CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION
The late Eighteenth and early Nineteenth centuries of England and the Post-Independence era of India witnessed two great women novelists who portrayed variegated human experiences encompassing all aspects of life—tears and smiles, gain and loss, the quotidian and complicated incongruities of life. Jane Austen and Ruth Prawer Jhabvala are these two novelists whose artistic experience unfolds life's incongruous oddities, inconsistencies, human follies and foibles in the most authentic, convincing and artistic manner through their masterly use of irony. Life's little ironies, unravelled through ironic technique is the forte of both the ironists.

The present project is a comparative study of these two novelists' use of irony in their particular socio-cultural environments which resemble each other to a great extent. A brief resume of the findings of this study is attempted in this concluding chapter.

II

After the introductory chapter on Irony the second chapter explores the variegated themes of these two novelists which are bathed in ironic colours. A critical assessment of their themes shows the deep insight and keen observant eye which both Ruth Prawer Jhabvala and Jane Austen possess. It is found that both the novelists are well acquainted with mundane affairs of common urban middle class people. They both worked wonders on their little bit of ivory, hardly two inches wide. Their range of subjects is exclusively limited as their works are mainly concerned with the upper middle class people and their daily intercourses of life. Obviously the themes which they deal with are also drawn from the same aspects of life. Love, marriage and the
deep impact of money are themes which are eternally universal, true for all ages and all times. Nirupa Rani K. confirms this when she says:

Like Jane Austen her [Jhabvala's] range is restricted to themes of love, marriage and family life.¹

Both Jane Austen and Ruth Prawer Jhabvala explore these themes in an ironic mode. The domestic comedy of Jane Austen as well as that of Ruth Prawer Jhabvala achieves an intellectual level when they both explore the human heart through the psychological analysis of their characters. The acquisition of self-knowledge, thus, forms the very core of both Austenian and Jhabvala's comedies. The other minor themes which are commonly handled by both of them are familial relationships—sisterly bonds in Jane Austen's novels and joint familial bonds in Jhabvala's novels, economic privation of the middle classes, sex and spirituality, tradition verses modernity and so on. However, the last two thematic elements are more dominant in Jhabvala's novels than in those of Jane Austen's.

The reason for choosing Jane Austen and Ruth Prawer Jhabvala in this comparative study lies in the fact that both the novelists are similar not only in their being the great social ironists but also in analysing similar social ethos for exposing life's little ironies. The great social painters excel in portraying the simple, daily routine of the rising middle class as observed by their keen ironic sight. While Jane Austen perceives the placid provincial life and laughs at human foibles and affectations bathed in the genial sunshine of sympathy; Jhabvala observes the Indian society, its culture and customs, rites and rituals at close quarters and smiles at what she finds ludicrous. However, the detailed study of Jhabvala's later novels shows more of her tears than smiles in an alien country. The reason lies in Jhabvala's peculiar predicament. She is portraying a society which appears quite strange and contrary to her European sensibility. Thus, theme of East-West encounter colours Jhabvala's vision.

Despite such differences the two novelists are found akin on certain grounds. The six novels written by Jane Austen and eight novels written by Ruth Prawer Jhabvala are found to be exclusively limited in their range. As stated earlier both of them are mainly concerned with the upper middle class and their routine life; which tends to limit their vision. Their novels are found to be singularly devoid of wars and accidents, tempests and supernatural interventions or sudden shifts of destiny. On the contrary,
they are steeped in the mundane, the quotidian to such an extent that they even invite harsh criticism for being warily repetitive and monotonous. Nevertheless a thorough study of their restricted world places them as the unchallenged monarchs of this so-called small world. Moreover, it requires a high degree of skill to make the small incidents or routine activities so highly interesting and charming. R.G. Agarwal refers to Sir Walter Scott’s remark to stress the same point when he writes:

“Austen” said Sir Walter Scott, “renders ordinary common place things and characters interesting from the truth of the description and sentiment.” These words could almost apply to Mrs. Jhabvala.²

Thus, Jane Austen as well as Ruth Prawer Jhabvala catch the minor events or incidents to describe the bigger truths of life. The theme of self-knowledge which is studied in the second chapter is an attempt to show how both the novelists sound every nook and cranny of the human heart. Interestingly, this exploration shows them moving in two different directions.

Jane Austen’s quest embodies the path of exploring the amiable and candid nature and essential goodness of heart. Jane Austen’s world is entirely dominated by her women characters and her quest for self-knowledge is delineated mainly through her heroines. Catherine Morland, Elizabeth Bennet, Marianne Dashwood and Emma Woodhouse are suffering under an illusion. But the ironical revelations of various characters and situations open their eyes and make them see the reality. On the other hand, Fanny Price or Anne Elliot, the very embodiment of Austenian virtues are shown striving towards true sensibility and sensitivity. Thus, the Austenian heroines are led to adopt the right path of truth which promises them a happy marital knot with the right person.

In Jhabvala’s world, on the other hand, Nimmi, Amrita, Gulab who suffer from an illusion about their sentimental love also acquire a modicum of self-knowledge. But this knowledge is the unquestioned acceptance of parental authority in worldly matters. Unlike Jane Austen, in Jhabvala this striving towards self-knowledge is not restricted to heroines alone. In Austen’s world, Darcy, Edmund Bertram or Captain Wentworth are made to see the reality but not so intensely and elaborately as in the case of Austenian heroines. In Jhabvala’s world, the male characters are found equally grappling with confusion between appearance and reality as the women characters do Hari, Vidi, Prem, Esmond are some of those characters who are the victims of their false
dreams. In Austen's world her heroines are not trapped in any kind of stark generation gap as it is found in Jhabvala's world. The theme of self-knowledge is brought out through the head-on-collision between the new emancipated young generation and the conservative and rigid old generation. In Austen's world the self-knowledge is the acceptance of conservative moral values which her heroines acquire after the painful realization of reality. But in Jhabvala's world, the quest ends at the acceptance of worldly reality and unquestioned acceptance of parental authority.

Jhabvala's theme of self-knowledge has been discussed in three sections. The first section analyses the theme of self-knowledge in novels like To Whom She Will, The Nature of Passion, Esmond in India, where the old generation wins over the young. The second variety of self-realization is found in novels like The Householder, Get Ready for Battle or A Backward Place where Prem and Indu, Sarla Devi, Sudhir and Vishnu, Judy and Bal find the solution ironically in their problems themselves. In other words, there is a kind of static realization found in these novels. Finally this process of realization of truth brings out a bitter reality in the third section in her later works where everything is gloomy, dark and repugnant. Unlike Jane Austen, here Jhabvala takes up the theme of East-West encounter and its disastrous effects. In her later work she is engaged in writing about 'Swamijis' and the fate of European seekers who come to India in search of Truth, but fails to get themselves adjusted to the Indian climate. The expatriate seekers like Clarissa, Lee, Margaret, Evie, Miss Rivers, Chid etc. are those characters who undergo the tragic realization of Indian 'Heat' and 'Dust'. Even characters other than spiritual seekers are also found getting frustrated and dejected with Indian reality. Jhabvala succeeds to a large extent in analysing the human psyche of both Indian and European characters. R.G. Agarwal refers to Jonh Reed's comment in this connection:

"No Western writer I have read, not even E.M. Forster, is better equipped to deal with the Mysteries of the Indian psyche than this sensitive observer."³

The other themes which both the novelists deal with are love and marriage, matters of universal importance. In fact, here lies the essential charm of their popularity. Sentimental love is satirized by both the novelists—Marianne Dashwood and Willoughby, Emma's dreaming of Frank Churchill, the Musgrove sisters' love, Hari and Amrita, Nimmi and Pheroze, Shakuntala and Esmond are the major butts of their amusing satire. A comparative study of both the ironists reveals that while Jane Austen tends to condemn sentimental love through pin-pricks of irony, Jhabvala is found
standing a little aloof enjoying the sentimental love scenes of these emancipated lovers. Naturally such scenes are a rich source of comedy.

Another difference which is found in the treatment of love is that in Jane Austen's world the theme of love works as a touchstone to identify the right and the wrong person. Willoughby, Wickham, Mr. Thorpe, John Crawford, Mary Crawford, Mr. Elliot who are introduced as the most charming lovers, are soon proved superficial and morally weak. After self-knowledge dawns on the Austenian heroines, these fake lovers are substituted by the morally right persons whose love is true and steadfast. Thus, the stern moralist Jane Austen does not adhere to love which lacks a moral foundation. The passionate or illicit love has no room in Austenian world. Thus, Mr. Elliot and Mrs. Clay or Lydia and Wickham or Maria and John Crawford are finally expelled from her world.

Unlike those of Jane Austen, Jhabvala's lovers are always free and unrestricted to exhibit their love: Hari's high-sounding speech, Nimmi's and Pheroze's kissing scene, Shakuntala's physical relationship with Esmond exemplify Jhabvala's free handling of such relationships. Her purpose is basically to lash out at the hollowness of sentimental love of the westernized young generation instead of proclaiming the moralistic view of love.

The violent love, passionate love or uncontrolled expression of emotion is usually avoided by Jane Austen. Norman Sherry rightly remarks:

Emotion experienced and controlled is, therefore, a part of her novels. She does not exclude the passions from her work, but she is most interested in emotions which are experienced within a social framework and which find their expression within the conventions of that framework.4

Atma Ram too refers to the same thing:

Whenever emotionally moved, the heroines seek solitude or privacy. When Anne Elliot is emotionally touched, she needs solitude to give vent to her aggrieved feelings:

‘Her spirits wanted the solitude and silence which only numbers could give.’

Further Atma Ram refers to the other heroines too, like Catherine, Elizabeth Bennet, Emma, Jane Fairfax, Fanny Price who seek solitude when they are emotionally
overwhelmed. Emma, for example, wants to be alone when Mr. Knightley, who has recently proposed to her, wants to praise her. Jane Austen writes:

Their conversation was soon afterwards closed by the entrance of her father. She was not sorry. She wanted to be alone. ... She was in dancing, singing, exclaiming spirits;... She could be fit for nothing rational.⁶

Jhabvala, on the other hand, grows more loud in discribing the violent expression of passionate love as she moves to her later novels. Shakuntala’s passionate love for Esmond is antipodal to Austenian restricted love. Unlike Jane Austen, Jhabvala now is seen peeping into marital relationship of the couple. Prem and Indu find the resolution of their problem in the violent expression of their love in the concluding scene of The Householder.

Thus, the theme of sexual love is now involved with the theme of love in Jhabvala’s novels. There are only a few modern critics, on the other hand, who find sexual awareness in Jane Austen’s major theme. Rather she frowns upon characters like Lydia, Maria, or Mr. Elliot and Mrs. Clay; whereas in Jhabvala’s world, a free play of feelings is described through an ironic detachment. Nonetheless, the delicate love or tender feelings of love which are shown beautifully by Jane Austen in some of her characters like Darcy and Elizabeth, or Anne Elliot and Captain Wentworth find no place in Jhabvala’s world. Ramlal G. Agarwal seems to observe the same when he writes:

Love as a tender feeling, a warm, private emotion shared by persons in response to each other, is never depicted in Jhabvala’s fiction. There is only a glimpse of it in The Householder, but in all other novels of Jhabvala, love is either a fantasy or an animal passion.⁷

In her earlier novels, there is a fairytalesque adolescent love which seems to acquire a shade of illicit relationship in her later novels. Kusum, and Gulzari Lal’s illicit relationship, Etta’s previous marriages followed by lewd relationships with Mr. Gupta and other rich men, Olivia’s and Nawab’s relationship, Asha’s erotic love for Gopi and Miss Rivers and Inderlal’s relationship are examples of illicit and sensual love which Jhabvala describes sometimes as neurotic love. Moreover, she depicts, sometimes, a nerve-wracking analysis of erotic love. Delineation of Asha illustrates it very well. Far removed from Jane Austen, Jhabvala shows homo-sexual relationship too, though in a suggestive manner. There are hints that Nawab and Hari, Gopi and Raymond, Etta
and Clarissa, Asha and Banubai form such relationships. Deviant sex is described in 
a grotesque language when her expatriate seekers adopt the role of lovers and meet 
with a tragic end. They mistake sexuality as the source of reaching spirituality. Hadyn 
M. Williams writes:

Jhabvala's attention as a novelist is moving over to the inner conflicts of her 
bizarre "seekers and lovers"—deviants like Gopi and Raymond, the 
nymphomaniac Asha and the frigid Lee; .... Here some ironical social comedy 
(partly at least a satire on Nehru's India) fusions as the needed wider Indian 
backdrop in what is a very Indian novel indeed. Though the problems are not 
peculiar to India, an Indian articulation is given to them: spiritual seeking, the 
desperate search too for love's fulfilment and a 'place' in life, whether this be a 
goal to aim at or a harbour of retreat. ... In Jhabvala's India, seekers and lovers 
gain poignancy from the Indian tradition, with its emphasis on both outer social 
integration and inner renunciation of worldliness. These are now accompanied 
by the distorted configurations of the weird Swamiji and his ashram, the Rajput 
palace and ruined fort, the English cemetery... Beyond lies the huge India of 
travellers, seekers, sadhus, pilgrims, beggars...⁸ 

There appears to be an undertone of political satire when one analyses Heat 
and Dust closely. For example, "The narrator learns from Olivia's letters that Olivia has 
realized at least one truth, that the Nawab far from loving her has simply used her to 
revenge himself on Douglas who stands in his way as a despotic ruler with criminal 
tendencies. In the same way he has tried to use the British "rebel" Harry, weak, flabby, 
homosexual in revolt against the public-school-trained official whom he sees as another 
lot of school bullies and "hearties" like the ones who persecuted him in England. ... The 
deeper ironies of the British Raj have rarely been more tellingly conveyed."⁹ Thus, 
Jhabvala's purpose in exploring the theme of love in her novels stands at a variance 
from that of Jane Austen's. Jane Austen intends to establish her moral norms in a 
comic vein through her handling of love in an Augusten manner while Jhabvala is found 
portraying the adolescent and mature, sensual and mundane love to represent the 
conflicts of modern versus traditional India and later in her novels the encounter between 
the eastern and western culture.

The theme of marriage is yet another ground where Jane Austen and Jhabvala 
appear to be writing in the same vein. As disillusionment sets in Jhabvala turns away 
from the Austenian discourse. Amrita, The Nature of Passion are initial novels where 
Jhabvala resembles Jane Austen a lot. As in Jane Austen all her heroines finally marry 
the right persons and the novels end on a happy note; the same happens to Amrita,
Hari and Nimmi, who tie the knot finally with those who are the right choice in their parents' views. But after that, unlike Jane Austen, Jhabvala explores tellingly life after marriage. The trapped couples in their marital cages complicate the theme of marriage with dark irony. Whether it is an Indian couple like Vishnu and Mala, Prem and Indu or Gulzarilal and Sarala Devi, or the mixed couples like Esmond and Gulab, Judy and Bal, Etta's five marriages or the English couple like Olivia and Douglas, all of them are found struggling under the burden of marital problems. Jhabvala delineated their problems with a touch of comedy at the earlier phase, then with a grave irony in the later novels. She seems to grow more bitter while dealing with a mixed-couple. Roopali S. Chibber remarks thus:

In her short stories and novels, Indians and Europeans meet, fall in love and marry and find either marital harmony or dissonance and friction. Interestingly these marriages are set against the backdrop of India and thus the problem of adjustment for the outsider becomes more intense and difficult. The success and failure of this marriage will also measure the individual's capacity for love, understanding and self-deception. It will mean prompting the self to come to terms with itself.¹⁰

Unfortunately it is very difficult for her expatriates to come to terms with the Indian reality and the result is catastrophic. Judy has to sacrifice her English pragmatism to save her marital life while Esmond is finally found packing his bags for London. Etta grows hysteric out of five broken marriages. Here Jhabvala is found dealing with the "stale, flat and weary" uses of the mixed couples as marriages perceived through a European eye which naturally invokes harsh criticism from Indian critics who even term her as 'Anti-Indian'. However, a close study of the two novelists brings out an interesting fact as to why they differ in their treatment of marriage. The answer lies in their personal life. Despite being a detached observer the personality of both novelists is reflected consciously or unconsciously. Jane Austen lived a spinster's life which probably in her works led her away from the reality of complexities of married life. Therefore, all her novels end with happy wedding bells. Jhabvala, on the other hand, lived a mixed-married life and naturally portrays the same and thereby succeeds in bringing out complications of married life of both Indian couples and mixed couples. Shantha Krishnaswamy, for example, tries to find out the reason for Jhabvala's bitterness in this connection:

The meaningful relationship between man and woman is absent. India seems a prison, each race enslaved by its own respective ethos. The races maintain
their separateness to maintain order... Miscegenation leads to personal and social turmoil and mixed marriages are viewed with unsympathetic eyes. ... The foreigners set up their own way of life in India and the reader and the author remain as successfully outside the Indian vision of life as Esmond and Etta are. Being saturated with a sense of 'alieness', of Western values, it is difficult to convey or comprehend the inwardness of Indians.\textsuperscript{11}

In my view, one should not forget the fact that Jhabvala basically wrote her novels for the western readers. She sees India through her western eyes. "Her area of exploration is the social world and the material of her analysis is manners. To Jhabvala, reality is whatever is eternal and hard, though it could be gross and unpleasant."\textsuperscript{12} Perhaps, this is the main reason why Jane Austen and Jhabvala differ in their treatment of various themes.

The second chapter finally deals with the theme of money which pervades the writing of both Jane Austen and Jhabvala. The marital negotiations are found to be influenced by monetary elements in both novelists' writings. Mrs. Bennet's search for a rich prospect for her daughters finds an echo in the character of Radha in \textit{Amrita} who is desperately looking for an aristocratic groom for Amrita. Both Jane Austen and Jhabvala are, sometimes, pointed out to be mercenary social realists whose society is dominated by monetary values. Jane Austen is criticised for the fact that all her amiable heroines finally marry rich grooms. The fact, of course, cannot be denied but a thorough research of all these matrimonial negotiations in all six novels proves one common fact that 'it is silly to marry without money but it is a sin to marry for money.'

Elizabeth's rejection of Mr. Collins and first proposal of Mr. Darcy; Fanny Price's rejection of Henry Crawford; Anne Elliot's rejection of Charles Musgrove and Mr. Elliot prove the fact that moral norms are superior to any kind of monetary influences.

Jane Austen is a social realist. Her Tory rationalisation condemns the mercenary marriages or relations—such as Willoughby's rejection of Marianne for a rich prospect; Lucy Steele's rejection of Edward on his expulsion from the Ferrars' estate; Isabella Thorpe's inconsistent love, fortune-hunter Wickham and so on. At the same time, she cannot shut her eyes to the basic need of money in life. W.H. Auden points it out in the following verse:

\[\textit{\"{}What is life? It is the noise of money,}\
\]
You could not shock her more than she shocks me; Beside her Joyce seems innocent as grass. It makes me most uncomfortable to see An English spinster of the middle-class Describe the amorous effects of ‘brass’, Reveal so frankly and with such sobriety The economic basis of society.\textsuperscript{13}

Most possibly, her own experience of financial stress in her life is one of those reasons which made her realize the importance of money in life. Oliver MacDonagh points it out while studying the relationship between the economic knowledge of Jane Austen herself and the same as displayed in her novels:

At any rate, Jane Austen was accustomed from childhood to hear money matters discussed in informed and detailed fashion; and the lessons she learnt were driven home by her own comparative poverty.\textsuperscript{14}

Since both Jane Austen and her sister Cassandra led the life of spinster, Jane Austen realized that single women more or less face financial stress in their lives. The Dashwood sisters’ attempts to continue their life in severe financial stress reflects her own struggle along with her sister. Mrs. Bennet’s anxiety or restless nerves is the result of their poor financial security in the absence of the right successor of their property. Fanny’s timid nature and submissive personality reveal her poor financial status. This is the reason why her novels are full of talk of money. Also, for the same reason, most of her novels end with a special note on economic prosperity of newly married couple and grooms from the top of the hierarchy as the reward for her heroines. Leonard Woolf points out:

The social standard, ideal, and duty of a woman is assumed to be to marry as high or as rich as possible, and we know, on Mrs. Bennet’s evidence that, according to the tariff, £10,000 a year was as good as a lord....\textsuperscript{15}

In this connection Leonard Woolf further states:

Everyone of the novels ends happily and the end is happy in four out of the six because the heroine, inspite of difficulties, marries above herself.\textsuperscript{16}

On the other hand, a moralist like Jane Austen does not forget to condemn the corrupting power of affluence too. Crawfords, Miss Bertrams, Mr. Elliot, Elizabeth Elliot, Sir Walter Elliot etc., are presented as the victims of the corrupting power of money. In
fact, snobbery, vanity or affectation make their ugly presence felt as the result of class-consciousness. Lady Catherine’s attitude towards Elizabeth, Mrs. Ferrars’ attitude towards Elinor and to a certain extent Emma’s ruthless behaviour towards Miss Bates are examples of snobbery arising out of their rich background.

Another aspect of the theme of money which is found in Jane Austen’s novels is her depicting a restricted class of people. The extreme poor does not find any place in her world. The rising middle class or upper middle class is her forte where she works with the abundance or want of money and its effect on human relationships, more especially in marital negotiations. *Persuasion*, her last novel is the best example of all aspects of the theme of money as taken up by Jane Austen in her six novels. The snobbery of aristocrats like Elliot family (except Anne), Captain Wentworth being rejected on financial ground and above all, the changing relationship of Anne Elliot and Captain Wentworth with the passage of time on account of their changed financial positions permeate her last novel. Moreover, Annes’s rejection of mercenary marriage with Mr. Elliott (the way Fanny did by rejecting John Crawford in *Mansfield Park*) exemplifies Jane Austen’s ultimate concept of money which is always tested on the touchstone of moral grounds.

Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, like Jane Austen, employs the monetary elements in her novels to judge the characters, but in a different manner. However, in her initial novels one finds similarity between her attitude and Jane Austen’s. Besides, she also limits her world to the middle class or upper middle class Punjabi families of post-Independence era of Delhi. Like Jane Austen the very poor or down-trodden are not found as her characters which she herself confesses in an interview.

I’ve alway moved up and down the social scale quite feely. I think—though only, as I say, among the urban upper, middle, and lower-middle classes. I haven’t lived among villagers and haven’t lived among the very poor. So obviously I can’t write about them directly. Although I like to think that they are there *indirectly*—the great mass of India beneath these middle class lives—as they are there indirectly for all of us who live here.”

This appearance of the poor, indirect though it be, makes her different from Jane Austen. This has been discussed later. So far as the novels like *Amrita* or *The Nature of Passion* are concerned, there lies a great affinity in the treatment of money-matters by both the novelists. Despite being an outsider, Jhabvala never fails to catch the importance of money in Indian upper middle classes, especially in marital
negotiations. Like Jane Austen, she is also found satirizing the snobbery and affectation of aristocrats like Ram Prasad, Radha, Mrs. Tarala, Kanta, Nimmi, Pheroze, Shakuntala’s family, Rai Bahadur and many other such westernized aristocrats in her later novels. The role of money in marital prospects appears as the common ground in both novelists’ world. However, it is more vivid, practical and concrete in Jhabvala’s society where money wins over love. Hari is rejected by Amrita’s family as he comes from a simple family background; Nimmi’s love for Pheroze suffers a blow when she comes to know the affluence of Kuku, selected by her father. Jhabvala satirizes the prevalent mercenary tendencies of the businessmen like Lalaji, who settles his daughter’s marriage to benefit his own-business. In short it can be said that while in Jane Austen’s novels money is always present in the background, it comes out more strongly to the foreground in Jhabvala’s novels and marriages are solemnised taking into account the financial status of the two families. In Jane Austen’s world too, money influences marital negotiations but finally heroines marry the heroes for their virtue, not for their money.

From these earlier novels, Jhabvala next moves forward to exploring the lives of such people who are the victims of either corrupting power of money or the extreme want of money. The westernized life of empty-headed youth of such business families, the princess Asha’s misuse of her power of money to satisfy her lustful sexual desires are satirized by Jhabvala with her peculiar touches of irony. On the other hand, the poor plight of backward India overwhelms Jhabvala with the same intensity. In fact Indian poverty seems to have become an obsession with this European lady married to an Indian. Though poor people are never shown as main characters yet the poverty of India as a background of her Indian scene forms the dominating theme in her later works. A Backword Place, A New Dominion and Heat and Dust are those novels where Jhabvala cries out in anguish through the lips of her expatriate characters who fail to come to terms with the Indian squalor and backwardness. Now she is sick to the core at the perception of India. This bitterness starts growing stronger with the introduction of her European characters. Prof. Shahane rightly remarks:

The western man with his background of an affluent society is naturally very sensitive to Indian’s abysmal poverty and also perplexed by the insensitivity of rich Indians to this vast pathetic panorama. ... and what appals him most is that this coexistence of extreme riches and extreme poverty goes often unnoticed by Indians.¹⁸
Prof. Shahane calls this vision Jhabvala’s moral judgement and he thinks this is how “her technique becomes part of her vision: it becomes discovery.”

In this way, Jhabvala starts revealing her own distress at Indian backwardness with the introduction of her European characters. These characters who are mainly spiritual seekers come to India in search of peace but paradoxically fall a prey to Indian heat and dust and squalor and heart-rendering poverty. Jhabvala’s charm for India and Indian poverty disappeared to some extent after her visit to England. Because there she once more saw the European affluent society. But after her return to India she once again sets up a comparison between the two societies and realizes how poor India really is. And as a social realist she started unfolding this poverty quite mercilessly. And once again she was criticized in India for giving a gruesome and one-sided image of India. R.G. Agarwal seems to put the whole issue in perspective:

Obviously, she is aware of the problems of this country and these problems make her squirm in her easy chair. Fortunately she does not romanticise Indian poverty or write propaganda novels about the travails of the poor. She writes about the restlessness of the tiny minority of the rich, its infuriating stupidity and its paranoiac sensuality.

Thus, this section concludes by showing how Jane Austen and Jhabvala deal with the theme of money in their works. If they differ, it is because of their particular environments—which lead them to see the power of money in different contexts.

III

The third chapter is a comparative study of irony which arises out of juxtaposition of various characters and situations in their respective societies. As the technique of irony works basically on contrasting elements, obviously the technique of juxtaposition works wonders in bringing out the critical attitude of both the social ironists. Though their approaches differ; the basic purpose is the same—to perceive the human heart with all its smiles and tears.

As pointed out earlier, the cultural context is the main factor which puts the two ironists on two levels of reality. Jane Austen adopts this method to distinguish between the Augustan values and Romantic values. Her playful but moralistic irony brings forth the victory of Tory values but essentially in a comic environment. In Jhabvala’s world
the juxtaposition of characters or situations is employed for the same purpose i.e. to reveal the distinction between two contrasting values but it goes beyond the initial comic scenes to grapple with the tragic irony of expatriates who fail to accept the contrasting culture of India.

As stated earlier, Jane Austen's favourite technique is to juxtapose various characters in terms of their relationships to the central character. And the central character is her heroine who is to be taught the victory of moral values through the method of contrast and comparison. Within the general framework of her technique in all her six novels, Jane Austen juxtaposes her characters on three or four levels. As she largely concentrates on female characters, her favourite juxtaposed characters are two girls. She is most adept at dealing with the warmth of love between two sisters despite their contrasting nature. In my view, it definitely reflects Jane Austen's strong filial relationship with her sister Cassandra. Atma Ram too points out:

As Jane Austen herself loved Cassandra, this mode of study was particularly suited to her art. This relationship was deeply and authentically known to her; and she could effectively transform her own experience in her works. It may be noted that no two sisters in her novels quarrel or clash together seriously. On the contrary, they often encourage and cheer each other up. In fact, to have a sister is a coveted comfort in the world of Jane Austen.\textsuperscript{21}

Jane Austen's deep concern for this relationship is reflected in Miss Tilney's speech in \textit{Northanger Abbey}:

'I have no sister, you know—and though my brothers are very affectionate, and Henry is a great deal here, which I am most thankful for, it is impossible for me not to be often solitary.'\textsuperscript{22}

With this contrastive method Jane Austen brings out successfully the ironies of life. If sisterly relationship is not present, a female friend works as a sister. Catherine and Miss Tilney; Emma and Harriet; Elizabeth and Charlotte Lucas are such examples.

Jane Austen does not forget to see the other side of the coin where two girls are studied in contrast as rivals. These rivals portray the darker side of human nature. In the same way this method of contrast is applied by the novelist between the two suitors also in order to bring out the distinction between right and wrong more sharply. The same comic irony is displayed in both kinds of juxtaposition. As at the beginning
the reader tends to think that these rivals will be rewarded but various ironic reversals of various situations prove the darker side of these rivals and finally the right people come together. In a nutshell, it can be said that by juxtaposing two contrary values Jane Austen wants to show the conflict between the right and the wrong as perceived in her contemporary transitional age—the old age of reason and the new age of passion. Of course, it is the reason which wins over passion. Thus, the comic revelation of these two contrary values has settled at the very core of Jane Austen's novels. Besides, the method of comparison enables Jane Austen to point to a larger and more comprehensive panorama of life.

In Jhabvala's novels too the juxtaposition of characters is found to be one of the major technical devices for bringing out the irony implicit in characterisation. However, the set-up of this juxtaposition differs due to the cultural background which she portrays. In her initial novels like *Amrita, The Nature of Passion, Esmond in India* Jhabvala can be seen juxtaposing two female characters or two male suitors in a comic situation in an Austenian manner. Amrita and Sushila, Hari and Krishna, Nimmi and her under-educated sister, Gulab and Betty etc represent that young generation of Post-Independence India which is juxtaposed by Jhabvala in order to exemplify the irony of their situation in that transitional society. A detailed comparative study of both the ironists in this respect proves that Jhabvala's characters are juxtaposed more on the ground of their cultural background instead of on their nature or inner personality. This is the chief difference between Jane Austen's and Jhabvala's technique.

Thus, Jane Austen seems to be more concerned with the values or the intellectual temperament of her characters than their cultural background; while Jhabvala being an 'outsider-insider' is found to be more involved with the cultural background of her characters. In fact, there is found no Austenian type of 'good' or 'bad', 'right' or 'wrong' or 'vice' or 'virtue' in her juxtaposed characters. Thus, if Hari and Krishna are put in an ironical situation, it is done because of the difference in their lower middle class Punjabi background and aristocratic Bengali family respectively. However, to some extent Jhabvala tries to touch an intellectual superiority of Krishna to Hari but not so intensely as Jane Austen does with the two contrasting male suitors of her amiable heroines. The same happens when Betty and Gulab are juxtaposed who are sharply contrasted against one another more because of their different cultural backgrounds than their intellectual temperaments. However, Esmond's realization of difference between the intellectual level of the two is virtually an outcome of the difference in their cultural and
social backgrounds. In fact, it can be said emphatically all these juxtaposed characters differ not on the basis of vice or virtue but on their social, financial and the totally incompatible cultural backgrounds. Nevertheless, the irony which arises out of this cultural distinction remains comic in vein in these earlier novels.

Unlike Jane Austen, Jhabvala juxtaposes dominantly the young and older generations. In Jane Austen’s world the older people have very little to do with the lives of their children except a few whereas the liberal Westernized younger generation in Jhabvala’s world clashes with the rigid and conservative old generation. The presentation of the conflict between tradition and modernity in the transitional social scenario of the post-independence India is the ultimate purpose of Jhabvala’s social comedy which she does by juxtaposing the two generations. In Jhabvala’s works this juxtaposition culminates unfailingly in comic irony in showing the rebellious young generation quite happily surrendering before the rigidity of the old generation. Aruna Chakravarty brings out this fact tellingly:

The collective identity is threatened and the generations are alienated. However, as Ruth Jhabvala sees it, the Indian family succeeds in resuming its collective identity by stretching its norms on the one hand and by inducing assimilation by the power of wealth and the weight of an established tradition on the other.23

As stated earlier, the intra-Indian ethos is the sole purpose of Jhabvala to depict; she has grossly indulged in revealing the conflict of entirely contrary cultural values—tradition and modernity—in her earlier novels and the western and oriental values in her later novels. The conflict which goes on between traditional values and modernity remains comic in vein in an Austenian manner. But the moment Jhabvala takes pain to write about the head-on-collision of two totally incompatible western sensibility and Indian ethos, she finds difficult to retain her smile for a long time. So far, this cultural clash occurs inside a family, it is dealt with in a comparatively sympathetic irony. But the marital clash of the mixed couple which is steeped in bitter satire is nowhere found in Jane Austen’s novels. Mr. and Mrs. Bennet or Mr. and Mrs. Palmelton present a juxtaposed contrast in terms of the gap which is found in their intellectual level and Jane Austen deals with that through her superb wit and unfailing comic irony. Nonetheless the complexities of marital life as seen in The Householder and Get Ready for Battle or the problems of mixed marital life as seen in Esmond in India and A Backward Place are portrayed by Jhabvala by juxtaposing these couples through both comic and grave irony.
But after taking leave of marital problems Jhabvala's irony remains only tragic and chaotic when she next turns to another problem which is a consequence of the cultural conflict—the encounter between diametrically opposite East and the West in the context of the spiritual seekers and their meeting with fake swamijjis.

Here her expatriate seekers seem to voice the emotional and cultural shock of their creator when they are juxtaposed against the 'naga swamijjis' and 'gurus'. Jhabvala juxtaposes these European seekers of Indian spirituality against the Eastern spurious swamijjis and presents the most painful confrontation between the two and the ultimate loss of her seekers’ identity through bitter irony. Finally these seekers simply go astray and meet a tragic end. Undoubtedly, this whole lot of experience reflects the author’s ultimate scornful vision of everything Indian.

A close study of this kind of juxtaposition reveals only one fact that Jhabvala restricts herself to reveal only one aspect of reality which is replete with sexually hungry 'gurus' and 'swamijjis' but she never tries to see the other side of the coin where real spiritualism lies. Somewhere, her limited vision is coloured with her own bitter experiences of living in India which prevents her from seeing the other side of India. In a nutshell, it can be said that the creator herself fails to come to terms with the Indian ethos which forces her characters too to remain expatriates only, instead of merging in Indianness. Except Judy and a few others all her expatriate characters know Dr. Hochstadt’s axiom very well:

“It is fatal to come to India and expect to be able to live to a Western rhythm.”

IV

Chapter IV of this project is a study of various tools and methods of skilful irony as applied by both Jane Austen and Ruth Prawer Jhabvala. The major ironic devices which are used by both of them are narrative irony, irony through dialogue and situational or dramatic irony. Both the novelists are found unsurpassed in their use of both verbal and situational irony. However, the verbal irony is more skilfully used by both of them than situational irony.

Being women novelists Jane Austen and Ruth Prawer Jhabvala show a deep knowledge of the emotional life of their characters which they study through a keen
observant eye. Both excel in the technique of narration or writing witty dialogues which is the perennial sources of their unfailing comedy. A pure novelist Jane Austen has singular command over English Language and knows very well how to play with words. Her epigrammatic style, compact language full of maxims is just the right vehicle to point out what is ridiculous, odious or incongruous. This has universalized her ironic style of presenting various characters or situations.

Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, on the other hand, despite being Polish by birth succeeds instinctively to choose such kind of English as can depict the Indianness in a clear comic way and later the trauma of the expatriates in a relentlessly satiric way. She easily adopts the Indian tone and mannerisms of speech while dealing with the upper middle class Punjabi families of the post Independence India which is one of the major sources of her highly entertaining comic irony. Shantha Krishnaswamy points out:

> Within their narrow compass, her novels are skillful affairs. She has a marvelous ear for the rhythms of Indian speech and an observant eye for the modes of behaviour in an adopted culture.\(^25\)

The same is true of Jane Austen’s use of irony. She stands almost unparalleled in her use of both narrative irony and irony of dialogues. Keeping her Augustan values as the criteria for judging her characters she applies her omniscient irony and establishes the victory of her moralistic values. Her heroines, who despite being morally upright persons still suffer from some human flaw or the other. Being a detached observer she enjoys describing their illusions in her unfailing irony which places Jane Austen in the category of great ironists. Malcolm Bradbury points this out while discussing her art in *Emma* which in my opinion is true of her other novels as well:

> This irony dominates the novel. It is contrived through the device of an omniscient narrator who is able to offer an alternative set of values, and it concerns almost always the difference between what the character sees and comes to judgement about, and other potential readings of the incident.\(^26\)

This kind of ironic device is the main weapon of Jane Austen to bridge the chasm between illusion and reality. Thus, she comments at Catherine Morland’s gothic fancy in *Northanger Abbey* and ridicules the tradition of gothic heroine by presenting her as anti-gothic heroine. Here she is found narrating with her favourite mocking irony when Catherine goes to Bath:
... and journey began. It was performed with suitable quietness and uneventful safety. Neither robbers nor tempests befriended them, nor one lucky overturn to introduce them to the hero (p. 684).

No other writer can present such a morvellous piece of narrative irony. Similarly, there are hundreds of instances of this kind of irony which ridicules the follies and foibles of her characters.

Another source of her comic yet gentle verbal irony is found in her dealing with comic fools such as Mrs. Bennet, Mrs. Jennings, Mr. Collins, Miss Bates who have been immortalized both for their humorous speeches as well as the author’s ironic commentary on them.

The dialogue which takes place between Mrs. Bennet and Mr. Collins while discussing Mr. Collins’ proposal to Elizabeth is regarded as one of the most comic proposals ever written by any ironist. Her ironic comments on Mrs. Bennet, Mrs. Jennings or Miss Bates are a fitting testimony to her immortal genius as an ironist. Her epigrammatical narrative style, sometimes, appears to attack two characters at the same time. In Emma, for example, the garrulous Miss Bates and self-centred Mr. Woodhouse are ridiculed by her in the same sort of irony:

She was a great talker upon little matters, which exactly suited Mr. Woodhouse, full of trivial communication and harmless gossip. (p. 37)

Jane Austen, thus, touches a great variety of characters and through pin-pricks of sympathetic and witty irony she points out their follies and affectations. While attacking the snobbery, vanity or affectation of some of her aristocratic characters, Jane Austen’s verbal irony grows inexhaustibly amusing and witty. Lady Catherine’s meeting with Elizabeth, meeting of two women Mrs. Allen and Mrs. Thorpe, Mary Crawford’s witty dialogues, Elizabeth Elliot’s and Mary Musgrove’s snobbery are the examples of those characters who provide the ironist an ample opportunity to ridicule the little incongruities of the characters. The reader cannot fail to perceive the irony when she describes Mrs. Ferrars with venom:

... her features [were] small, without beauty, and naturally without expression; but a lucky contraction of the brow had rescued her countenance from the disgrace of insipidity, by giving it the strong character of pride and ill nature.
Andrew H. Wright finds this kind of ironic device as a sort of antiphrasis by which Jane Austen presents the contradictions in a character. In fact, the understatement, antiphrasis or abbreviating the long speeches into precise comments is one of the major sources of her irony which helps her in attacking the vanities of human nature. Andrew H. Wright remarks:

We cannot leave off consideration of Jane Austen’s dramatic instinct without giving attention to her technique of abbreviating long conversations which by their compassion make for a greater ironic impact than would otherwise be possible.

Her maxims given in the most ironic tone have become the most universally recognised truths and a part of English heritage of proverbs. A close study of Jane Austen’s ironic devices, thus, proves her versatile genius as a pure novelist whose feet are firmly grounded on the tenets of art for art’s sake. For example, when in Emma, Mrs. Churchill dies Jane Austen comments:

It was felt as such things must be felt. Everybody had a degree of gravity and sorrow; tenderness towards the departed, solicitude for the surviving friends; and, in a reasonable time, curiosity to know where she would be buried (pp. 355-356).

Such kind of ironical commentary can be found only in a great novelist’s work like Jane Austen’s, who criticizes the way people’s minds work in such a situation with a delicate irony. The contradiction between sympathy and concern with petty matters is ridiculed by Jane Austen a number of times in all her six novels. However, for using humorous irony in such instances Jane Austen is sometimes criticized for being a little harsh on sensitive matters like death. The fiercest criticism she has faced is in her comic description of Mrs. Musgrove’s way of remembering her dead son. Excepting a few cases, Jane Austen is never found being harsh or cynical at any kind of deviation from her norms. Her brother Henry Austen’s comment in this regard is worth remembering:

Though the frailties, foibles, and follies of others could not escape her immediate detection, yet even on their vices did she never trust herself to comment with unkindness. The affectation of candour is not uncommon; but she had no affectation. Faultless herself, as nearly as human nature can be, she always sought, in the faults of others, something to excuse, to forgive or forget. ... she never uttered either a hasty, a silly, or a severe expression. In short, her temper was as polished as her wit.
Perhaps, this comment encompasses the whole gamut of ironic purpose in Jane Austen’s novels. Her narrative style, the free flow of her dialogues mark her as one of those great humorists or ironists who love mankind with all its follies and foibles. That’s why Jane Austen’s irony has emerged as the most gay, vivid and unfailingly interesting. The dialogues which she has used through the lips of her characters are hailed as good examples of comic and moralistic irony. Witty verbal exchanges between Darcy and Elizabeth, Anne Elliot and Wentworth’s verbal duels regarding loyalty in love, conversations between two sisters constitute remarkable and the most memorable pieces of irony. In fact these ironic dialogues are reminiscent of the verbal duels between Viola and Olivia in Twelfth Night and Benedick and Beatrice in Much Ado about Nothing. George Henry Lewes writes in this connection:

... she has the rare and difficult art of dramatic presentation : instead of telling us what her characters are, and what they feel, she presents the people, and they reveal themselves. In this she has never perhaps been surpassed, not even by Shakespeare himself. ... What incomparable noodles she exhibits for our astonishment and laughter! What silly, good-natured women! What softly-selfish men! What lively, amiable, honest men and women, whom one would rejoice to have known!

Ruth Prawer Jhabvala captures the Indian ethos of customs, rituals, social intercourses through her ironic vision. Like Jane Austen, Jhabvala’s society is also a local limited stylized world in which Jhabvala’s moralistic irony operates to depict its operative values and its own occasion. Her narrative irony becomes most amusing when she portrays Indian life with all its mannerisms. Jhabvala has shown the contrast by presenting other characteristic habits of Indians which are pleasant. However, a frequent repetition sometimes may turn it monotonous. The Punjabi taste and temperament, the favourite Punjabi dish ‘green spinach and maize bread’, the humbler women tying money to their dhotis, the common places of consumption of betel leaf, or various social gatherings, and the display of money and affectations during such occasions provide ample opportunity to an Ironist like Jhabvala whose detached observation is a vehicle for unsparing irony and mild satire. Her verbal irony is found amusing in an Austenian manner in her early novels where she smiles benevolently at the rising coffers of the newly merchant class and the young naive but foolish Cinderellas who turn out eventually obedient and submissive to parental authority. These pseudo-non-conformists become the butt of Jhabvala’s satire through the most amusing comic description when she mocks at their empty adolescent sentimentalism. The reader can never forget the highly amusing irony of fickleness of love of the young generation.
like Amrita and Hari, Nimmi and Pheroze or Shakuntala and Esmond. This she achieves through verbal irony, narrative technique and skilful use of dialogues. Shantha Krishnaswamy writes in this connection: Pheroze's 'kissing Nimmi in moonlight at the Kutb is portrayed in all its ironic splendour while Nimmi's initial reaction is to laugh, his is funnier still; 'What would my mother say if she knew I was kissing a girl who is not a Parsi?' Then the author adds another ironic comment: 'He had kissed several girls in the course of his career and this had always been his first thought.' 31

Similarly Hari's sentimentalism for Amrita as shown in his speech; Shakuntala's flirting with Esmond and many other such naive adolescent love scenes are ridiculed by Jhabvala through her comic irony. In fact, Jhabvala is found as amusing and entertaining as Jane Austen in employing verbal irony both in narrative commentary or dialogues of her characters when she ridicules the whims and inconsistency, snobbery and idiosyncrasies of the westernized Indians who blindly imitate western manners even though, at heart, they remain Indians. Shyam M. Asnani compares Jhabvala to Jane Austen quite aptly in this concern:

She [Jhabvala] is quick, sharp, and intelligent to perceive that under the western influence only surface changes have taken place in the Indian society. Its core remains unaffected. At the same time the blind imitation of the West is bound to have dangerous repercussions. In her novels she employs the qualities of Jane Austen, of exposing the smug self-consequence and pompous triviality, the sentimentalism and cheap romance characteristic of the middle class. 32

Thus, there are a number of examples in this connection. Take for example, the way Kanta blindly imitates European manners to arrange a party and Nimmi's westernized life style and passion for parties in The Nature of Passion and the fashionable airs of Ushi in Get Ready for Battle are ridiculed by Jhabvala through highly amusing verbal irony. Moreover, her irony grows almost merciless when she exposes the hypocrisy of the so-called social workers like Mrs. Kaul, Mrs. Bhatnagar, Tarla, Lady Ram Prasad etc. These women are harshly satirized for their empty social work which ends with discussions, parties and mere paper work. She pointed this out in one of her interviews. When she was asked why she didn't figure those Indians who had been working silently, she replies:

And doesn't writer always take the most representative aspect of his subject ——... And would you say that the most striking feature of Indian life today is Indians working quietly and unpretentiously? Would you really? 33
These westernized people are often portrayed with a wonderful piece of comic verbal irony when they aspire to lead the western way of life but in the process they become cultural snobs and blindly admire the European way of life. Shakuntala's admiring western music without understanding, Nimmi's enthusiasm for acting as party-goer and pretending to love sherry even though it "tasted like petrol", etc. are those examples where Jhabvala's verbal irony reaches its peak and entertains the readers by exposing the hollowness of such westernized people.

But with the passage of time her verbal irony is observed gaining a dark hue when she portrays the mental trauma of her European characters. This is the reason why her initial social comedy turns to tragic realism finally. Ramesh Chadha writes:

Her European characters are more impressive than the Indian ones. She has a deep understanding of European life whereas she has only outer knowledge of Indian characters. Herself a European, she cannot probe the Indian psyche as deeply as she can do the European one. But this is enough for her purpose of writing social comedies. She is a European writer who primarily writes for western audience.  

It clearly shows that she is seen being more personal when she looks at India through her European characters. Her verbal irony is found losing its entertainment and growing bitter and harsh with the passage of time. In this respect, Jhabvala is found absolutely different from Jane Austen. Unlike Jhabvala, Jane Austen had nothing to do with her racial problems. She was untouched by any kind of 'East'— 'West' encounter. She remains as sympathetic in her irony in her later novels as she was earlier. However, her language grows more mature and sombre in tone. But Jhabvala's language is found harsh, sarcastic and finally cynical as an expression of her anguish and frustration. Her discription of European seekers meeting with sexually starved 'swamijjis' seems to be the very culmination of her theme of East-West encounter. Shantha Krishnaswamy finds it quite strange that this seems to be the ultimate reality of her writing:

There is the uneasy and hard to believe combination of the sacred and the profane, the spiritual and the sexual, the normal and the perverse in several situations in the novel's narrative framework.

As a counterpoint to the tragic trauma of her European, Jhabvala's sarcastic irony describes in detail Indian poverty, its litter backwardness, gems and diseases and above all its heat and dust. This growing bitterness can be observed in her choosing
the titles of later novels. Now she is ready to battle with all the incongruities in India but she finds herself losing her European identity due to the total incompatibility of an alien culture. Consequently she finds India a very backward place which is a new kind of dominion that can offer the outsiders only 'heat' and 'dust'. In fact 'heat' and 'dust' seem to have become an obsession in her writing.

A close look at all her novels reveals this fact. She introduces heat and dust which is a recurring symbol of Indian climate in her novels on a mild level in the early phase of her writing and more intense and traumatic in the last two novels. So it comes as no surprise that the title of her last novel is *Heat and Dust*. At the same time, she is also found growing a gradual aversion to 'Indian smell' which her characters suffer from in crowded places, in Indian food etc. Having grown frustrated with Indian climate, Chid being sick says that he can't bear the smell of Indian people and food.

The growing personality of an author is thus observed in Jhabvala’s selection of titles. "The European", as Shantha Krishnaswamy puts it, "used to a cool clean climate abhors the heat and the dust and also as Etta puts it, the germs and the disease that India offers to her visitors. The suitability of the title is evident enough in this light." She further continues saying, "This jaundiced view of India is found repeatedly in the novel that it ceases to shock or mystify the reader. The Indian environment emerges as an oppressive factor that not only grips and warps the characters but has also taken hold of the author’s imagination and creative skills."

Thus, the Indian environment appears to have a debilatating effect on European sensibility. We find sordid relationships, deep disillusionments resulting in a split personality of her European characters and an endless frustration which is revealed in a final scornful ironic comment by Minnies in *Heat and Dust*:

One should never, he warned, allow oneself to become softened (like Indians) by an excuse of feeling; because the moment that happens—the moments one exceeds one’s measure—one is in danger of being dragged over to the other side.

That seems to be the last word Major Minnies had to say on the subject and his final conclusion. He who loved India so much, knew her so well, chose to spend the end of his days here! But she always remained for him an opponent, even sometimes an enemy, to be guarded and if necessary fought against from without and, especially, from within: from within one’s own being.
H.M. Williams points out the same while commenting on Minnies’ speech: “Minnies appears to be giving a philosophical justification for the British stand of “keeping one’s distance from Indians,” but there is a final irony in all this...”

Thus, Jhabvala’s irony runs the whole gamut from humorous ironic portrayal of Indian life to the bitter satiric exposure of Indian reality.

Jhabvala differs from Jane Austen in one more aspect. As Jhabvala belongs to the twentieth century school of novel writing, there is found a gradual inclination towards modern techniques of narration. The broken narration and split plots of *A Backward Place* and *A New Dominion* as well as flash—back technique of *Heat and Dust* go hand in hand depicting the complexity of modern life. V.A. Shahane points out: “Modern fiction in English is peculiarly conscious of its techniques and tools. The modern novelist tries to explore and interpret the complexity of the modern spirit...” He finds Jhabvala a “sensitive creative writer”, who remained pre-occupied with the environment only. Otherwise she would have excelled in her technique of describing the inner psyche of her European characters. One should, however, not forget that “Exploration of the psyche has never been Jhabvala’s forte. She aims at narrating the story interestingly and excels in it.” Interestingly, Jane Austen too does not delve deep into the inner life of her characters. Both the writers, however, are found excelling in narrative technique and their use of verbal irony which suit their genre—the comedy of manners. Nonetheless, Jhabvala moves far away from Jane Austen in her later novels where her technique differs widely. As she is caught in the conflict of two cultures, she adopts the right method of modern technique.

Both Jhabvala’s and Jane Austen’s use of situational irony is aimed at the education of their protagonists. The self-deception which blinds these characters in perceiving the reality leads them into a fanciful world. But this appearance ultimately gives way to reality which they are made to see after undergoing ironic reversals in life. The encounter with reality is painful for them but it leads to a clear vision to see the world as it is, not as it seems. An elaborate analysis of this ironic reversal of situations as found in both novelists writing brings out an interesting factor. Whereas in Jane Austen’s novel the revelation of reality is drawn with a promise of happy life; it is not always amusing or happy revelation of reality in Jhabvala’s novels. Nonetheless the conflict between appearance or illusory notions and the factual rigid truth prepares the very foundation of the situational irony of both ironists. Of course this factual rigid truth
differs in the worlds of the two. In Jane Austen’s world truth is an established moral
code of conduct while in Jhabvala’s world this truth varies. It is either the acceptance
of conventional mode of life, or the realization that solution of life lies in the problems
themselves or losing oneself in the unresolved mystery of Indian climate.

A close study of Jane Austen’s novels shows that Jane Austen’s situational
irony, which is actually the learning process of her self-deceived characters, is essentially
moral, though comic in vein. Interestingly this process is inseparable from her moral
norms which requires a sensitive critical intelligence from the reader’s point of view to
understand it. Arnold Kettle is also of the same view that moral is always paramount in
Jane Austen’s writings.

Thus, there is found a beautiful blending of moral wisdom and practicality in
Jane Austen’s situational irony. In Northanger Abbey, for instance, Catherine Morland
comes to know not only the distinction between life and literature but also the practical
limitation of her newly acquired ‘good sense’. The same happens in Sense and
Sensibility where besides ‘sense’, ‘sensitivity’ is also justified when Elinor is found
learning the importance of sensitivity in life, of course, Marianne is first to learn the
moral value of sense but sensitivity is also recognised as important factor of successful
life. Nonetheless the victory of her Augustan values remains at the very core of Jane
Austen’s situational irony. At the end of the story her main characters are made to see
their fault of mistaking appearance for reality. Quite interestingly Jane Austen’s revelation
of this contrast between appearance and reality is presented in a similar way in all her
six novels. For example, in Northanger Abbey Catherine’s self-realization is worded
thus:

Catherine was completely awakened .... Most grievously was she humbled.
Most bitterly did she cry (p.822).

In Sense and Sensibility, Marinne cries out bitterly when she learns of Elinor’s
mental stress of concealing her break-up with Edward. She regrets :

Marianne was quite subdued.
“Oh ! Elinor, you have made me hate myself for ever. ...”

Jane Austen further writes :

Marianne felt that she had injured, no reparation could be too much for her to
make (pp.200-201).
Similarly Elizabeth Bennet cries out bitterly on learning the ironical revelation of Darcy's goodness and Wickham's villainy in *Pride and Prejudice*:

She grew ashamed of herself: "How despicably have I acted!" she cried. "...Till this moment, I never knew myself."

The same kind of irony is dealt with in *Emma* when Emma undergoes the same repentant feelings:

Every moment had brought a fresh surprise; and every surprise must be matter of humiliation to her. How to understand it all!... The blunders, the blindness of her own heart!... (p.378)

Thus, all these passages confirm Jane Austen's moralistic situational irony about disillusionment. As C.S. Lewis points out.

All four heroines painfully, though with varying degree of pain, discover that they have been making mistakes both about themselves and about the world in which they live. All their data have to be reinterpreted. Indeed, considering the differences of their situations and characters, the similarity of the process in all four is strongly marked. All realize that the cause of the deception lay within; ... Self hatred or self contempt, though (once more) in different degrees, are common to all.  

This is the moralistic aspect which seems to dominate Jane Austen's situational irony. C.S. Lewis throws light on this aspect as well:

It is perhaps worth emphasizing what may be called the hardness—at least the firmness—of Jane Austen's thought exhibited in all these undeceptions. The great abstract nouns of the classical English moralists are unblushingly and uncompromisingly used; good sense, courage, ... generous candour, blamable distrust, just humiliation, vanity, folly, ignorance, reason. These are the concepts by which Jane Austen grasps the world. ... It reveals to Marianne her "want of kindness" and shows Emma that her behaviour has been 'unfeeling'. Contrasted with the world of modern fiction, Jane Austen's is at once less soft and less cruel.

This contrasting feature is the most dominating characteristic feature of Jane Austen's world. And one must not forget, as stated earlier, all kinds of disillusionments lead to a happier life based on refined or newly gained moral values in her world.
Jhabvala’s use of situational irony, on the other hand, is more to do with practical reality than moral wisdom. In fact, the disillusionment of her self-deceptive characters force them to see the worldly matters as the prime reality of life. The conflict of love marriage versus arranged marriage which is set up as the framework in her earlier novels consists of conflicts between the emancipated youth and the rigid parental authority. This gets resolved with a practical, social irony when Amrita, Hari, Nimmi realize the illusion of their fairy-tale love and happily accepts the bond of arranged marriage which has both an approval of the parents and certainty of happy and prosperous life. On the other hand, some characters like Viddi, Vishnu are found accepting monetary help from their fathers. They are no longer interested in their illusory world of doing something different and independently from their parental authority. The most remarkable piece of situational irony is found in *The Householder* which reflects Jhabvala’s practical but realistic attitude towards life when Prem finds the solution of his problems in facing squarely the problems and responsibility of a householder. In this way, in the initial works, Jhabvala portrays the irony of situation in quite a sympathetic, realistic and practical manner and the moral sense is found to be intermingled with practical wisdom. It remains essentially comic and promises a happy life further ahead, similar to that of Jane Austen’s treatment of comic irony.

In Jane Austen’s novels the use of irony takes a turn in her last two novels where there is no ironic revelation in the case of Anne and Fanny. Here male characters learn righteousness from these amiable and sensible heroines and finally marry them. However, the end is found to be common—the happy ending which is the very purpose of her social comedy.

Jane Austen’s use of irony reaches its peak in *Pride and Prejudice* where both the protagonists are set face to face forming an illusory appearance of each other’s attitude. Elizabeth’s pride and Darcy’s prejudice create as much illusion as is done by Elizabeth’s prejudice and Darcy’s pride. The ironical revelation of the goodness of their hearts is drawn by the ironist with an unfailing reciprocal irony which lends an undeniable charm to this novel.

Such kind of irony is not to be seen in Jhabvala’s novels. However, she sets up reciprocal irony in some novels of the middle phase of her writing, but it is not always comic in vein. Unlike Jane Austen this irony is employed not between lovers but between married couples. Gulzari Lal and Sarla Devi, for instance, are set in an ironical situation
where they break-off permanently not because of any illusion but owing to their ironically contrasted principles of life. The reader anticipates that the idealism of Sarla Devi will but ironically enough it is Gulzari Lal's power of money which wins over the principles of Sarla Devi and she loses her battle.

This kind of reciprocal irony is dealt with by Jhabvala in the mixed-couples as well. The East-West encounter is the very core of such relationships. The cultural difference which makes Esmond and Gulab in *Esmond in India* and Judy and Bal in *A Backward Place* fall in love with one another, renders, ironically, their lives miserable after marriage. The Europeans still want to continue to live in a European way of life in an Oriental culture of India and naturally suffer. Judy's pragmatism collides with Bal's fanciful dreams while Esmond finds himself trapped into living with Gulab. Judy finally is found surrendering to the Indian way of life, thereby, protecting her married life. While Esmond fails to do so and packs his bags for London. The ironical situation these couples are found in is comic in *Esmond in India* but grave in *A Backward Place*. It shows Jhabvala's growing awareness of Indian reality which she finds absolutely incompatible with her European sensibility. In fact the light-hearted comic irony of *Esmond in India* is also coloured with Jhabvala's growing bitterness towards India. She herself accepts this fact in an interview when she is asked by Ramlal G. Agarwal as to why *Esmond in India* "shows a sudden change in your attitude and ... bitterness...?" Jhabvala replies: "I suppose it could be put down to my change of attitude towards India. I loved everything during my first year here—I really loved it and was wildly excited by it and never wanted to go away from here. But later that changed. I saw a lot I didn't like. I'll go further: a lot that horrified me."45

Therefore, despite being a detached ironist Jhabvala fails to keep a distance from her characters, especially from her European characters. Her personal anguish starts being reflected in the bitter shafts of satire in her later novels. Shanthan Krishnaswamy remarks in this connection:

While this detached outlook promotes irony and satire in her work, it cannot be forgotten that she writes exclusively from the point of her own dilemma, of her own personal anguish as a white European woman, caught in a mixed marriage, in a tropical country, unable to compromise, unable to forget her own culture, wholly subjective, self-righteous, thinking constantly of her own choice, ... such an attitude provides for fitful glimpses in her novels of the vision of Indian womanhood and these are fatally compromised or flawed.46
Further this personal anguish grows deeper which turns Jhabvala's situational irony completely dark and tragic. "Her initial excessive, unreflecting, un-controlled delight in India, her willing but unnatural suspension of European sensibility and of rational judgement, ... have now led to the inevitable recoil and revulsion from India."\(^{47}\)

She feels the Indian soil killing the Europeans' identity. Her seekers present this outlook in the last three novels who are dealt with by the most tragic and relentless irony of an expatriate writer. These seekers come to India seeking ideal spirituality in India which ironically presents a land full of disease, poverty, corruption; and above all wierd 'sadhus'. They mistake sexuality as the path of reaching spirituality. The result is tragic as portrayed with a scornful irony. *A Backward Place*, *A New Dominion* and *Heat and Dust* show how Jhabvala's European sensibility leads her to criticize everything Indian. Now she finds India as a land of disease, backwardness and poverty where death seems to be the last solution for every problem.

In this way, a comic ironist Jhabvala is finally found using devices of grim irony and biting satire in her technique which carries her far away from Jane Austen who always remains sympathetic and gentle in her technical tools to expose life's little ironies.

V

An analytical comparative study of the two novelists is attempted finally in the fifth chapter to reach the conclusion. A broad and deep study of both Jane Austen and Ruth Prawer Jhabvala's writing finally proves that both ironists are skilled in their use of irony while dealing with domestic matters of day-to-day life. If they differ in their use of irony, it is only because of the cultural scenario which they portray in their writings.

Jane Austen's light, vivid and sympathetic irony is the result of her dealing with a congenial atmosphere. An English lady delineating an English society which does not give her any cultural shock. On the other hand, Jhabvala, a white woman, lives with oriental people, who appear, initially fascinating and interesting but backward, hypocritical and repulsive finally. The initial cultural contrast is observed with a comic irony showered with mild satire when she watches Indian customs, rituals and, above all, the day-to-day life of Indian families. But, with the passage of time, her ironic laughter is found giving way to sarcastic smile and finally into painful tears. Quite naturally her
tears turn her irony deeply scornful and grim. Unlike Jane Austen's, Jhabvala's perception of this darker side of reality invites a hostile criticism from the Indian side. The grim irony which is used in her later novels can lead any Indian reader against her. No doubt, she perceives Indian ethos on a very restricted plane through her European sensibility which makes her malicious and scornful about India. This makes a number of Indian critics furious. Shantha Krishnaswamy writes:

It is only to be regretted that excessive emphasis on the incongruities in Indian life makes her and her readers oblivious of the fact that India is this and much more. The source of her strength as well as weakness as an artist arises from the fact that she trains a consistent European eye on India and writes about what is most apparent and striking to her eye. In the process the truth about India becomes simplistic and one dimensional.\(^{48}\)

In her last three novels like the way she uses shafts of her irony to portray the East-West encounter on a quite mundane level is found to be an embodiment of Anti-Indianism. One is inclined to agree with R.S. Singh's view that there is sensationalism in her last two novels: "The novelists seem to have indulged in sensationalism to attract the western audience through exoticism and the unusual, but it does not give evidence of a better understanding of the Indian mind."\(^{49}\) It will be relevant to refer to a journalist Reene Isar's open letter to Ruth Prawer Jhabvala published in the Statesman Literary Supplement. In this letter the journalist takes the novelist to task for giving a very damaging and highly inaccurate picture about the country with particular reference to the foreigners. Here is a telling message from the letter:

I feel entitled to protest that a European in India does not inexorably have to agonize in those painful dilemmas you describe, ever besotted by a feeling of danger or an ever-impending Auden-ish general assault on his ideas of safety.\(^ {50}\)

It will be very difficult for an Indian not to agree with the balanced view expressed by a foreigner, who became a naturalised citizen of this country.

However, one should not forget the fact that Mrs. Jhabvala is critical not only of Indians but also Europeans. Her European characters are not spared for their pretentiousness and indulgence in inmoral way of life. A. Hari Prasanna defends Jhabvala in this connection:

Her [Jhabvala's] satire, however, is not confined to the worldly materialistic goodness alone. The spiritual seekers from the West are not spared. The West
turns to the East, not because it believes, trusts and admires the spirituality of the East, but to fill the vacuum in their lives. One cannot find fault with Jhabvala for the distorted picture of Swamiji, for India has no dearth of such fake Swamijis. The irony levelled at such godmen also brings out the hollow nature of the Western spiritual seekers, for, they are most of the time attracted to the life of Swamiji than to genuine ones. They look at Swamiji, as a symbol of India’s spirituality and seek complete indentification with him. The tragedy [on ironical level] is that they do not know what they want, nor do they know where they can find it. They get confused between physical union and spiritual communion. Therefore, they submit to the lust of Swamiji.

Henceforth, Jhabvala’s relentless irony aims at all those characters who blindly believe the illusion as reality and, therefore, suffer when they undergo the painful process of disillusionment.

This is how, the cultural scenario has emerged as the deciding factor to shape the handling of irony by both the novelists working with three or four families and their domestic pleasures and sorrows. Both Jane Austen and Ruth Prawer Jhabvala employ their irony and expose the human foibles and follies as they receive in their respective societies. Both of them deal with the subjects of universal importance i.e. the theme of love, marriage and money, which prepares the characters for self-awareness, for gleaning the truths of life. The process of disillusionment and awakening of self-knowledge is dealt with by both the ironists by means of a number of ironic reversals which open the eyes of their characters. They see the reality finally which is found as an absolutely stark contrast to their illusion.

In Jane Austen’s novels self-knowledge leads to happy ending. Whereas in Jhabvala’s world reality is not always pleasing or soothing. There is an affinity in the handling of irony by the two novelists only in Jhabvala’s early phase of writing. With the passage of time, Jane Austen’s irony is found less satiric and more serious as compared to that of her earlier phase. However, it never turns grave or tragic. While Jhabvala’s irony starts growing more serious, grave and finally relentless. The reason for this change lies in the cultural scenario which they depict in their novels.

Jane Austen is writing in her own language about a society which is congenial to her. Being a true worshipper of Dr. Johnson Jane Austen establishes her moralistic but essentially entertaining irony. Her compact style, and witty expressions to depict the quotidian successfully reveal the hidden incongruities and foibles in the most amusing
manner. Her economy of art goes hand in hand with keen observation of reality. George Henry Lewes remarks: "... no novelist has approached her in what we may style the 'economy of art', by which is meant the easy adaptation of means to ends, with no aid from extraneous or superfluous elements. ... It is easy for the artist to choose a subject from every-day life, but it is not easy for him to represent the characters and their actions that they shall be at once lifelike and interesting; accordingly, ... But Miss Austen is like Shakespeare: she makes her very noodles inexhaustibly amusing, yet accurately real."

In my view the achievement of Jane Austen's art cannot be summed up better than this remark which compares her to the very legend of English literature, William Shakespeare.

In this way, despite working in a limited area, Jane Austen is unsurpassed in her wit and wisdom, portraying the human heart with a dedicated honesty which prepares the ground for her entertaining and moralistic irony. Her irony steeped in Augustan values successfully delineates the 18th century English Provincial life in a highly amusing and entertaining manner. Moreover, there is found a gradual maturity of the author both in language and delineation of the themes with the passage of time. She achieves an artistic excellence in rendering the sufferings and emotional turmoil of her solitary heroine in her last novel Persuasion. The journey from Catherine Morland's gothic fanciful world to the isolated life of Anne Elliot establishes the aesthetic peak which Jane Austen achieves, bathed in her ironic wit and kind sympathetic laughter. It suggests her consciousness has grown more subtle and the apprehension of her subject more complex and above all she has learnt how to apply her ironic medium through which she can depict her characters' consciousness and bring the truth to the foreground which otherwise lies hidden under the surface of reality. For this, she is found developing her own style which suits her purpose—to love mankind with all its foibles and accept the life as it comes. Thus, the sympathetic irony focussed on the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries of England proves Jane Austen. "... a woman of great vitality, of generous impulses, of a large-hearted charity; gifted, in a pre-eminent degree, with that power of intuitive sympathy in which women excel." And when Emma exclaims, "There is no charm equal to tenderness of heart." (p. 13), it proclaims the tenderness of the author's own heart, who can love a fool even in her real life, as stated by R.W. Chapman.
In this way, working in a very limited field, Jane Austen is found universalising the conflict of human head and heart in the most charming and entertaining manner and describing the reality which she perceives through her ironic eyes. The way we find an ever-widening view of the experience of human nature in her later novels (especially in *Emma* and *Persuasion*), we feel she would have matured greatly in delineation of human heart, if she had lived long. It will be pertinent to conclude the achievement of Jane Austen’s artistic gift with Margaret Kennedy’s remark:

But her courage was boundless. If she had lived longer she would not have rejected all that the years must teach. It she had reached old age, as Cassandra did, this one limitation might have disappeared and a lost hue would have been added to the rainbow.  

Ruth Prawer Jhabvala too excels in her comic vision as seen through her ironic insight. Like Jane Austen, she catches the mannerisms, tantrums and hypocrisies of Post-independence Indian society and lashes at it with an ironic smile. Both the writers are found being less concerned with the psyche of their characters, which suits their purpose of writing i.e. comedy of manners. Thus, they endeavour to keep a distance from the pitfalls of extreme sensitivity or emotional upheavals of their characters. Nonetheless, both reflect a deep knowledge of human heart which leads Jane Austen to delve deep into the world of Anne Elliot turning her irony more consummate and realistic; while Ruth Prawer Jhabvala as a contrast finds herself filled with human sufferings and woes and her irony, consequently, turns to a merciless satiric portrayal of Indian life. Thus, it is obvious that Jhabvala who is equally gifted as an ironist becomes more subjective and fails to continue her sympathetic Austenian wit for a long time. From a keen observer Jhabvala turns finally to adopting the role of an expatriate critic who finds everything torturous and unbearable around her. Thus a thorough study of the novels of both the ironists brings out this difference in their use of irony, and finds their respective cultural background as the biggest factor responsible for this distinction. If Jane Austen can still love the follies of man, it is because she never had any experiences of cultural shock. On the contrary, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala is held firmly between two contrasting cultures. The East-West encounter is a perennial theme in her novels. It had an enthusiastic and curious outlook at the beginning of her writing when a European observer captures a different culture with a lot of interest as seen in her humorous irony. But with the passage of time the more she gets acquainted with Indian society, the more she finds herself aloof from that scene. Her European sensibility clashes with the Indian reality and fails to perceive the ultimate truth. Thus, her successful
and artistic irony finally turns her search of truth to a chaos where instead of truth, ironically, everything is full of the dust of backwardness and poverty and heat of lust and passion. Her comic irony, henceforth, paves the way to a tragic irony which turns Jhabvala almost anti-Indian. But one should not forget that she is a realist and expresses exactly what she perceives in an alien culture. In fact, she was able to “execute her exquisite comedies of urban middle class life in the nineteen fifties and sixties.” And inspite of the distorted image created by her use of tragic irony in her last three novels, it can be affirmed undeniably that Jhabvala has succeeded in capturing Indian sensibility in her earlier novels. The portrayal of Indian society despite being limited emerges on the whole as genuine and real. Nirupa Rani ’s following comment points out Jhabvala’s artistic talent as justified and genuine:

As a foreigner she [Jhabvala] found a number of things which were quite alien to her Western upbringing and sensibility, and these she has depicted with the characteristic attitude of her Western culture. She is not however, impervious to the good in Indian culture and society. Wherever possible she has stressed this aspect. She is critical... but appreciative also. India and its vastness are very beautifully portrayed in her novels with the correct accent on the good and bad side of Indian life. It is commendable that a foreigner could develop such a balanced attitude towards Indian life and society. Her novels are not only interesting but present a very unique attitude towards Indian life.

Thus, it will not be an exaggeration to state that if Jhabvala had continued staying in India and had tried to expand her ironic vision on a broader level, she could have possibly succeeded in perceiving the other side of Indian reality as well, which is more real, genuine and soothing. And her irony could have escaped from gaining the tragic hue as the only truth of Indian scene which turns her away from the tenderness of Austenian laughter. In short, we can say that the handling of irony of both the writers arises out of the conflict of of two contrary values as both are found to keep one foot planted in the old society and the other in the modern age. In Jane Austen’s case this gap is not very wide, therefore, it easily gets filled up with an ironic smile and comic vision, while in Jhabvala’s world the gulf widens due to two incompatible cultural values to such an extent that it remains too deep to be filled up easily.

However, like Jane Austen we can hope that some day Jhabvala would try to bridge this gap once again with her sympathetic and humorous irony.
NOTES


3. Ibid.


All further references to this edition will be displayed in the body of the thesis through parentheses.


16. Ibid.


19. Ibid.


All further references to this edition will be displayed in the body of the thesis through parentheses.


All further references to this edition will be displayed in the body of the thesis through parentheses.


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36. Ibid., p.329.

37. Ibid., pp.329-330.


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44. Ibid., p.28.


46. Shantha Krishnaswamy, op.cit., p. 284.

47. Ibid., p.289.

48. Ibid., p.332.


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