

## Traditional adulterous triangle in Ruth Praver Jhabvala's *Esmond* in India

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### **Abstract**

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*Ruth Praver Jhabvala has achieved an international reputation as an Indian novelist. Her eight novels which appeared in quick succession, deals with the themes like, love and marriage in the bourgeois society, East-West encounter, pseudo-modernism in Indian society, the post-independence Indian ethos, affectation and hypocrisy in the Indian middle class society. She handles her themes with dazzling assurance and presents penetrating and compassionate picture of human relationship ironically and realistically. *Esmond* in India is a novel of maneuver and misunderstanding. At its center is the traditional adulterous triangle of a man, The title and themes of the novels coincide with Jhabvala's different experiences in India. *Esmond* in India presents a new dimension in Ruth Praver Jhabvala's creativity. The novel delineates a disaster in marital relationship between an Indian wife and an English husband. Life partners from two distinctly different cultural backgrounds obviously tend to feel the tensions, conflicts and marital misgivings. As a westerner who has close ties with the Indian family norms, Ruth Praver Jhabvala realistically portrays the problems of *Gulab*. The present paper is an exploration of her artistic vision and literary craftsmanship. in the traditional adulterous triangle of a man*

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**Key Words:** peculiar, paradox, exploration.

Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Born on 7th May, 1927, is a winner of the prestigious Booker prize. She is a two-time Academy Award winning screenwriter. She is also a renowned novelist and a short stories writer. This Anglo-Indian writer was born in Cologne, Germany. Family of Ruth Praver Jhabvala was Jewish and in the year 1939 they moved to England from Germany. Her father was Polish-Jewish and her mother was German-Jewish. After the settlement of her family in Hendon, northwest London, Ruth Praver Jhabvala attended the Country School. In the year 1948, she became a British citizen. She completed her M.A from Queen Mary College in London in English literature in the year 1951. She enjoyed reading the works of Dickens. After completing her M.A, Ruth Praver Jhabvala married an Indian architect and came to India. In India, she spent the next 24 years of her life and in the year 1975 moved to New York City and in 1986 became a US citizen. Her three daughters are living in various parts of the world. After moving to New York, Ruth Praver Jhabvala divided her time between the US

and India. This writer is very popular for her insightful and witty portrayals of the lives of the people of contemporary Indian societies.

Though Ruth Jhabvala has made a significant contribution to the Indian English fiction, she has not received proper attention from the critics of literature. The characters in her Novels deal with their identity-crisis and how they handle the trauma and possible success, failure or resistance of subjects who in their confrontation with the culture of the other negotiate their new identities. Jhabvala's literary works are concerned with the diasporic postcolonial situation of the lives of Europeans, who are caught between the Indian traditions that they have left behind and a totally different western world that they have to live in, culminating in an ongoing struggle to adjust between the two worlds of the two cultures. Concerned mostly with the disappointment, failure and at-times success of Europeans immigrants in India, Jhabvala's works abound with female characters who, on being displaced, struggle to survive in the unfamiliar surroundings they are entangled in. Her work deal with the common motif of exclusion, loneliness and the search for an identity and fulfillment.

It has been observed that her characters are like windows, through which her readers can see the changing image of Indian society. Through her characters she was able to touch almost all the important aspects of Indian Society. A clear clash between traditional and modernization can be understood with the close treatment of relationship between the characters of her novels. She closely connected her characters with all the customs like marriages, child births and mundan ceremony. She has discussed the plight and dilemma of those foreign characters who come India in search of spiritual peace but all they get is disease and depression.

Esmond Stillwood, and two women, his wife, Gulab, and the younger Shakuntala, with whom, late in the novel, he begins an affair. Yet in ironic reversal of novelistic convention, these romantic or sexual relationships are completely dwarfed in interest and importance by the subtler domestic struggles going on around them. Gulab never finds out about Shakuntala, and, though Gulab does leave Esmond and return to her family, this has nothing to do with her feelings about him, and everything to do with the long and vocal campaign conducted all through the novel by her Aunt Uma to get her, and especially her child Ravi, to come home to Indian food, Indian manners, and her Indian ties of blood. Similarly, Shakuntala's family never find out about Esmond, or even suspect such a possibility, concerned as they are about making a prosperous marriage for her, which will above all defeat the feared and dangerous prospect of Shakuntala's deciding to marry Gulab's brother Narayan, a qualified doctor but one who shows no ambition toward using his qualifications to make money.

The real events in the novel, as one can see already, are almost hidden by a cloud of hopes, fears, and possibilities, few or none of which eventuate. The general anxiety which fills the novel is, moreover, generated and fueled by events in the past, both personal and political, which everyone remembers but no one is eager to mention. At the root of the whole confusion

lies the changed relationship of Ram Nath and Har Dayal, the two fathers. Both were once of similar status, rich, Cambridge-educated, full of potential, with Ram Nath the elder and guiding spirit. This relationship, however, has, by the time of the novel, been reversed: Har Dayal is rich, Ram Nath relatively poor (though still supported by portions of his former property).

Shakuntala is a young Indian woman who comes home to live with her prosperous family in post-Independence Delhi. Sketching a gallery of fascinating and distinctive characters against a rich background, Ruth Praver Jhabvala draws the contrast between two very different families and their daily lives - their squabbles, their politics, their love affairs, their expectations. She brings to life the nostalgic Englishman Esmond Stillwood, also the beautiful Gulab and her son Ravi, the elderly Uma, and Shakuntala's family and the neighbours Ram Nath and Lakshmi.

### **Gulab and Esmond –Conflict in Ways of Living**

Gulab is so charmed by Esmond's speeches and marries Esmond against the wishes of her mother, Uma. She is not a true representative of Indian culture and neither is Esmond a true representative of the British in India. Esmond cannot leave his pseudo modernity and self-centeredness, and Gulab cannot free herself from the shackles of her traditions. She has followed modernity only on the surface level in marrying Esmond. She tries to conform to Esmond's household rules and she reverts to her way of doing things the moment he is out of sight, both in the food she eats and in her affectionate and deeply physical way of nurturing their child. Gulab likes the comfortable way of living without any formality.

Gulab loves eating sweets and oily food. The novelist depicts convincingly Gulab's Indian tastes and habits and how they are resented by the very English Esmond. Esmond loves salads and boiled European food. The couple differs not only in their food habits but also in the way they eat.

The Indian way of dressing is also quite different to the European. Gulab may imitate the European style but she feels comfortable and at ease only in her own style. Jhabavala succeeds eminently in catching and conveying the 'Indianness' of Gulab's mode of living. Esmond decorates his flat and the furniture is modern but Gulab finds it a hindrance. He is very particular about keeping the house clean and dislikes Gulab's untidiness.

*The milk that servant brought them did not have enough sugar in it, so they sent him to put in more, they both liked things to be very very sweet. Half way through Gulab thought, it would be nice to flavour the remainder with rose essence to vary the taste. When they had finished, both have white milk moustaches and they had a good laugh at one another before Gulab wiped their mouths first lovingly his then carelessly her own with the end of her sari. The*

*new servant since he had nothing else to do, continue to watch them. Ravi tickled Gulab and then Gulab tickled Ravi. She yawned, she stretched herself; she felt contented. Ravi sat on her and rode her as a horse and she laughed. The new servant also laughed, an animal sound, and Gulab lifted her to ask him what did he want, had he nothing better to do than to just stand there and look? (EII,p.14)*

### **Deterioration of Married Life of Esmond and Gulab:**

The married life of Esmond and Gulab deteriorates after the birth of a son, Ravi. Esmond wants to bring up the child in the European way and keep him away from Indian food. There are other small problems, like giving a massage to the child and the 'shaving ceremony', that highlight the two extreme modes of living and thinking. According to the traditional belief, the 'shaving ceremony' is compulsory, but to Esmond it is a barbaric custom. Gulab is neither mentally satisfied nor physically comfortable in her husband's house

### **Conflict between the Eastern and the Western Cultural World:**

Jhabvala beautifully brings out the problems and conflicts facing people belonging to the eastern and western parts of the world. They do not come to terms with one another because no sincere effort is made to narrow down the gap separating the east from the west. There is a desire for friendship and relationship and sometimes it appears to be coming from the heart, but even then it does not have an element of solidity and firmness because though it comes from the heart, it does not include the heart. The theme of marital conflict in Jhabvala's fiction has a much larger scope than is evident in East-West confrontation or co-existence. Indian husbands and their Indian wives too appear to be falling apart in a purely Indian familial and social situation. This has its roots in the clash of personalities, temperaments and also values. Jhabvala appears to be suggesting that getting married does not mean enjoying the bliss of heaven and this is clearly brought out her novels

Ruth Jhabvala has either translated herself or quoted the English translation of Sanskrit poems. Lala Hardayal in his parties recited Sanskrit poems:

*O swollen hath the mango sprouted and budded and bloomed.  
O swollen hath our love sprouted budded and bloomed.(EII,p.63)*

And again:

*And do the thought, O lord of hearts,  
Ne'er fly to me  
Who sit and long, and long for thee?  
Induc'd by thy arts  
I pine in love's valley  
When thou didst once dally  
Midst oranges blossoms that cloud the clear sky  
As the tear cloud my eye.(Esmond In India,p.63.)*

## **Cause of the differences between Gulab & Esmond, hence a space for the triangle:**

Marriage is one of the most important institutions of any society. In all societies- whether proletariat, underdeveloped and developed-social anthropologists discovered some form of mating, some degree of social regulation over sex relationships. Every society regulates the sexual behaviour of its members. Therefore, in every society we find norms governing the sexual relationship between male and female. These complex norms constitute the institution of marriage. In the institution of marriage we have the relationship between a man and a woman. Such relationship being culturally defined and socially approved is established through some religious or social rules.

Hindu marriage literally means the ceremony of 'carrying away' the bride to the house of the groom. Hindu Marriage is different from the institution of marriage in other societies. According to Prabhu," Hindu Vivaha (marriage) is, in essence, a ritual and a formality, of course, very important through which an individual has to go, to be able to start his other life in Grihasthasrama. The meaning of vivaha refers mainly to the ceremony of 'carrying away' the bride to the house of the bridegroom. But since long it has come to refer to the whole of ceremony or wedlock.

According to K.M. Kapadia,

*"Hindu marriage is a socially approved union of man and a woman aiming at dharma, procreation, sexual pleasure and observance of certain social obligations".*

Gulab and Esmond were attracted to each other and as a result got married. Initially things seemed going good as there was love in the relationship.No sooner the couple had a baby, Ravi when the problems or differences started showing up. Gulab as an Indian knew her responsibilities as a mother. And she was fulfilling them to her best.But Esmond started feeling that Gulab has shifted her love, care, concern, attention to Ravi instead of him. Hence there started developing a communication gap. Lack of communication resulted in a gap between Gulab & Esmond. And now Esmond started spending more time out. Thus in due course of time he met Shakuntala, who was more charming, young and attractive as compared to Gulab. Now Esmond enters a world of comparison between Gulab & Shakuntala. And unfortunately he finds Shakuntala better than Gulab in all genres.

Shakuntala was a young, vibrant, extrovert, energetic, intellectual girl. Esmond seemed to grow a kind of interest and affection for her. But since he was dissatisfied with Gulab and his marriage hence he started finding solace in the outside world. Esmond comes from a non-Indian background. Where a married man can go around having infinite relationships. The culture and environment outside India is way different from ours. Hence it was more tempting for Esmond to

fall for Shakuntala, and this is what happened. However Gulab leaves Esmond to survive in Indian culture not for Shakuntala. As she never gets to know Shakuntala.

### **Conclusion:**

Usually, a love triangle will end with the hero or heroine confiding their feelings in the suitor they feel is most virtuous or has the most interest in them. (As in *Twilight* or *The Hunger Games*.) The other suitor usually steps aside to allow the couple to be happy, or comes to terms with their feelings, often claiming they could not love the main character as much. Sometimes they are written out of the love equation entirely by falling in love with someone else, or being killed off or otherwise eliminated. While love triangles can be accused of being clichéd, if done well, they provide insight into the complexity of love and what is best to pursue in a romantic relationship.

The term "love triangle" generally connotes an arrangement unsuitable to one or more of the people involved. One person typically ends up feeling betrayed at some point, e.g. 'Person A is jealous of person C who is having a relationship with person B who, in person A's eyes, is "his" person'. A similar arrangement that is agreed upon by all parties is sometimes called a triad, a type of *polyamory*, although polyamory usually implies sexual relations. Within the context of monogamy, love triangles are inherently unstable, with unrequited love and jealousy as common themes. Though rare, love triangles have been known to lead to murder or suicide committed by the actual or perceived rejected lover. But however in our case this doesnot happen. Gulab, unlike her personality, takes a bold step to leave Esmond.

As stated above a love-triangle usually frames in a situation, where either of the persons in a couple gets dis-interested in continuing their relationship. In case of this book, "Esmond in India" by Ruth P Jhabvala, Esmond gets bored off by Gulab and her changed behaviour towards their child. In such cases the third person comes into their relationship and ends up in breaking marriages or relationships (former). Unlike traditional love triangles, Esmond and Shakuntala donot culminate into getting married. This story is about love triangle of attraction. Firstly Gulab getting attracted to Esmond. Secondly Esmond getting attracted to Shakuntala.



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