rearing children, cooking and tending the house, languishing in the dark corners of a joint family household, regarded as inauspicious, a woman with a white foot and forehead, if fated to be a widow, who was even dragged to the pyre, or married before her fifteenth year to a man of fifty years. (Meena Shirwadkar Image of Woman in the Indo-Anglian Fiction 145)

As Homo sapiens, man is the male of the species and woman, the female of the species. Man is considered as the stronger sex because of his masculinity and woman, the weaker sex because of her femininity. Hence, woman has been treated as the inferior sex and as Sherry B. Ortner argues: "The secondary status of women in society is one of the true universals, a pan-cultural fact" (qtd. in "Feminist scholarship and the social construction of woman" 9).
Culture is male-oriented and that results in the suppression of women down the ages. Indian culture has been inflicting its own peculiar kind of traditional restrictions upon women. In Indian society, the roles of women and the images of them are developed not from the exigencies of biology and social conditions but from the deep-rooted myths and legends, religion and culture. Myths and ideals are sought to hold the traditional and religious ideas about women and its impact on controlling women's daily life. In the West, the Virgin Mary is hardly presented as a model that ought to be emulated, whereas in India the mythological Sita in Ramayana is considered as the ideal and the role-model for womanhood. Sita exemplifies the qualities of pativrata by being a true and devoted wife to Rama. She is seen as the epitome of the virtues of a wife. Therefore, female children's behaviour is given a pattern by citing the image of Sita and they are psychologically made to accept that the wife-role is pre-eminent for them and that they should get themselves prepared for the occasion of marriage.

The concept of the female in Hinduism presents an important duality. On the one hand, the woman becomes benevolent -- the bestower; and on the other, she becomes malevolent -- the
destroyer. As Susan Wadley observes,

A popular statement characterizes the goddess in all her manifestations thus: 'in times of prosperity she indeed is Lakshmi, who bestows prosperity in the homes of men; and in times of misfortune, she herself becomes the goddess of misfortune and brings about ruin'. ("Women and the Hindu Tradition" 24)

These religious ideas about women are quite damaging to their individual life. In the male-dominated society they are praised at times for prosperity and blamed at times for crisis. This tendency leads to dowry harassments, claiming more dowries at the time of marriage and even after marriage, where woman is treated as a piece of property. Indian women suffer between these two extremes: one which equates her to a status of goddess and the other which considers her existence as entirely dependent on the male-governed social-structures, treating her as a piece of property to be passed on from one man to another. "Both these images," as Jasbir Jain observes, "successfully combine to keep her out of the mainstream and deny her personhood" ("The Feminist Perspective" 67). Therefore, she has no individual identity in this society.
The routine activities of women in the Indian society are also conditioned by myths, legends, and religions, the carriers of traditional ideas. Many restrictions imposed on women and the traditional ideals instilled in their mind from childhood, have made them accept the inferior status without questioning. Different codes of behaviour are set for men and women. "Outer space is reserved for men, inner place belongs to women" (Elizabeth Janeway Man's World, Women's Place 7). Hence, women are taught not to come out of home. Laws of Manu gives a list of basic rules only for women's behaviour and duties and not for men's. To have a better understanding of the oppressed condition of women, a few rules can be cited as illustrations from the book:

By a young girl, by a young woman, or even by an aged one, nothing must be done independently, even in her house.

In childhood a female must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband, when her lord is dead, to her sons; a woman must never be independent.

She who controlling her thoughts, words, and deeds, never slights her lord, resides (after death) with her husband (in heaven), and is
called a virtuous (wife).

Day and night, women must be kept in dependency by the males (of) their (families), and if they attach themselves to sensual enjoyment, they must be kept under one's control... (qtd. in "Women and the Hindu Tradition" 30-31)

Self-surrender, obedience, sacrifice, endurance, acceptance, loyalty and passivity are the expected qualities of a woman and she is trained to exhibit only them. Sati, child marriage, widow harassment, demands of dowry, denial of education are some of the atrocities committed on women.

The condition of women in the pre-Independent India was worse and more pathetic than in the later period. With the dawn of Independence, the position of women underwent a little change. The cruel practice of Sati was abolished. Widow-remarriage was encouraged. Woman's marriageable age was raised with the passing of the Sharada Act. Education and job opportunities were given to them. The Indian constitution sanctioned equality to them.

However, in social life, the status of women has not improved. Modern Indian women are not completely independent.
They are still made to depend on men, whatever be the relationship:

The father protects the woman during childhood, the husband during her youth and the son during her old age. (Alladi Uma Woman and Her Family 2)

This extraordinary protection denies women the freedom and individual identity and proves that Indian society has always been highly patriarchal. In India, legal and constitutional rights are already extensively available to women. The problem is that they are not adequately used. Indian women suffer because of the continuing gap between political ideals and realities. M.J. Antony observes,

While women in the West had to fight for over a century to get some of their basic rights, like the right to vote, the Constitution of India gave women here equal rights with men from the beginning. Unfortunately, women in this country are mostly unaware of their rights because of illiteracy and the oppressive tradition. (Women's Rights 1)

Therefore, creating an awareness about the available rights and opportunities becomes the chief objective of Indian
feminism. No doubt, both education and the influx of Western culture have brought about a change of attitude in Indian women. But with their knowledge of the external world and by aping the western society, Indian women have only become more westernized rather than emancipated. The tendency to follow the western ways of living and at the same time, the addiction to Indian male-oriented culture have placed Indian women in a traumatic situation. The result is, they are still victimized by the victimizer in the tradition-bound society. In this context, Shyam M. Asnani's observation is proved right:

... under the western influence only surface changes have taken place in the Indian society. Its core remains unaffected. ("Jhabvala's Novels" 45)

Women cannot be fully liberated in India, where the traditional values are still operative. In the post-Independence India, many young women are educated, modern in outlook and liberal minded. But, they have to struggle against their traditional elders, which symbolizes the conflict between tradition and modernity. While the younger women desire to be informed, to be free and to be individuals, they find the old customs, practices and
standards as impediments to their progress towards emancipation. They often find parents, especially mothers, restricting their aspirations. Thus, in the Indian society mothers seem to be apathetic towards their daughters and this exposes nothing but the real condition of women oppressing women. The notion that women are their own enemies, is probably the most widely expressed view wherever women's issues are discussed. The prevailing condition of women, as observed by Srilatha Batliwala is pathetic:

Women were forced not only to accept the ideology and practice of male supremacy, but to inculcate these values in their daughters -- and their sons. Over the centuries, therefore, with no access to different ideas nor opportunity to challenge the prevailing order, women became willing, unquestioning participants... and took the onus of socialising their offspring to accept the ideology of gender inequality. ("Why do Women Oppress Women?" iii)

Thus women, within the family, themselves, ironically become the chief instrument in transmitting the patriarchal ideology which they internalize to form part of their own
Consciousness. Therefore, liberal-minded young girls are discouraged by the tradition-conscious mothers. Ruth Jhabvala's early novels present this dichotomy between daughters and mothers effectively since her presentation in literature owes to her minute observation of the world around. Ruth Jhabvala's early novels which include To Whom She Will, The Nature of Passion, The Householder and Get Ready For Battle, picture the problems of women in modern India. The milieu of her early novels is the post-Independence Indian society. In spite of all its shortcomings, Jhabvala is seen tolerant towards the Indian social reality in this initial phase. She presents modern Indian woman caught between the conflicting forces of life. At one side she talks about the development of the condition of women and at the other, she discusses the problems of women in this society where traditional taboos still persist behind the facade of modernity. While stating arguments from both sides, Jhabvala does not take sides. She presents the contemporary scene as it exists. Ramlal Agarwal rightly observes Jhabvala's verisimilitude, in his book Ruth Prawer Jhabvala:

Jhabvala is interested in society and social fact, or social reality. To a casual observer, Indian society appears to be modern, and he is likely to carry the impression that Indians
are liberated from the clutches of time-worn traditions and that Indian women can now take up positions with men. But in reality those who seem modern are more backward, and those who advocate women’s liberation are the most traditional. It is this reality with which Jhabvala’s novel is concerned. (22)

Ruth Jhabvala’s presentation becomes realistic. She presents the Indian middle class aspiration towards sophistication, westernization, glamour and power. She also brings out the caste-consciousness prevailing in the Indian families. Her authentic portrayal of Indian families and customs justifies what Vasant Shahane calls "matter-of-fact realism" (Ruth Prawer Jhabvala 116). Jhabvala presents people with their customs and mannerisms saturated in purely Indian culture. For instance, when the birth of a female child is announced to the family, Lalaji, the grandfather, in the novel The Nature of Passion, immediately opens his mouth to utter his wish:

How beautiful she will be, like my Nimmi, like a queen. Such a wedding we will make for her, [new-born child], the best husband in the whole of Hindustan we will get for her, the richest, the fairest…(15)
It is true that in the Indian society, talk of marriage arises at the birth of the female children. These female children are brought up only to be married off when the time comes and they are made to accept that "wedding is the most important event of a girl's life" (Gamma "She is not afraid to dare: An Interview with Taslima Nasreen" xiv). Even in the advanced societies where, as Shahida Lateef observes,

... concessions to modernity have raised the age of marriage, increased educational levels and extended the available career opportunities for women, the desirability of marriage as the pre-eminent goal for women continues to be stressed. (Muslim Women in India 126)

The conventional duties of a woman are taught to them: "Every girl has to be married, what else is there?" (The Nature of Passion 153-154); "It is only by fulfilling the work laid down for her, by doing her duty by her husband and her husband's family, that a girl will attain to goodness and beauty in the sight of God" (The Nature of Passion 127).

The intellectual aspect of the girl is not given importance. Education for women is considered "a waste of time and of
good money" *(The Nature of Passion 16)* by the family elders. As Taslima Nasreen observes,

> Everybody thinks that girls don't need to go to school, they should only learn how to... write a little bit because they would have to write to their husbands. The only interest of educating girls is to allow them to have a better marriage. So the main goal of a girl's life is her wedding. ("She is not afraid to dare" xiv)

Therefore, education is given to women with much regret and restriction. When a girl is seen liberal minded in her behaviour, immediately, education is blamed for her sense of liberty, which a woman should not exercise in the Indian society.

Lalaji's list of women's duties reflects the intensity of the hold on traditional ideas about women prevailing in the Indian society:

> A family was not a family, a home not a home, unless there was a women's quarter in which the women could lead their own lives. Demure daughters-in-law, stern mothers-in-law, widowed
aunts, all pounding spices, sifting rice, scolding servants, washing babies; the stone jars of rice and lentils, the vat of boiling milk, the barbecue, the pump in the courtyard; quarrels and recriminations and occasional songs, nostalgic peasant songs or plaintive hymns winding round the ceaseless kitchen noises -- these constituted the necessary, if unconsidered, background to a man's life. (The Nature of Passion 112)

At the same time, Jhabvala portrays the younger generation opposing these traditional assumptions. They refuse to abide by the traditional feminine roles and strive for modern, fashionable ways of living as does Nimmi in The Nature of Passion:

... it is very bad that our family is so old-fashioned.... They understand nothing. For instance, they do not understand that it is fashionable for a girl to go to Club and have her hair cut and meet young men. They think all these things are bad because they do not understand them.(153)

Despite the traditional restrictions, Jhabvala's heroines
are provided with education and employment. At this juncture, Jhabvala underscores the traits of liberal and moderate feminism, stressing the need for financial independence for women through education and employment. Her women go out to learn and work "side by side with men" (To Whom She Will 140). Women of the Ladies' Committees are proud "to see our daughters educated side by side with our sons" (32). They feel elated over the uplift of women: "The emancipation of women is one of the greatest achievements of our modern age" (32). They are grateful to the modern society which is "sufficiently advanced to think of women as something more than a mere marriageable commodity" (32).

Though these young women are allowed to learn and earn, their mothers want them to be married off soon. The daughter's wish to choose her husband is questioned. It is often refused, since in the Indian context, "the idea of female input in the choosing of a mate is traditionally regarded as a social evil" (Laurie Sucher 130). Indian social stratification does not favour a girl of one caste to marry a man of another caste and those who break this norm are open to criticism by the caste-ridden society. Hence families do not allow inter-caste, inter-communal marriages. Jhabvala's young women, who select their fiance out of their
choice have been defeated by the sheer norms of the convention-oriented society. *To Whom She Will* and *The Nature of Passion* are built on this theme.

Amrita, an educated Bengali employee falls in love with Hari, a tradition-bound Punjabi young man. Her courtship fails because of the caste-class consciousness of the family members. In fact, as Shantha Krishnaswamy observes,

> While the disparity between her aspiration and reality given enough room for the author's exploration of the comic possibilities inherent in the incongruities of the situation, it is also indicative of how the modern young woman in India is not really so 'mod' after all; in the slow but gradual transition of a tradition-bound society, the woman is often restrained by the forces of conventions and Jhabvala's women do not have the strength of will to transcend such restrictions. (292-293)

Even the so-called emancipated women like Radha, who recommends her daughter to cut her hair short after the latest fashion, does not approve of Amrita's affair with Hari, not considering her own love marriage with Nirad
Chakravarthy, which happens to be an inter-communal marriage. She denies her daughter the freedom given to her by her father, Rai Bahadur and plays an oppressive, domineering role of a mother. Rai Bahadur's words of resentment at Radha is equally an attack on tradition-oriented mothers:

It is shameful that you do not allow your child the liberty which your parents allowed you; that you should revert to the -- the primitive custom that I took pains to eradicate from our family. (To Whom She Will 179)

Though Radha believes in "women's freedom and the Hindu Code Bill"(103), as a mother she admits that "it is quite different when one thinks of one's own daughter"(103). If Amrita's predicament in a sophisticated family remains to be so, that of Nimmi's in an orthodox joint family could never be measured. From the beginning of the novel, The Nature of Passion, Nimmi is pictured as rebellious, opposing her family's traditional way of living. As Haydn Moore Williams finds,

... she [Nimmi] rebels against the tyranny of the family, the narrowness of the life of the
women's quarters and the system of arranged marriages with dowries. Instead she longs for a gay emancipated life...(The Fiction of Ruth Prawer Jhabvala 21)

The defiant Nimmi is contrasted with the obedient Usha, her sister, who willingly accepts whatever her family decides for her. She is ready to marry a man whom she hardly knows, for she is satisfied with the hope that "afterwards there will be plenty of time to know him" (The Nature of Passion 154). She is no better than her mother who "sticks to the tradition that a girl should be trained for marriage and motherhood and thinks that college education is pernicious" (Meena Shirwadkar 43). But Nimmi stands against these views. She enters college, visits a club with her girl-friend, Rajen, who comes from a very modern family. It is in that club that she meets Pheroze, a Parsi boy and is soon infatuated with him. They start visiting restaurants and various places. Her parents, when they are informed about Nimmi's affair feel disgraced and dishonoured:

If a girl was seen out in public places with a young man -- and worse, much worse, with a young man from a different community -- her reputation in her own community would suffer; which would make it very difficult to find a
suitable husband for her. So the only thing to do when there was a threat to the reputation was to find the husband, quickly, at once, before the canker spread. (The Nature of Passion 165)

It is obvious that in India, for fear of the society, parents restrict the activities of their daughters. While the society is concerned about a girl’s character, it just closes its eyes to the behaviour of the boys. Jhabvala exposes this double standard of the society and presents how girls are controlled by the traditional codes.

To be a girl in such a society proves terrible for Nimmi. She finds it impossible to cope with her tradition-oriented family members. She wishes she were a daughter of Rajen's parents, who are endowed with a broader knowledge of life. For, they not only consider arranged marriage a primitive custom which should not be allowed, but never speak of marriage. During the course of their discussion, when Rajen asks, "if your parents arrange for your sisters, will they not also arrange for you?", Nimmi retorts: "Oh, I will never marry!" (The Nature of Passion 135). But unfortunately, both Nimmi and Amirta are made to succumb to tradition. While claiming individual rights for women, Jhabvala does not fail
to point out that these

... youngsters, with false pretensions to independence and modernism, have not been able to grow out of their mental servitude. Their responses, mental processes, attitudes, and sentiments are too much conditioned by a social structure in which family bonds are over-powering and parental affection excessively possessive. (Shayam M. Asnani "Jhabvala's Novels" 41)

It is true that they do not strive to achieve what they want and they lack the courage to face the crisis. Ultimately, as Shanta Krishnaswamy finds, they are "content with finding their niche of fulfilment, their reconciliation with life in marriages arranged by the elders in the family" (290). Jhabvala has nothing but sympathy for such characters.

In the Indian society, parents get their daughters married too early to prevent love marriages. Early marriages are arranged by parents in order to maintain their social status and the dignity of their families. Early marriages, which are common in India, are ironically commented at by Jhabvala. The title of her first novel To Whom She Will
which is extracted from the Panchatantra, translated by H. Ryder, signifies the theme of early marriage.

For if she bides a maiden still
She gives herself to whom she will
Then marry her in tender age
So warns the heaven-begotten sage. (qtd. in Laurie Sucher The Fiction of Ruth Prawer Jhabvala 14)

Laurie Sucher explores the corresponding relationship between the novel and the Panchatantra:

The Panchatantra prescribes an entire code of manners, in this detail specifying that a girl must be married before the onset of puberty, to 'forestall any mishap to her virginity and to permit her mother-in-law to train her in household ways before she develops strong tendencies of her own.' The warning of the 'heaven begotten sage' rests unheeded in the case of Anirita, who valiantly, if naively, attempts to give herself to whom she will: thereby hangs the plot of the novel. (14)

Most of the women characters -- Mrs. Anand, Prema, Mohini in To Whom She Will and Phuphiji, Rani, Shanta's mother in The Nature of Passion -- are betrothed in childhood and married
at an early age. Jhabvala ridicules this practice of the contemporary Indian society. When Om in *The Nature of Passion* plans her daughter's marriage, Jhabvala seems to mock at the practice of deciding early marriages for girls:

> When she is seven, I will find a good husband and betroth her. Then she can come back to the house and learn from mother and her aunts to make chapatis and mango pickle. When she has learnt that well, and also how to manage servants and children, she can go to her husband's house and be a credit to us there.(17)

Om's ideas about women are entrenched in tradition. Further, when the Ladies' Committees in *To Whom She Will* take pride in abolishing the idea of early marriage, one of its members reminds that her sweeper's daughter has been married at twelve recently. When approached from a feminist standpoint, Jhabvala satirizes this hypocrisy and lashes at the practice of early marriage through Rajen's father, who considers it

> ... a primitive custom to marry girls young, without giving them any education, even if you can afford it, or without letting them see anything of the world... this is what retards
our progress. (The Nature of Passion 135)

What Jhabvala underlines here is that the dominance of primitive custom over modern ideas of liberation still finds its existence in contemporary India.

Ruth Jhabvala is keen to point out the gap between theory and practice in the field of women's emancipation. Modernity and westernization have brought about only superficial changes. A few women, like Amrita, not all, are allowed to dress after the latest fashion. For instance, Nimmi is restricted. But, the rebellious Nimmi has had her hair cut short. To Nimmi, cutting the hair is an act of emancipation. As Haydn Moore Williams observes:

The symbol of emancipation for Nimmi is to have her hair cut short. Yet even this modest aspiration seems daring in the suffocating atmosphere of her orthodox family life. (The Fiction of Ruth Prawer Jhabvala 21)

Much criticism comes directly from the women's quarter and these traditional Indian women could not approve of such activities as visiting clubs, playing tennis, wearing shorts, dressing fashionably and the like. In fact, they blame education for these activities. They refuse to accept
women's independence and equality. They do not wish for any change or improvement in the traditional roles of women. Therefore, women like Nimmi are warned and defeated by the conservative women:

A girl of that age has no right to enjoy herself! She should be managing a household and bearing children and looking after a husband.... Eighteen years old she is. Is that an age for her to go and play at a college and show her face to all the world? (The Nature of Passion 68)

The conflict between the modern, liberal minded women and the traditional parents becomes a never-ending battle, in which traditional forces are all powerful. In such conditions women's emancipation seems to be an illusion and Nimmi realizes this fact:

The independence on which she [Nimmi] had so prided herself, her differentness from the other women in her family, were only an illusion. In reality her position was no different from Usha's and ultimately, from Shanta's. (182)

Thus, younger women find it difficult to get their desires
fulfilled. While in *To Whom She Will* and *The Nature of Passion*, Jhabvala discusses the problems of liberal minded women before their marriage -- in attempting to have their life as they plan or wish or to choose their partners -- the later novels *The Householder* and *Get Ready For Battle* picture the predicament of women after their marriage. In these two novels and in some of her short stories like "Widow", "A Loss of Faith," "A Bad Woman", Ruth Jhabvala presents Indian domestic life with its joint family system, wife-beating, dowry harassments, harassments by in-laws and widow harassments.

The novel *The Householder* revolves around a couple, Prem and Indu, who are married at an early age. Early marriage has deprived them "of all joy and of any purpose in life" (Rupinderjit Saini "Economic Entrapment" 3). As Yasmine Gooneratne observes,

Indu and Prem are little more than children, innocents... doing their best to conduct themselves according to the traditional 'rules' governing the adult world to which marriage has brought them. (*Silence, Exile and Cunning* 122)

Indu remains a stranger to Prem even after a long time of
their marriage. Prem's relationship with Indu, as tradition insists on him, is possessive and domineering. His male-dominated instinct demands the traditional duties of a housewife: "it was not right for a wife to go to sleep before she had served her husband however late he might come" (The Householder 62). When Prem feels over-burdened with family responsibilities, his male-dominated spirit makes him refuse Indu's solution to the problem. But, this economical crisis creates in him a great dislike for Indu.

Indu, on the other hand, suffers in silence, like any Indian housewife. Here, Ruth Jhabvala presents how immaturity leads to incompatibility between the partners.

The clash of egos becomes another major impediment to compatibility between husband and wife. When Indu's mother invites her at the time of his mother's visit to his house, Prem does not permit her to go. His male-ego is the expression of the unconscious patriarchal spirit in him. But this time, Indu surprisingly reacts: "Who are you to forbid me?" (68). Unhesitatingly, she goes out of the home and leaves 'no message' for Prem. Indu's unpremeditated reaction is due to the outburst of suppressed feelings and emotions. Here, one could notice the passive feminine in Indu yielding place to the active feminine, thereby she reveals the traits
of a New Woman. As Gail Cunningham defines,

The New Woman had high ideals; she examined the world from an intelligent and informed base, and if what she saw led her to the conclusion that accepted standards were unjust or inadequate then she would try to go her own way according to her own principles. (The New Woman 10)

Prem represents the male-chauvinistic principle which does not care to treat woman as an individual human being. But, the sudden reaction of Indu immediately challenges his domineering mind and he repeatedly questions: "Why did she go? Who told her to go? She knew very well that he had forbidden it. Yet she had completely ignored his wishes... even his existence" (The Householder 114). The conventional-minded Prem finds that he has not been a successful husband for he has not been able to make her obedient and respectful. It is a fact that Indian husbands expect implicit obedience from their wives and Prem is no exception. Eventually, the calm after his angry-storm leads him to self-realization: "Who am I to forbid?" (69). It is Ruth Jhabvala's feministic concern for women, that has brought about this realization on the part of Prem.
Gradually he learns that he should respect Indu's feelings also. He realizes that he has been selfish and mean and that she has the right to go away from him. His ego gets softened in her absence and he grows 'fond of her'. Ruth Jhabvala, thus, strikes the importance of love rather than power in a family. In a way she blends feminism with "familism" (Nicholas Davidson The Failure of Feminism 340) and calls for the need of coexistence, of co-operation and compromise in family life. She also holds the view that feminism is one which is concerned with both the intellect and the emotion, promoting understanding and love between husband and wife.

Ruth Jhabvala in this novel, does not fail to present the characteristic battle between the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law, a peculiar Indian problem -- "the one with overt accusations, the other with silent hostility or at the most obliquely expressed wrath" (Meena Belliappa "A study of Jhabvala's Fiction" 75). The conflict between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law is due to power dominance. When the new bride arrives, it is the position of the mother-in-law which is questioned. While the mother-in-law fights to retain her power; the daughter-in-law tries to gain power. By presenting the miserable condition of the daughter-in-law, Ruth Jhabvala underscores the plight of women oppressing women not only in the relationship between mothers and
daughters but also between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law; and also she brings out the relationship between husband, wife and mother-in-law in the Indian context.

Prem's mother's arrival causes displeasure between Prem and Indu. Prem's mother holds a list of complaints against Indu: "She is not very much educated... she is not even very good at household duties(85); "she has bad temper also"(96). She is dissatisfied with the things she has brought from her parental home as dowry. She always criticizes her activities. But as a mother, she pets Prem as a child. In the absence of Indu, she prepares various delicious dishes for Prem. She never allows her son to talk freely with Indu and does not care disturbing their privacy. She very often intervenes between them unnecessarily, even at bed time. It becomes true that a good mother often turns out to be a bad mother-in-law and this is something to be studied in relation to Freudian psychology. Knowingly or unknowingly Indians have grasped this sense of jealousy. Hence, perhaps, is the custom of giving "compensation" for the mother-in-law of the bride at the time of marriage for having brought up the bridegroom -- which is called "māmiyār sīr" [māmiyār sīr] in the area around Karaikudi in Tamilnad. This is a peculiar condition of a particular community in Karaikudi.
Ruth Jhabvala stresses the essential need of sex in conjugal relationship to make it a happy life. For it dissolves the ego of the couple and promotes better understanding between them. Sex, after a short separation, leads to reconciliation between Prem and Indu. Prem realizes the inconvenience of his mother's presence. His want of privacy makes him plan to send his mother to his sister's house without hurting his mother. Perhaps, as Shanta Krishnaswamy remarks, "This is the only decisive action he takes in the whole story and in this he is successful" (302). The happy ending is suggestive of the optimism on the part of the writer. At the end of the novel, Prem and Indu are shown harmonious enough to invite a friend for dinner, to bestow their hospitality. Indu, a stranger initially, turns out to be Prem's best friend at the end. Prem also discovers that "his malady was not as much economic as emotional" (R.S. Singh "Ironic Vision" 155-156). Thus, Ruth Jhabvala presents the evils of early marriage and the miseries of women in the joint family system. Ruth Jhabvala's short story "The Interview" also treats the problem of women in joint family system. In the institution of marriage, women have to abide by traditional rules. Her aims and aspirations, dreams and expectations get shattered into pieces when she faces the hard realities of marital life. She has to submit to man's cruelty and infidelity. Prema's
reaction, in *To Whom She Will*, to a story which she reads strikes a pathetic note:

"Unhappily married," she went on... "Her husband -- he is bad. He treats her badly. He -- he goes to other women". And then the tears began to flow more quickly and her voice sobbed: "My life", she cried, "my life exactly!" (14)

This seems to be the saddest tale of many a woman in Indian society. Ruth Jhabvala's another short story "On Bail" narrates the story of a sinful husband and a virtuous wife. Rajee, the husband, is a cheat. He cheats not only the public but also his own wife, the narrator. When Rajee is arrested for cheating, the narrator, pleads bail for her husband. Women, like the narrator of this story, consider their husbands' pseudo-love as true one. They are prepared to sacrifice to any extent for their husbands believing that they are performing the role of *Pativrata*. But in reality, these women are left alone to weep out their plight. Some of them are provided with wealth and comforts by their husbands, as in the case of Prema in *To Whom She Will*, but they too suffer: "She sits in the middle of all this expensive furniture, carpets, silver, many servants, but her heart is breaking inside her" (14-15). Even if their husbands
arrive late at home every night, they do passively wait for them. They do not have the courage to question them, in fact, they are denied the right to question their faithless husbands. Some are so conditioned by society that they accept their husbands' infidelity as a matter of course, as does Shantha in The Nature of Passion

...she realized that he (Om) was going to a party with friends;... They would drink a lot and there would be dancing girls.... They were bad women, this was all she knew about them. But she accepted them, because everyone's husband went to such bad women. It was just something a wife had to pretend she did not know about.(129)

Om reminds one of Vishnu in Get Ready For Battle. He frequents fashionable parties and clubs and flirts with dancing girls. He is fascinated by young girls like Gogo and Sumi. His relationship with Sumi rouses suspicion in his wife, Mala who can only warn Sumi, not Vishnu:

'Sumi, do you think it is right for a young unmarried girl to go into a bazar and sit in a shop with two men?'...'Are you married to my husband?... How do you ever expect to be
married if you behave like this? What family will take you?' (106-107)

Home becomes a sort of prison to many women. While Vishnu spends most of his time outside home in dalliance, Mala remains alone at home and hence shouts: "You (Vishnu) have the office, you have your friends. You drive off in your car and do what you like, while I sit here only and wait for the day to be finished" (36). Desolated women like Prema, Shanta and Mala are pinned down to that one private life and are made to suffer alone. They study the difference between men's way of life and those of women.

The men had two lives, the women only one. If the men had business rivalries, they could forget them in private life.... For the women there was only that private family life, where a grievance was a grievance for ever and for all occasions. (The Nature of Passion 23)

To shed such grievances modern women come out of home and indulge in social activities. It relieves them from their loneliness. To Tarla, in To Whom She Will, "ladies' committees were her passion, her rich compensation for an unsatisfactory husband" (26). Women's dissatisfaction and disappointment in the inner life drive them to outer social
activities. Lack of harmony in family life makes solace in some organizations or 'Cultural Dias' as in the case of Mrs. Kaul in A Backward Place. She feels like 'a bird in a gilded cage':

Mr. Kaul all day in his office, and always committees and meetings and not a moment to spare for her; and the children away at boarding school (naturally, one wanted only the best for one's children) -- who was there for her? who needed her? she sat here in this big house, perhaps people envied her, but -- ah, if they only knew, if they could only read into her heart.(170)

For some women, the marital bond seems to be a total fiasco and so they dedicate the rest of their lives to the cause of the down trodden. Sarla Devi in Get Ready For Battle quits the family and evolves into a full-time social worker. The idealistic Sarla Devi finds it difficult to adjust with her materialistic husband, Gulzari Lal, who fails to cherish her ideals. This leads to their estrangement. When the novel opens, the reader is informed that they have been separated for ten years and that Sarla Devi is leading an independent life. Involving in social activities gives her pleasure,
unlike the family life which imprisons her. Hence, when asked for divorce by her husband, she is "ready to sign anything" (52) he wants and she becomes the champion of the poor people of Bundi Busti. As Haydn Moore Williams puts it,

In championing the unfortunate refugees of Bundi Busti she finds herself locked in battle with her husband and the official 'do-gooders'. When this cause too is lost (the leader of the refugees is bribed into acquiescence), she refuses to give up and turns to the reclamation of prostitutes from the red-light district of Old Delhi. A ridiculous but noble figure, Sarla Devi gets ready to do battle once more, and we know she will lose this one too. ("The Yogi and The Babbitt" 85)

Her sincere efforts to help the poor people are discouraged by the corrupted society. Ultimately she fails as a social worker too. Sarla Devi recalls Ila Das, of Anita Desai's Fire on the Mountain, who suffers from a rape-murder for protesting against marrying a seven year old daughter to a widower of six children. Thus, those who work to uplift the down-trodden and the suffering people are defeated. It is impossible for a single woman to fight against the odds of
the society. Hence, Jhabvala advocates mass involvement for revolting against the vices and injustices of the society.

Ruth Jhabvala's short story, "In a Great Man's House" pictures the condition of home as prison for women in its grimness. Khan Sahib almost keeps his wife, Hamida in house-arrest and does not allow her to attend her sister Roxana's wedding. For, her presence is 'needed' in the home to 'massage' his legs. Hamida has no other way than to obey Khan Sahib. Sofia, in "Desecration", also feels lonely and isolated. But she finds an escape route through her sexual affair with the Superintendent of Police. Her sexual adventure with this police officer drives her to commit suicide. In this short story, Jhabvala deals with a traditional theme. As Laurie Sucher confirms, "the danger inherent in sexual knowledge for women is an ancient and archetypal theme"(83).

Ruth Jhabvala discusses the problem of widow-remarriage in Get Read For Battle. She presents the paradoxical condition of women -- one has to sacrifice her status as a wife to another woman who is a widow. Though the Widow-Remarriage Act was passed in 1856, the society fails to accept the law in practice. It is a pity that the society which favours a
spinster marrying a widower, does not permit a widow to marry a bachelor or a widower. Kusum, a widow, becomes a mistress to Gulzari Lal. She realises her position: "What am I to you? A moment's pleasure, a two anna toy to be played with and broken and thrown aside"(31). It is the fear of the public or society that causes a sense of guilt in her. She insists to Gulzari Lal, "Please, don't have your car parked outside my house. It creates a bad impression"(30), and at another time, "it was wrong for me to come to you so often, it will make people think ill of me"(30). But she is so committed to Gulzari Lal's family that in the absence of Sarla Devi, the family members treat her as mother and mother-in-law. Hence, to serve without a sense of guilt, she pleads on her knees to Gulzari Lal to give her the status of a legal wife. She wants Gulzari Lal to divorce Sarla Devi and remarry her.

Gulzari Lal's procrastination in divorcing Sarla Devi and remarrying Kusum reveals his hypocrisy. He fears that divorce would spoil his social image. But the irony is: he keeps a mistress. Though he is separated from his wife long back, in the eyes of the public he wishes to remain the husband of Sarla Devi. For him "to keep a mistress was different: it was an old-established custom and one that he
had every right to follow"(46). His pretensions reveal his male-dominated spirit that man is free to do anything. Ruth Jhabvala here attacks the double standard of the society. Persuaded by Kusum, who "had now become modern and decided that mistresses were no longer socially feasible and that remarried widows were"(46), he decides to divorce his wife and remarry Kusum. Thus, Jhabvala, while presenting the paradoxical situation of women, exposes Indian society with its multifarious layers of reality.

The predicament of Sumi, in Get Ready For Battle pictures the evils of dowry system which is still existing in the Indian society. Three of her sisters are married to poor husbands and her father finds it difficult to marry off Sumi and two of her younger sisters because he could not afford a sumptuous amount of dowry. Sumi stays with one of her married sisters who exploits her. Hard work and exploitation drive her to a pitiable condition, and she hopes that marriage would relieve her of the tensions.

She wished a marriage could be arranged for her soon; she was tired of living at home, tired of going from one sister to the other. She wanted a husband of her own and live in
his home and have children and be grown-up and
do what she liked.(41)

Marriage seems to be the only escape for her from the
parental home. She is so conditioned by the society that
"she is even happy to be taken to the slaughter"(211). What
is yearned for in life by the yet-to-be married persons is
regretted by the married persons, as Mala sighs: "... one's
troubles did not stop with marriage but, on the contrary,
might even be said to begin"(41).

The dowry-problem very often leads either to murder or
suicide. Female infanticide and dowry deaths are frequently
happening at present days. As a feminist, Jhabvala responds
to this contemporary problem of women. She describes a
dowry-death in her novel, A New Dominion, where a young
girl, married only seven months, is poisoned to death for
the sole reason that "her dowry had not been very big; her
father had not been as generous to the son-in-law as he
might have been"(20). It is this dowry system that has
resulted in the preference for a male child in every family.
For instance, in her short story "Sixth child" Ruth Jhabvala
presents the husband's longing for a male child. All his
five children happen to be girls. He feels that he is not
blessed enough to have a son. But he goes on making babies
in the hope of getting a son. Unfortunately, the sixth child also happens to be a girl. Here Ruth Jhabvala probably hints at the reason for the growth of Indian population. She never fails to bring out the anxiety of the husband who is eagerly waiting for the birth of the baby. This preference for the male-child ends in the cruel practice of female infanticide.

Ruth Jhabvala laughs at the patriarchal society which is too ignorant to understand that men are almost sold in marriage while getting dowry. Hari in To Whom She Will is "booked"(122) just for twenty-one rupees: "your boy is ours, we book him, here is our money"(122). At the same time, Ruth Jhabvala also satirizes people who encourage dowry by offering huge amounts. In The Nature of Passion, Lalaji takes pride in giving a large dowry to his daughter: "All the rich men in Delhi will run after her with their sons. The dowry I will give with her, no one will believe the figure"(15). Ruth Jhabvala ridicules people like Lalaji for giving big amounts of dowry to show-off their social status. She brings this into focus in one of her short stories, titled "A Bad Woman":

...they spent their time planning advantageous marriages for their children -- marriages in which not the happiness of the main
protagonists was considered, oh no, that was of no account whatever, but only the question of how much money would be coming into the family, what status they would enjoy in the community and how grand the wedding festivities were going to be. (How I Became a Holy Mother 22)

Ruth Jhabvala attacks advantageous marriages which are very often ostentatious, because an advantageous marriage can only be a marriage of convenience and not a marriage of minds. Kanta and Chandra's marriage in The Nature of Passion is an advantageous marriage and their married life is bereft of love.

Ruth Jhabvala mocks at the practice of marrying a young woman to an old man. In her short story, "The Widow", Durga, a young girl is married to an old man, only to become a widow. Jhabvala explores through Durga, the problems confronting a young rich widow in the social context. Society suspects her relationship with a neighbour boy who could be the age of her son, if she had one. Her relatives speak ill of her and at the same of time aim at her rich wealth, the only comfort left by her dead husband. She is pestered so much that at one stage she gives up everything.
She is made to accept her lot as a widow:

There was no other way for widows but to lead humble, bare lives; it was for their own good. For if they were allowed to feed themselves on the pleasures of the world, then they fed their own passions too, and that which should have died in them with the deaths of their husbands would fester and boil and overflow into sinful channels. (Out of India 56)

Ruth Jhabvala's yet another short-story, "A Loss of Faith" also presents the widow harassments. The widow is criticised thus: "Evil eye, killer of your husband, bringer of death" (Like Birds, Like Fishes 24). While observing the widow harassment prevailing in the society, Jhabvala feels that the 'rigid rules' for a widow have become lenient, as she sarcastically comments in "The Widow" that "no one insisted that Durga should shave her head"(56). The fact is that the society expects a widow to lead a life of renunciation.

Ruth Jhabvala presents the plight of prostitutes in her short story "Prostitutes" and the miserable life of an actress in "Suffering Woman." Both these women are viewed by the society as commodities of pleasure rather than as human beings.
Her early novels and some short stories, thus, realistically bring out the predicament of women in all walks of life. In all these novels Ruth Jhabvala underscores the dominance of traditional codes. Many of her liberal minded women have been over-powered by traditional elders. She not only analyses the problems of women before their marriage, but also after marriage. Ruth Jhabvala seems to suggest that most marriages lack compatibility. If women suffer in marriages between persons of the same culture, the problems of women in inter-cultural marriages are more serious. Ruth Jhabvala being caught in the inter-cultural marriage, observes the sufferings of such women with a feminist consciousness and presents them in her later novels. The predicament of women who are caught in inter-cultural marriages form the nucleus of the following chapter.