Chapter V

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Hari shows his love to Amrita but ultimately marries the girl chosen by his parents. He comes to realize that his wedded spouse is more beautiful than Amrita. Similarly Amrita, in her desperation, magnifies the importance of Krishna's letter sent from Calcutta and thinks that she has found her anchor. She pours her heart on him. Ironically enough, Krishna is considered to be the best match because

"he is a Bengali and later it is discovered that his father has shared a prison sentence with Nirad Chakravarty (her father) in Meerut Jail during 1933-1935: this makes Krishna quite one of the family."

Amrita suffers blows of social bondages. She is afflicted with an inner division on the issue of her marriage. Her cautiousness and self-consciousness can be attributed to her upbringing and to her

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schooling at Lady Wilmont College. Though timid, she demonstrates defiance. She lacks courage to override it. Her modesty, her training, her tradition, becomes strong for her. Amrita discloses to Krishna.

"Everybody is always telling us to be \textit{set free} emancipated, to be like European women; but when we try to be they are shocked and say we are behaving badly."

The story of Amrita is about maturing and refinement of sensibility of a young woman whose fanciful feelings are based on an idealized concept of Indianness. The novelist portrays the conflict between youth and age. She draws dominant shades of the Indian family as a loving protective ‘cocoon’ over all other considerations. Yasmine Goonaratne endorses this view:

"We may detect here an indirect assertion that Amrita itself is a novel in which the style adopted and the sensibilities expressed are native and natural to the author and her subject neither borrowed nor assumed."

Hari's family realizes ground realities and drags him to tradition of arranged marriage within their status. His mother proclaims,

"He is a good son, he will marry a nice girl you will see; one of our own girls whom his family will choose for him." ¹

Hari submits himself to his family and is booked for Sushila Anand in business like way.

The structural patterns in Ruth Prawer Jhabvala bring about reconciliation between the individual and social themes.

"In all good new comedy there is a social as well as individual theme which must be sought in the general atmosphere of reconciliation that makes the final marriage possible." ²

In the novel To Whom She Will (1955) the theme of the individual is reflected in the conflicts of Amrita and Hari and the social theme is explored in complications of social institutions.

¹To Whom She Will, p.13.

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The integration of the individual and the social levels has a moral norm. It has a positive as well as a negative aspect. It presupposes a moral code resting on traditions of joint family system, the authority of parents, the wisdom of the elders guiding the inexperienced young. This moral norm at the same time suggests freedom from unfair moral restraints and purely conventional constraints.

The notion of rebellion is hazy to Krishna who surveys his past life in England and India and dreams of becoming a person with a steady job, a little house, a wife and two servants. England appears as an image and not a reality.

Hari leads bride Sushila round the fire seven times. His mother and relatives swarm him when he cries. His cheeks are wet in this moment of overpowering joy. The image of Amrita fades and is replaced by Sushila Anand. He feels exhilarated, 'he felt he had never been so happy in all his life.'

The novel ends on a note of reconciliation achieved through arranged marriage. The weddings of Hari and Sushila and of Amrita

1 To Whom She Will, p.290.
and Krishna do not detract the idea of union which forms the note of reconciliation in life.

The keynote conveyed is reconciliation with contemporary reality. It makes realize its failings in the process. The weaknesses of the social reality are exposed and treated comically to project an affirmative world-view. It becomes a triumphant affirmation of truth of Amrita and Hari who despite their frustrations say 'aye' to life. The affirmative note emerges when man feels freed from shackles of a pressing contemporary reality, and yet retains confidence that the ideals remain unimpaired. This affirmation besides a moral statement is a felt experience embedded in the souls of Amrita and others who have passed through the crucible of adolescent love.

Nimmi in 'The Nature of Passion', Shakuntala in 'Esmond in India' and Gulab in 'A Backward Place' are emancipated women, but they appear versions of medieval women for their dependence on security provided by their well knit family. Jhabvala postulates of deep understanding and progressive attitude for harmonious living in the modern context. She highlights the irony of ambition and attainment, vision and revision and emancipation and illusion. She
weaves out situations in a way that responses of characters to these situations reveal their contradictions.

In *The Nature of Passion*, tradition and environment become incompatible. Nimmi, a modern girl, believes in emancipation, goes to clubs, plays tennis in shorts, keeps bobbed hair, dotes with boys and attends lectures almost ignorantly on English literature in fashionable clothes but lives in old and conservative family. Her Phuphiji, a custodian of orthodox beliefs comments:

"A girl of that age has no right to enjoy herself. She should be maintaining a household and bearing children and looking after her husband."  

The justaposition of traditional mode of life against the modern accentuates not only changes perceptible in the cultural complex of the country but also superficiality of the so-called modern life. Viddi approves cheap imitation of the Western mode of life. She does not understand essential difference, in terms of approach, atmosphere and attitude, between the two modes of life. Viddi fails to draw a line of demarcation between the Western and the Eastern modes of life in terms of approach, atmosphere and

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attitude. His ambition is to become a writer or a critic, but when his father announces to pay him five hundred rupees per month for looking after a shop he feels happy as it relieves him for his financial burden.

Hans and Prem, in the farewell scene, speak of their deep friendship. Kitty who talks of the Infinite and non-attachment checks the overwhelmed Hans who is divided between the voices of Prem and Kitty:

"I forget the source of my being and so I become attached to friends and other things which are only Maya."\(^1\)

Hans poorly asserts that 'We must be non-attached' and yet smiles as he shakes Prem's hand.

"Hans tried to smile; but looking up, Prem was surprised to notice that his eyes were swimming with tears. Prem was touched......."\(^2\)

\(^1\) The Householder, p.187.
\(^2\) Ibid, p.188.
The conversation demonstrates triumph of human spirit, of love and affection over philosophical catchwords and metaphysical labels.

Indu, after her return from her parents' house finds her mother-in-law usurping her position as 'the lady of the house'. She remains quite submissive and undemanding on her husband but in her mind, she is determined to take her full hold and her feelings get too strong to respect the traditional rules and regulations. Even Prem appears to be moving out of the shadow of mother fixation and realizes the damaging effect of his obedience to mother. Their emotional and sexual necessity forces them at last into an oblique confession of mutual need and love.

Their growing sympathy and glowing affection for each other help them to sustain their sexual relationship which is the first cementing force of a household. Prem's new found maturity emerges. Jhabvala seems to convey the truth that Prem ultimately realizes that it is better to be a good householder. He discovers the true value of his young wife and of marriage and suppresses his own snobbery when faced with other girls' lack of education and culture.
The novel asserts that woman is a pivotal figure in a household provided the householder proves his manliness in managing resources, fulfilling sexual needs and catering to emotional desires without any intrusion or authoritarian hold on her. Prem comes to realize this truth partially.

Sarla Devi, the estranged wife of a business shark, is an idealist and a reformer. She supports the cause of poor people of Bundi Basti who are likely to be displaced under the pretentious plan of slum clearance. She evokes her son to fight this injustice:

“Oh Vishnu, Vishnu why are you like that? You are like my son, you are as beautiful as Krishna and as strong as Arjun. But your conduct is that of a little merchant’s son.”

She inspires her son in these words,

“You must stand up son, fight, you must fling yourself into the world.”

Her heart is overflowing with sympathy for the poor but Vishnu her son in reality is only, a little merchant’s son.
Sarla Devi fights a losing battle for the dwellers of Bundi Basti. She austere and high-principled, stands alone being intensely alive.

"She is the symbol and epitome of what Ruth Jhabvala regards as the opposite reaction to the Indian greed and callousness she describes in her article-The Indian Spirituality—not grabbing at the world but wanting nothing whatsoever to do with it."1

Sarla Devi is called 'a mad woman'. Her brother Brijmohan and her daughter-in-law Mala oppose her. The possessive Mala resents Vishnu’s staying away from home to avoid his father’s business work. She frets and fumes at being neglected and turns into a virtual tigress with biting teeth and clawing nails. She complains angrily

“You have the office, you have your friends, you drive off in your car and do

1 Yasmine Goonaratne, op.cit., p.142
what you like, while I sit here only and wait for the day to be finished".

These are interpretations of the progressive sensibility of modern Indian women at different degrees of their self-actualization. Jhabvala portrays compassion in the personality of Sarla Devi. Sarla Devi walks her weary way in search of Tara to give succour to her distracted soul. Her heart is filled with the vastness of space and the saint in her seeks unattainable horizons. Her vision expands and tries to encompass the orange of the evening sky.

"Sarla Devi looked up and above the street—remote but seemingly unattainable—she saw a sky huge and soft with evening. There was a last, lingering, fading, orange streak on the horizon and flung out against it a flight of silhouetted birds with outstretched wings."

The other—worldly woman Sarla Devi looks up to sky and vast spaces that beckon to her soul but at the same time she looks at the earth with its Bundi Busti, Tara and the poor downtrodden. She resolves to move to accomplish her mission on the earth in the hope

\footnote{Get Ready For Battle, p.223.}
that her spirit will attain freedom after the completion of task. She is an angel of the earthly paradise.

(Gautam voices Sarla Devi’s quest for spiritual freedom. He holds the lamp high in the hours of darkness. His main aim is to persuade ‘people to keep their spirit free’ and not be tied to shackles of rigid conventions. He tries to keep Sumi’s spirit free by dissuading her from falling into the conventional moulds of a housewife. He is anti-materialistic and condemns Gulzari Lal’s worship of money. He, however, seeks his necessary help in establishing an ideal school for children. Jhabvala, like Bernard Shaw and E.M. Forster, is conscious of value of money in modern life and the fact that all idealistic schemes of restructuring civilization need money for their implementation in practical life.)

Gautam, a non-conformist, denounces Vishnu’s one-track mind approach. He subscribes to motifs of youth, idealism, nature and freedom which finally culminate in man’s real happiness. His romantic world-view restates Browning’s belief in beauty and grandeur of this world. Vishnu thinks of starting a manufacturing factory of spare parts and screws while Gautam dreams of unity of
man and nature and achieving higher state of manhood through environment and education. He desires to set up a school. Gautam, a visionary, thinks that 'no man is poor'. He observes

'all our (this) gifts, all our (his) riches-the sky, the sea, the mountains and the sun-everything is there for us to seize and enjoy........'.

He hopefully looks to the mulberry tree to confirm his view of the world.

Sarla Devi and Gautam represent visionary gleam in a world darkened and disturbed by Gulzari Lal’s commercialism and Vishnu’s expanding industrial stodginess. Jhabvala has skilfully portrays two contrary aspects of modern, post-independent India: the wordliness of Gulzari Lals and Vishnus and the other-worldliness of Gautams and Sarla Devis.

Shakuntala, who pities her sister-in-law at the start of the novel, soon finds all choices and possibilities including her dream of daring marriage with Esmond. Unlike Jane Austen’s heroine Emma

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1 Get Ready For Battle, p.212
Woodhouse, Shakuntala does not grow up into good sense and sensibility.

Jhabvala’s early novels depict a mental and psychological bondage of Indian women. It is difficult to break this bondage in spite of their desires for freedom and excitements for self-realization. Gulab and Shakuntala leave conventions in their expression of love, yet they are effectively bound by their upbringing, social restraints and innate Indian sensibility.

Renee Winegarten’s notices that in the earliest works of Ruth Jhabvala,

"whatever the inner strains and stresses, the Indian family dominates, wrapping its members in a loving, protective cocoon."

Judy exemplifies what Ruth Jhabvala declares in Myself in India that it is not possible to become Indian without surrendering sense of Europeanness. In this context Shahane’s appreciation of her endeavour to harmonize the two extremes in her is quite apt:

1 Renee Winegarten, R.P. Jhabvala: A Jewish Passage to India, Midstream, March, 1974, 72-9, quoted in Contemporary Literary Criticism (Detroit, 1975), 258.
"Although English by birth and alien by upbringing, she adapts herself admirably into Bal's joint family and the heterogeneous household. She has inherited the Englishman's gift for adaptability and she adapts her western modes to the requirements and claims of Indian culture."

The novelist tries to establish human values that are universal. She portrays conflicts but resolves them developing a sense of proper understanding, sympathy, fellow-feeling and conformity to tradition. The novelist is opposed to materialistic values. Though, she does not under estimate the worth of money. In her opinion, a proper balance is key to success in life and human values provide strength, unity and a strong will to face struggle.