Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, an Anglo-Indian writer occupies a significant place in the Indian English literary scene. The significance of her position lies in the nature of her mixed cultural heritage which results from her varied expatriate experiences. As Anna Rutherford and Kirsten Holst Peterson point out in a review of one of Jhabvala's novels:

With a background like this, it is not surprising that Ruth Prawer Jhabvala should be concerned with the problem of integration into and alienation from a foreign society. . . . The main question asked in all her books is to what degree it is possible and desirable to become involved in a foreign culture.¹

The fact that she is one of the leading practitioners of Indian English writing by not being a 'real Indian' makes it a paradox of Indian English
literature. Besides, her status as a novelist who writes about India remains a contentious issue whether she should belong to a group of Anglo-Indian writers such as Rudyard Kipling, E.M. Forster, Paul Scott etc or to a class of Indian English writers like R.K. Narayan, Anita Desai and Kamala Markandaya. As pointed out by Ralph J. Crane:

She is at once an outsider, a non-Indian who is also an intimate insider, part of an Indian family. This apparent dichotomy is only one aspect of cuckoolike life of expatriation that has taken Jhabvala from Europe to India and most recently, to the United States. Nevertheless, her greatness as a competent novelist cannot be underestimated.

Ruth Prawer Jhabvala was born in the city of Cologne, Germany on May 7, 1927. She was the second child of Marcus Prawer, a Polish Jew and Eleonara Cohn. She had an elder brother, Siegbert Saloman Prawer. Jhabvala’s father, a lawyer by profession, had come to Germany to escape military conscription in Poland during the First World War. There, he met her mother, who like Ruth had been born in Cologne, but whose father had come from Russia. Thus, a sense of rootlessness overwhelms the author’s ancestry which is aptly justified in the words of the author:

Whatever place were in, we didn’t go back into it very far. Not much rootedness—everyone having come from somewhere else; usually having run away from somewhere else.

Ruth Prawer Jhabvala describes her family background: “And I was born into what seemed a very solidly based family who had identified with the
Germany around them — had been through the 1914-1918 war with them—
had sung for Kaiser and fatherland . . . My first memories then—that is between
1927 and 1933 were of a well-integrated, solid, assimilated German Jewish
family”.

As recalled by the author, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala:

One of her mother’s proudest moments was being chosen
by her school to recite a poem in celebration of the
Kaiser’s birthday, and Ruth Prawer’s family treasured
the picture of the Cologne Rathaus presented to her
grandfather in recognition of his civic virtues.

However, the influence of Judaism on the lives of the Prawers cannot be
overlooked. In fact, Jhabvala’s maternal grandfather had been the cantor of
the biggest Jewish synagogue in Cologne, Germany. This was how the child
Ruth and her brother had been introduced to the mysteries of Judaism.

In 1933, the historic rise of Adolf Hitler to power in Germany brought
about a significant change in the lives of the Prawers. The sense of their
alienation (from the mainstream of German life) seems to be complete with
the implementation of Hitler’s policy of politically motivated persecution
of the Jews. As a consequence, Ruth received her elementary education in a
segregated Jewish school at the age of six and “ran the daily gauntlet of
anti-semitism that had to be endured by all Jewish children”. Between
1933 and 1939, the extermination of Jews from Germany was completed
and all of them emigrated to countries like Holland, France and the United
States.
In April, 1939, the Prawers left Germany for England. Nevertheless, the horrors of Nazi Germany kept haunting the author’s family even in England. The author recalled the trauma of losing most of her relatives in the Nazi camp:

Every last one was killed in a camp. We counted more than 40.

In fact, the pain and trauma had been too much for Ruth’s father that he committed suicide in 1948.

In England, the Prawers first stayed in Coventry and later in Hendon, a suburb of London with a sizeable Jewish population. In Hendon, Ruth’s parents bought a house and her father started a clothing business. It seems that Ruth Prawer Jhabvala had been gifted with the aptitude to write since an early age. Her first composition came out in German with the title Der Hase (The Hare) when she was at school in Germany. In England, her ‘first adopted home’, she immediately switched to the new language, English from German with much ease. Here, she started writing in English about English themes and subjects. On the other hand, her brother eagerly studied the German classics, read German at Cambridge, and in time became an authority on Heine.

In England, the young Ruth was educated at Hendon County school (a local grammar school). Later on, she attended Queen Mary College of London University where she studied English literature. During this period, Jhabvala had been fairly acquainted with the works of English novelists. George Eliot, Thomas Hardy and Charles Dickens and also with European classics which laid the foundation of her career as a writer. In 1948, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala
became a British citizen. After three years she completed her M.A. degree in English literature with the submission of a thesis entitled “The Short Story in England, 1700—1750.”

Ruth Prawer Jhabvala wrote a large number of unfinished novels and stories. However, she stopped writing about England much before she had acquired enough skill. At the same time, it is surprising enough to note that the author had made a deliberate attempt to shut out the memories of Nazi Germany. It is only in one story, “A Birthday Party in London” (which is included in her first collection of stories, Like Birds, Like Fishes) that she tried to recapture her adolescence and youth spent in the dreaded Nazi regime and then as expatriate in war torn England through the lives of German expatriates in postwar London, who are continually haunted by the hardship and humiliation in their first years in England.12

The author met her future husband Cyrus S.H. Jhabvala, an Indian (Parsi) student of Architecture at a party in London. She was married to S.H. Jhabvala at Burnt Oak register office and left for India where she stayed for about twenty four years. For the author, the land of India was different from that of Britain (which had been seriously affected by the world wars) despite both of them were foreign or alien to her. In India, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala and her husband settled in Delhi where they had their three daughters, Renana, Ava and Firoza. The author’s early experience of India seems to be a bit different from those of other Europeans or Westerners in the country. Her husband’s family belonged to the Indian Parsis who themselves possess a history of expatriation from Persia, which is many centuries old.
During her first ten years in India, the writer had been fascinated with everything of the land:

The smells and sights and sounds of India - the mango and jasmine on hot nights -- the rich spiced food - the vast sky - the sight of dawn and dusk-- the birds flying about - the ruins - the music.13

As she had done earlier in Britain, Jhabvala started writing about India and Indians. She was able to complete her first novel To Whom She Will. The novel was published in the United States under the title Amrita.

In the words of Yasmine Gooneratne, the early Indian experience may be described as:

The first stage of Ruth Jhabvala’s experience of India, invariably described by her in terms of ‘excitement’, ‘rapture’ and ‘love’ included the birth of Jhabvala’s three daughters and the publication of four novels, To Whom She Will (1955), The Nature of Passion (1956), Esmond in India (1957) and The Householder (1960).

The experience lasted about nine years during which Jhabvala was in love with everything she saw in India.15

With the publication of her first novel in 1955, Jhabvala was able to complete her second novel, The Nature of Passion. Both the novels had won acclaim and positive responses from a number of reviewers and critics. They are the lively recreations of Hindu family life through her association with the large extended family of her husband’s Punjabi business partner.16 Like its predecessor The Nature of Passion revolves around the family of Lala Narayan
Dass Verma, the rich Punjabi businessman of Delhi, who had acquired wealth by dint of hard work. Lalaji or Lala Narayan Dass Verma’s household consists of his wife, sons and daughters, daughters-in-laws and his sister. The members of the family is divided into two groups--one who upholds tradition and convention and the other who is in rebellion against it, under the impact of western thoughts, values and ideals. Thus, the clash or conflict between the two views of life forms the gist of the intracultural theme of the novel. In short, the author’s early novels depicted ironically the life and manners of Indian families, Westerners trying to understand India and the clash between Eastern and Western Cultures.

In 1960, Jhabvala returned to England for the first time. The visit was to have a significant effect on the author’s attitude to India. Since her first visit back to England, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala became disillusioned with India, like many of her characters. This sense of disillusionment became a part of a cycle which she believed that all Westerners who have visited India undergo. The cycle has various stages which are explained by the author in her essay, “Myself in India” (which is the introduction to her third collection of short stories, An Experience of India):

There is a cycle that Europeans—by Europeans I mean all Westerners, including Americans—tend to pass through. It goes like this: first stage, everything Indian is marvellous, second stage, everything Indian not so marvellous; third stage everything Indian abominable. For some people it ends there, for others the cycle renews itself and goes on. I have been through it so many times that now I think of myself as strapped to a wheel that goes round and round and sometimes I’m up and sometimes I’m down.
The author's discontentment with India has been vividly reflected in her fifth novel, *Get Ready for Battle* (1962) which focuses primarily on "India's extreme poverty, and upon the exploitation of the poor and helpless by the corrupt, the wealthy and hypocritical." Besides this, the feelings of disillusionment and disenchantment as experienced by the Westerners in India find its overwhelming expression in Jhabvala's three novels — *A Backward Place* (1965) *A New Dominion* (1972) and *Heat and Dust* (1975). In these novels, the author has shown that Westerners in India are "no longer as conquerer but as the conquered ones." 

*A Backward Place* is about the European expatriates—Etta, Clarissa, the Hochstadts and Judy who endeavour either to assimilate or shake off the alien culture of India. Jhabvala's seventh novel, *A New Dominion* or *Travellers* (in its American edition) deals with how India acts upon the Europeans who, "fed up with their materialistic pursuit of affluence, come here to seek peace of mind and spiritual solace in order to give meaning to their empty minds." In fact, the novels revolves around "an encounter between the forces of Hinduism, as embodied in a spurious godman and an enigmatic holy woman, and the forces of Christianity and modern rationality represented by three Western girls on a spiritual quest, an Englishman on a study tour of India and a female missionary who has spent thirty years in India." 

Written in the same vein is the author's Booker Prize winning novel, *Heat and Dust* (1975). In this novel, Jhabvala has shown how India, the 'land of heat and dust' affects the two English women—Olivia Rivers and her step-grand daughter who is also the narrator of Olivia's story. The east-west theme in the novel is percieved in terms of the two English women in India in relation to the native Indians and their social milieu.
Here, the east-west dichotomy depicted, especially in the portrayal of the characters is quite explicit. The novels draws a clear line of demarcation between two groups of characters—Indian group as identified with the East and English group in the similar manner. This is the reason why the text has been a problem for many of the Indian critics and reviewers who accuses the author for being racially biased and prejudiced. Unfortunately the author contracted jaundice while she was writing *Heat and Dust*. Thus, after spending about twenty-four years in India, Jhabvala left India for New York in 1975.

Besides writing novels, the novelist also devoted her time to other artistic pursuits such as writing scripts for the cinema. Jhabvala’s involvement in films began in the early 60s when James Ivory and Ismail Merchant invited her to write a screen play for her novel, *The Householder*. Her association with these two men of the filmdom resulted in eight memorable films such as *The Householder* (1963), *Shakespeare Wallah* (1965), *The Guru* (1969) *Bombay Talkie* (1970), *Autobiography of a Princess* (1975), *Roseland* (1977), *Hullabaloo over Georgie and Bonnie’s Pictures* (1978) and *The Europeans* (1979). These films were followed by many others in the later years. On the whole, the art of screenplay writing did influence the author’s development as a novelist and short story writer.

Ruth Prawer Jhabvala began to publish short stories in the *New Yorker* after the publication of her second novel. For the next twenty years she continued to contribute stories regularly to that magazine. Her first collection, *Like Birds, Like Fishes* appeared in 1963, when the author had already published five novels and was working on the screenplay of *The Householder*. It has eleven stories, which were set in India with the exception of one story—
“A Birthday Party in London”. The first story (of this collection), “The Old Lady”, concerns with an old lady whose daughter wants to divorce her husband. Being an upholder of tradition and convention of the Indian society, the old lady forbids her daughter, Leela not to get a divorce from her husband. Even the husband holds the same view as that of his mother-in-law. But the westernised Leela sticks to her decision of ending her marriage for it is popular in the West. Thus, the story presents two attitudes to marriage—the traditional represented by the old woman and the pseudo-modern by her daughter. In short, most of the stories in this collection indicate “an awareness of the Indian society which is inhibited by its age old complicated tradition of manners breaking under the impact of Western education which in turn inhibits its members, constricts their freedom and renders them helpless.”

The second collection of stories, A Stronger Climate is concerned with Westerners in India, who come to India in search of a higher realm of life but ends in disillusionment. In this collection, a story called “In Love with a Beautiful Girl”, deals with an Englishman Richard who worked in the British High Commission in India. Unlike his English colleagues who have no genuine interest in India, Richard is genuinely interested in India and wants to understand Indian culture. Thus, he falls in love with Ruchira, a young Indian girl. Ruchira likes Richard for she thinks that he can take her to exciting parties and introduces her to his English friends. Thus, Ruchira becomes friendly with other people from embassy and starts insulting Richard much to his shock. Here, the author tries to suggest that “Richard’s predicament and his humiliation by Ruchira exemplify the changed condition in which the white man finds himself in India.”
The stories of Jhabvala’s third collection, *An Experience of India*, examines that section of the Indian society in which the people lead an aimless life. One of the stories (in this collection), “A Bad Woman” narrates the life of Chameli who is the whore of a rich man, Sethji. Chameli derives her source of sustenance through Sethji who visits her occasionally to satisfy his sexual appetite. The problem begins with the arrival of a reckless young man in the life of Chameli. The young man becomes the lover of the prostitute. He does not like Chameli’s association with the rich man. Therefore, he kills Sethji.

The most recent collection of the author is *How I Became a Holy Mother*. It has nine stories. In one of the stories “Prostitutes”, the author describes “the sordid world of prostitutes which is full of loneliness, danger and anxieties.” In another story, “Desecration”, Jhabvala presents how a sensitive woman is torn between her old husband and a ruthless sex maniac. Thus, Jhabvala’s short stories have covered a wide range of themes which include expatriation, that of the social realities of the Indian society, cross-cultural encounter and many others. Jhabvala’s most recent collections of short stories include *Out of India: Selected stories* (1986), *East into Upper East: Plain Tales from New York and New Delhi* (1998) and *My Nine Lives: Chapters of a Possible Past* (2004).

In 1975, the author decided to leave India to settle in the U.S. Jhabvala’s decision to stay in New York may be explained in the words of Aruna Chakravarti:

*America with New York as its microcosm, is then, in Ruth Jhabvala’s opinion, the ideal refuge for the displaced*
European since it is of such that her nation is compounded. A vast, new and vital country, it should have presented itself as a permanent resting place for the already twice expatriated novelist. Yet, the images of America and her people that are portrayed in her writing of the last twenty years (1975-97) is not one of political assimilation but that of acute alienation.

However, her creative energy seems to lose its vitality after coming to America. During her twenty-two years stay in the new place, she has written only four novels—In search of Love and Beauty (1983), Three Continents (1987); Poet and Dancer (1993), and Shards of Memory (1995) and a few short stories. Although, Jhabvala has been distanced from India, her works written in America show some of the Indian element which the author has acquired over so many years. For instance, set in the backdrop of New York of the 80s, Jhabvala’s In search of Love and Beauty, delves into the life of a group of German and Austrian refugees and “examines the roots of their fascination with Indian spirituality.” In her tenth novel, Three Continents, the novelist draws upon her triple European, Indian and American heritage to demonstrate the stereotypical representation of India with its fatally sexual appeal of the male members and faked guru.

A retrospective look at Jhabvala’s career as a writer reveals her remarkable contribution to the literary world, especially to that of Indian English literature. This is evidenced by the range and diversity of the author’s literary output which includes novels, short stories, screenplays and personal essays. Although she claims herself to be an European writing about India, her preoccupation with the Indian element for a considerable period of time, has enabled Jhabvala to achieve a unique position among the distinguished Indian English writers.
A lot of criticism have been devoted to the life and works of the author. Mentioned may be Aruna Chakravarti’s *Ruth Prawer Jhabvala: A Study in Empathy and Exile*, Ralph J. Crane’s *Ruth Prawer Jhabvala*, Yasmine Gooneratne’s *Silence, Exile and Cunning*, Hadyn Moore Williams’ *The Fiction of Ruth Prawer Jhabvala* etc. In Chakravarti’s text, the critic has made an attempt “to place in a critical perspective Ruth Prawer Jhabvala’s exploration of cross-generation cross-familial and cross-cultural assimilations in India as manifested in her fiction written between 1955 and 1975.”

Whereas, Yasmine Gooneratne’s *Silence, Exile and Cunning* is an exhaustive study of Jhabvala’s work in which Gooneratne critically analyses how the author’s writing has been shaped by her Indian experience and its consequence. Another critic, Ralph J. Crane approaches Jhabvala’s works in the light of the author’s conviction that she must considered as one of those Europeans who have written about India.

Like Jhabvala, there are also writers whose works are concerned with cultural theme. Anita Desai is the most significant in this regard. Desai has dealt with the issues and problems. But the present research is of related to culture and its ramifications in some of her works. Besides the fact that the author’s mother is a German makes her share something in common with Ruth Prawer Jhabvala who has been raised from Germany. Thus, a comparative study between the two authors may be quite meaningful and illuminating in order to understand them in depth. The research is an attempt to investigate and analyse the differences and the similarities between the writers in their handling of the cultural theme in their novels.

In short, the comparative study is based on some of the striking
similarities and differences between the works of the two authors. Besides this, both the writers have been nurtured in mixed cultural background—Jhabvala in a Polish Jewish heritage and Desai in a Indian-German one. It is this fact which further strengthens the above statement.

Anita Desai who is about ten years younger to Jhabvala, also takes up the cultural theme in many of her novels. Her contribution to Indian English literature is remarkable. She has indispensably added some unique dimensions to the thematic concern of Indian English fiction. Thus, her position among Indian women writing in English, is significant to a considerable degree. According to a critic, the Indian English women novelists made their appearance in the literary scene late as 1874. The works of these writers are concerned with the daily Indian way of life—its customs, traditions and the consequent clash between eastern culture and its western counterpart values and ideals.

However, after the second world war, the writing of these women writers has been considerably improved, thus enriching the genre of fiction in Indian English literature. Among the women writers, Toru Dutt may be considered as the pioneer in this field of fiction writing by women in English. Other important works of early woman writers may include Rajlaxmi Debi's *The Hindu Wife*, Cornolia Sorabjee's *Between the Twilights* and *India Calling*. However, the genre attained a certain maturity with the works of novelists like Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Santha Rama Rao and Attia Hosain. These women writers have come out with some of the outstanding works in the 1980s. Anita Desai and Nayantara Sahgal’s best work appeared in this period. These writers have
grown older as compared to the much younger contemporary writers like Shashi Deshpande, Anjana Appachana, Suniti Namjoshi, Anuradha Marwah Roy, Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai, Bharati Mukherje, Jhumpa Lahiri, Meera Syal and many others. These younger generation of writers have written on a variety of subjects such as magic realism, social realism, regionalism and many others. Among them, many of them are diasporic in nature. Suniti Namjoshi and Bharati Mukherjee are the oldest and naturally the most prolific among the diasporic writers. Whereas, others like Jhumpa Lahiri, belong to the second generation of expatriate writers as compared to Jhabvala and Anita Desai who are late immigrants. Thus, it becomes inevitable that their works are concerned with the theme of expatriation—the problems and issues of Indian immigrants.

Anita Desai was born on June 24, 1937 in Mussoorie, India. Her father was D.N. Mazumdar, a Bengali businessman and her mother, a German called Toni Nime. The author spent most time of her life in New Delhi. During her childhood, she spoke German at home and Hindi to friends and neighbours. But English was the first language she learned to read and write at Queen Mary’s Higher Secondary School in New Delhi. Anita Desai began to write (in English) at the tender age of seven. She completed her B.A. in English Literature (1957) from Miranda House, Delhi University. Then she worked for a year at the Max Mueller Bhawan, Calcutta.

In 1958, Anita Desai was married to Ashvin Desai, an executive and became the mother of four children—Rahul, Tani, Arjun and Kiran. She has been a member of the Advisory Board for English, as well as a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, as well as a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. She has also worked as an educator at colleges including Mt.
During her literary career, Anita Desai has written about more than a dozen novels, short stories (in two collections), essays, reviews and articles. Among her novels, Fire on the Mountain has won her the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award in 1978 and Where Shall We Go This Summer? The Federation of Indian Publishers and Author’s Guild of India Award for Excellence in writing in 1979. In 1983, she was awarded the Guardian Prize for children fiction for her novel, The Village by the Sea. Three of her texts such as Clear Light of Day (1980), In Custody (1984) and Fasting, Feasting (1999) have been shortlisted for the Booker Prize. She was also awarded the literary Lion Award in 1993.

Throughout her novels and other works, Desai concentrates on personal struggles and problems of contemporary life that her Indian characters must wrestle with. In her novels she portrays the cultural and social changes that India has undergone as she focuses on the incredible power of family and society and the relationships between family members, paying close attention to the trials of women suppressed by Indian society. Most of the earlier novels of Desai are woman-centred and try to “explore the interior selves of women oppressed by their marriages.”

In her first novel, Cry, the Peacock (1963) the author presents the degeneration of Maya, a passionate young woman, into insanity. The childless Maya suffers from a joyless marriage to a much older man who fails to communicate her emotional needs to him. Finally, the woman is consumed by her frustration when she commits suicide after killing her husband. This novel is followed by Voices in the City (1965) the second novel of Desai. This
novel portrays the "nihilistic influence that Calcutta personified as Kali, who is both goddess and demon, has on three siblings—Nirode, Monika and Amla. Here, the author has drawn a parallel between the mother of the siblings and the city of Calcutta. This is because both symbolise Kali and unleash their evil power over people.

The author's third novel, *Bye-Bye, Blackbird* focuses on the much discussed theme of east-west conflict. The conflict is presented through the lives of the Indian immigrants, Adit Sen and his friend Dev, in London. In the novel, Adit's marriage to an English woman Sarah, does not help him assimilate fully to the western culture. Therefore, he finally returns to India with his wife, in order to cure himself from his acute sense of alienation. At the same time, the interracial marriage between Adit and Sarah seems to socially alienate Sarah from her English folk. Her departure to India with her husband to India means abandoning a part of western identity. The question whether she would be fully assimilated to the eastern culture or not, will remain open-ended. On the other hand, Dev decides to stay back in London despite the blatant racial prejudices which he bears with contempt.

This novel is followed by many other texts such as *Where Shall We Go This Summer*? (1975), *Fire on the Mountain* (1977), *Clear Light of Day* (1980), *The Village by the Sea* (1982), *In Custody* (1984) Baumgartner's *Bombay* (1988) and many others. Among these novels, *Clear Light of Day* is unusually remarkable for its brilliant portrayal of the intracultural motif. The theme is presented through the stance of the protagonist Bimla Das or Bim. The novel depicts Bim as an unmarried, educated woman who becomes the householder of her family after the death of her parents. She is left to
look after her mentally retarded brother and even the family home when her brother Raja leaves the family for his own comfort.

It is here that the roles assigned to a daughter and a son in a patriarchal system of the Indian society, are reversed. The Indian tradition expects of a son to carry on the responsibility of the household. But here, the irresponsible nature of the brother forces her sister to take up the role of the householder. Besides this, the deliberate attempt of the writer in juxtaposing Bim's spinsterhood with her younger sister's married life, further intensifies the above argument. All these factors do give rise to a tension or a conflict within the Indian culture and its tradition. The novel also depicts such similar situation of intracultural tension through the portrayal of the two middle-aged daughters of the Mishras, a neighbour of the Das family.

In Baumgartner's Bombay (1988) Anita Desai has gone back to her German roots. It is concerned with Hugo Baumgartner, a German Jew from Germany in India. The novel portrays Hugo as an immigrant who comes to India to seek refuge from his alienation in Nazi Germany but meets his tragic end at the ends of a fellow German in India only. Thus, the novel proves the author's claim that the East and the West are not opposites but are parallel to one another.

In the nineties, Anita Desai has moved to the U.S.A. As a consequence, the author has shifted its lens of focus from the Indian element to the expatriate one, which she has begun to explore in her earlier novel, Bye-Bye, Blackbird. Thus, the novels which are written after her sojourn in the U.S. has diasporic element. Such novels include Journey to Ithaca (1995), Fasting, Feasting (2000) and The Zigzag Way (2004).

Journey to Ithaca deals with the spiritual quest of Matteo, a European
expatriate in India. Matteo is an Italian who comes to India with his wife Sophie in search of beauty and truth of the eastern spirituality. He never returns to his home but stays on in India to serve the 'mother' (female Guru) who remains a mystery to Sophie. On the other hand, Matteo's wife comes back home, totally repelled by India—its climate, people and customs. Her disbelief in the Mother leads her to unravel the mysterious past of the Mother. Here, Anita Desai has viewed India from the perspective of an outsider. The detached observation of the writer has contributed an impersonal treatment of the Indian reality.

In *Fasting, Feasting*, the east west theme is treated with a difference. The first part focuses on the middle class Indian family of Uma, the protagonist in which Uma has been rendered inferior due to the patriarchal system of the Indian family. The second half of the novel is concerned with Arun (brother of Uma) who goes to the U.S. to study in the American University of Massachusetts. In the U.S. Arun stays with the Pattons, an American middle class family during his vacation. However, despite the apparent differences between the Indian family of Uma and Arun and the American family, there is a lot of similarities between the two families. Thus, instead of presenting the cultural polarity, the novel only portrays a cultural web. In her latest novel, *The Zigzag Way*, Anita Desai has beautifully painted a subtle picture of twentieth century Mexico as experienced by a young American.

As for her short stories, *Games at Twilight* (1978), her first collection is concerned with the lives of ordinary people with significance. This volume has eleven stories. It covers a wide range of characters such as a private tutor, a doctor, a boy who is a student, a vagabond and a sick husband.

Her second volume, *Diamond Dust* has nine stories. Among the stories.
three are about life in the U.S., while one is set in Mexico. Some of the memorable stories of the collection include "Winterscape", "Underground", "The Artist's Life" and others. "Winterscape" is about the relationship between a young American woman and her Indian mothers-in-laws. The Indian women came all the way from India to America to help at the birth of their grand child but soon realise that they are a burden rather than a help to the American mother. Here, the author's depiction of the Indian man trying to bridge the gap between the eastern and western worlds is full of pathos.

"Underground" is about a husband who finds himself unable to welcome the guests to his hostel after the death of his wife. "The Artist's Life" is concerned with how the dream of a young school girl to be an artist shattered when he sees the plight of the tenants living on their property.

Thus, in her long distinguished career, Anita Desai has established herself as one of the most prolific writers in the world of contemporary Indian English literature. She may be considered as one of the pioneers in her attempt to explore the inner realm of the human mind, especially the female one. In this way, she stands out distinct and different from R.K. Narayan, Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala and others writers.

Critics have paid a lot of attention to Anita Desai. As a consequence, many critical works on the author have been written so far. In *Anita Desai: Vision and Technique in Her Novels* by O.P Budholia, the critic has attempted a textual analysis of her novels to examine the theme and techniques in the texts. A pair of critics (Manmohan K. Bhatnagar and M. Rajeshwar) has applied sociological, psychological, structural and other approaches in order to explore thematic as well as stylistic dimensions of
Desai’s novels in *The Novels of Anita Desai: A Critical Study*.

A critic, Shashi Khanna, in his *Human Relationships in Anita Desai’s Novels* has approached Desai’s work from an humanistic perspective. Some critics focus on the feminist elements in Desai’s texts, while others like Usha Pattania have concentrated on the comparative study between Anita Desai and Kamala Markandaya.

In *Voyage into Consciousness: The Fiction of the Anita Desai and Virginia Woolf*, G. Sree Ramulu focuses on the comparative study between Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* and Anita Desai’s *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*. Here, the novelists have given special attention to the working of consciousness of the two protagonists of the respective novels of the authors—together with the impact of this on the other characters and situations in the novels.

However, as mentioned earlier, my present research is quite different from the other works of criticism as far as the subject matter is concerned. It views Desai’s novels from an altogether newer perspective: it juxtaposes Anita Desai with Ruth Prawer Jhabvala in their examination of the cultural theme in their works. In the next chapter, the social and literary milieu of the authors and the influence of the present and past writers over the authors, Jhabvala and Deasai will be discussed.
NOTES


7. 


33. Seema Jena, "The Place of Anita Desai". *Voice and Vision Of Anita Desai*.


