

Be a powerful or powerless woman

[Sociology](#), [Women](#)



Be a Powerful or Powerless Woman? In “The Englishwoman”, Ruth Praver Jhabvala writes about Sadie, a fifty-two-year-old Englishwoman who leaves her husband and children behind after her marriage with her husband for thirty years. Sadie goes back to her home country, England, to spend the rest of her life since she is not satisfied with the stifling life in India. Sadie feels disappointed when life in India is not the same as she expected, which she experiences in a culture clash between Indian culture and her own.

However, in Isabel Allende’s “The Judge’s Wife”, Casilda is presented as a powerful woman in front of her husband, Judge Hidalgo. When Judge Hidalgo sets up a trap for Nicolas Vidal, the leader of a gang of bandit, by caging his mother, Juana the Forlorn, Casilda goes to save her. In their seven years of married life, it was the first time that Casilda had gone against Judge Hidalgo. After the sudden death of Hidalgo, Casilda gives herself completely to Nicolas Vidal, who is willing to sacrifice his life for her, in order to gain time for her children.

Sadie decides to leave her family and marriage behind because of her powerless status within her husband’s culture; whereas Casilda holds great power against her husband and Nicolas Vidal. Due to the conflict between the culture of Sadie’s husband and her own, the Englishwoman despairs of the unbearable life in India. Although Sadie has been married to an Indian for thirty years, it seems that she has no power or influence in the family. Jhabvala says that, “Her husband’s family enjoyed and abetted her attempts to become Indian.

A whole lot of them – mother-in-law, sister-in-law, aunts, cousins, and friends – would cram into the family car” (1258). It shows that Sadie’s husband has a

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large family, hence Sadie loses her hostess's status and the other family members seem to have more rights than her. Moreover, Sadie starts living in this family with quite a lot of family members, and she needs to follow the rules, style and culture of the Indian family. In short, Sadie, as an Englishwoman, cannot adapt the Indian's culture and because of the big family, she shows no status and influence in the family.

This may be one of the reasons why Sadie decides to leave the Indian family. In addition to the culture clash, roles of other relatives like the mother-in-law, aunts, even the servants are more important than Sadie when her son, Dev, was sick. Jhabvala states that, " He lay burning in the middle of a great bed, with his eyes full of fever; he was very quiet except for an occasional groan. All the women in the house had gathered round his beside and all were giving advice and different remedies" (1260).

When Sadie notices that all women in the house come to her son's bedroom, she realizes that she is insignificant in the family, even less important than the servants. Jhabvala describes that some women sit on the chairs and some sit on the floor. This implies that the room of Dev is flooded with the relatives and servants. Besides, Sadie cannot bear the mother-in-law, who is still smoking and reading a novel, squatted cross-legged on the end of Dev's bed. Sadie feels sad for her son since she thinks the women who cram into her son's bedroom are stifling her son and that he cannot breathe too.

Other than that, Sadie remembers when she was sick in her childhood, " the only person who ever came in was her mother when it is time for her medicine" (1260). Thus, Sadie thinks that she should be the only person to look after her son instead of the crowd of relatives and servants. The

Englishwoman finds that she loses her status of a mother for taking care of her ill son and this brings up a foreshadow that aids her to leave the Indian family. In contrast with Jhavalá's story, Casilda holds a lot of power over her husband, Judge Hidalgo, and she influences his overall behavior after she married to him.

Judge Hidalgo is a severity, stubbornness man and "didn't have the slightest notion of how to go about pleasing a woman" (1226). Although Judge Hidalgo is twice as Casilda's age, she is happy and she gave birth to three lovely kids after their marriage. Also, Allende states that, "he flung off his gloomy apparel, rollicked with his children, chuckled as he sat Casilda on his lap" (1227). He becomes a caring husband and lovely father for Casilda and their children after Casilda married him. Casilda not only influences her husband's behavior towards family, but also transforms his character from a stubborn mind to a mercy thought.

After Judge Hidalgo sets up a trap for Nicolas Vidal, which put Vidal's mother, Juana the Forlorn, in a specially made cage for three days with a jug of water; Casilda brings food and water to save her. Initially, Judge Hidalgo ignores the people who "plead with Judge Hidalgo for Christian mercy and to beg him to spare the poor old innocent woman such a frightful death" (1229). In other words, though people protest the way of setting this trap by caging the ill-treated old woman, the Judge doesn't change his mind at all. Yet, Allende says that "Judge Hidalgo himself opened the cage to release the prisoner" (1229) because of Casilda's begging. In their seven years marriage life, it is the first time that Casilda uses her power to challenge with Judge Hidalgo because she wants to persuade him to become a lenient man. This

proves the importance of Casilda's status in her husband's mind and completely influences her husband's personality to make him become a merciful man. Using her power and grandeur, Casilda finds a cliff for hiding her three children so as to avoid being killed by the Vidal's party, and tries her best to satisfy Vidal as to gain more time for her children.

To his surprise, Nicolas Vidal realizes that Casilda is the first person who faces him without fear in his life. Moreover, Casilda focuses on gaining time for her children by pleasuring Nicolas Vidal. At last, Casilda begged Nicolas Vidal to escape since the soldiers are going to kill him. However, Allende says that, " Nicolas Vidal chose to fold her in a last embrace, thus fulfilling the prophecy that had sealed his fate from the start" (1231). Nicolas Vidal gives himself up to exchange for the last embrace because of Casilda, the only woman who influences him most of his life and is willing to sacrifice his life for her.

To conclude, Sadie attempts to become an Indian in the beginning of her marriage life. However, she fails and leaves her husband and children behind due to her helpless status and the differences between the culture of her husband and her own. On the other hand, Casilda uses her great power to influence her husband's behavior and Nicolas Vidal who was even willing to lose his life for her. Among these different situations, the two women have no opportunity to choose between a powerful or powerless woman because their life is destined by fate.