CHAPTER V

Theme of Intercultural Marriage:
A Comparative
Approach to *Esmond in India* and
*Bye-Bye, Blackbird*. 
Set against the background of post independent India (ten years after the Independence), Ruth Prawer Jhabvala's *Esmond in India* gives a picture of an urban upper-class world. This world mainly revolves round the families of Ram Nath and Har Dayal. Ram Nath comes from a rich family and had been educated at Cambridge. He used to be a highly westernised person during this days at Cambridge. This is vividly reflected in the conversation between Har Dayal and his daughter in the novel:

He was – how shall I say? - very lively, very gay, on! very Cambridge. Always there was a party in his rooms and always he overspent his allowance-- Ram Nath uncle? Shakuntala interjected with a little incredulous laugh. Yes, yes, who else? her father said, briskly wiping his spectacles with a corner of his golden dressing-gown; he sounded excited. Talking and thinking of these days always made him excited, pitched his voice even higher than usual. He drank, he smoked, he read so much English poetry, had so
many English friends and wore such stylish English clothes.\footnote{1}

Ram Nath had been a brilliant person with a promising future. He became a changed man after his return from England to India: he gave up everything – his career and all the worldly possessions of life in order to join the Congress; and he even demanded his wife, Laksmi to join him in the freedom movement. He became a freedom fighter who actively took part in the war of independene. As a result, he had been in and out of jail for many times. Therefore, his family had to go through hard times because of his absence from family. Moreover, after the independence of India the social life of the people have changed to a great extent:

Some had died and some had gone very old and some had gone to Pakistan. Some were now very important and no longer had time for anything except their official duties and position, some had gone to live abroad. And had faded away (219).

Ram Nath too had changed a lot. He lost his energy, vitality and enthusiasm in life. The post-independent India shows Ram Nath to be a poor old man who remains unnoticed to the public; and he withdraws from social life and remains in isolation:

Ram Nath was sitting in his room with all the windows closed. The walls were lined with large, dark, old books, and his table was covered with little piles of paper (34).

At this stage of his life, Ram Nath's sister, Uma becomes the only person with whom he is in touch. On the other hand, his wife, Laksmi has been affected by the change of fortune in her life. Laksmi has come from
wealthy and well-known family. She married Ram Nath in the hope of leading a life of luxury and comfort which she had already had in her father's house:

It had all been planned with such certainty after their marriage. Ram Nath, then seventeen years old, he was to go to Cambridge and when he came back he would start a lawyer's practice in which, all the influence and great properties of his family behind him, he would do very well. His wife— that had been held for certain, his parents-in-law had been quite satisfied about it— would be able to lead the sort of life she and all her female relations had always led— live in a large house with many relatives and many servants, gossip and make pickle and bring up children, go to weddings in costly saris and weighed down with the jewelry she had been brought from her father's house (63-64).

In fact, she is not very satisfied with her present situation and feels miserable about it:

You should have told me before. Now what have I got in the house except for a few miserable grains of rice and lentils, which is all we ever eat with my husband. Look at him, how thin he is when our children come home they will blame me and say I do not look after him well. (37-38).

Thus, Laksmi is unable to accept her fate— to live a life of simplicity and poverty.

Ram Nath has a son, Narayan. Narayan too believes in his father's ideals of rendering selfless service to people. The novel portrays Narayan as a competent doctor who can work in the city to earn enough money and lead a comfortable life. But he refuses such an opportunity and works in a
remote village in order to look after the poor and backward villagers. Thus, he has chosen the village instead of the city. So, he works in the village with only the bare necessities of life even though he has been underpaid.

This makes her mother resentful of her son's choice. She cannot understand why her son has unnecessarily chosen the difficult path. Subsequently, her resentment is directed against her husband because she feels that he is responsible for Narayan's fate. The novelist describes the situation in the words of the mother:

When I think of the other doctors, Laksmi said, her eyes fixed on her husband who at this moment turned a page; how easy their work is, how much they earn. They live comfortably here in Delhi with their families, they eat well, they drive round in big cars and go often to the cinema. And my poor son, who is the best and cleverest of them all, has to spend his life among dirty peasants and villagers, far away from his own family, work all day and also in the night and he is paid hardly enough for his needs. And what prospects has he? Who will help him in life? Must he stay there for ever and strive and overwork himself and no respectable person to speak with? (38).

Thus, Narayan is an idealist like his father.

On the other hand, Ram Nath's friend, Har Dayal is quite different from Ram Nath. Har Dayal used to admire Ram Nath and considers him as his benefactor at Cambridge. Har Dayal says:

Friend – he was more to me than a friend, more than a brother. He went to Cambridge a year or two before I did, so when I came it was he who showed me everything. All the things I love and value in life he said in an emotional
voice, I learnt about first from him (30).

However, being practical and materialistic he came back from Cambridge to make money. As he had no interest in the Congress, he did not participate in the freedom struggle. Later on, he became a rich man. Thus, in the post-independent India Har Dayal is a man who holds an important position in the affairs of the nation unlike Ram Nath. Aruna Chakravati points out the difference between the two men:

Through attracted in his youth to the ideal of his friend Ram Nath, he had allowed himself to be guided by his wife's gentle but unrelenting influence in which he would have had to set all his worldly assets at stake. Now, twelve years after Independence, (in the struggle for which Ram Nath has lost all he had) Har Dayal is flourishing in his career of time-serving.²

At the same time, Har Dayal's wife, Madhuri strongly supports her husband's materialistic pursuits for she firmly believes in a materialistic view of life:

Worldly values emonate from her presence as potent as the aura of sophistication and refinement she breathes into the air?.³

The novel portrays Madhuri as a modern, westernised but clever woman whose sole ambition in life is the pursuit of material gain. Thus, she plays a crucial role in influencing her family with her practical and materialistic values of life; and she guards the members of her family against Ram Nath because she feels Ram Nath's idealism is a threat to her family's
materialistic values. In this regard, Aruna Chakravarti makes a point:

Ram Nath had always managed to discompose her well-ordered existence and make her husband doubt the worth of the life he was leading.4

Madhuri tries hard to influence her family with the materialistic aspects of life. In fact, she does succeed to a considerable extent: her husband has become a successful man in terms of wealth and position; and her sons – Amrit and Raj have been educated at Cambridge; and they make the best use of their western education:

Amrit is in an English firm. Probably he will be made Managing Director. Raj is still studying at Cambridge soon he will come home and take up a good position(174).

The elder son of Madhuri and Har Dayal, comes back home sophisticated, polished and well-equipped with the capacity to settle in a lucrative job in India. He works as an administrative officer in a British firm. Besides, he has a cultured and smart wife, Indira who comes from an influential family. Like her in-laws, she too is conscious of her class and position:

Madhuri was pleased: She vaguely knew the Saxenas and the Srivastavas and knew them to be respectable families of the right class. That was the sort of thing about which one could trust a girl like Indira: she would make friends only with girls of the right class (24-25).

Raj has still been in Cambridge and has been engaged to an English woman. He is also expected to follow his elder brother's footsteps.
On the other hand, Shakuntala, the daughter of Har Dayal, seems to reject the materialistic and worldly values advocated by her family; but she does so at the superficial level and is not ready to put into practice what she preaches when confronted with this reality. Shakuntala says,

'I think my ideals are different from his. Though, of course, I admire him very much . . . . Daddiji. I love Art and Beauty and Poetry. How can I give thee things up as I should have to if I go and live with Narayan in a village to do good to the poor? (194).

The novel portrays her as a young woman who has completed her graduation and is ready for a new life:

She was grown up, no longer a college student but a finished B.A. She often wrote her name to see what it looked like with the B.A. after it. She had no regrets that she had finished with real life, her grown-up life, for which until now she had been only preparing (9).

At the same time, her parents want to train her by exposing her to the manners and culture of the westernised, modern and sophisticated society so that she may acquire its values. Thus, she is trained and prepared for a life of luxury and sophistication. This explains why her parents reject the idealistic Narayan as a suitable husband for their daughter much to the disappointment of the Narayan's parents.

On the other hand, they consider somebody who holds an important position in the society, to be their son-in-law. Therefore, Har Dayal and Madhuri want to accept professor Bhatnagar's son who is a Harvard law graduate. The Professor is an influential person who holds an important position in the
Ministry of education. In the meantime, Shakuntala falls in love with Esmond Stillwood, whom she met during her visit to the parties of sophisticated and cultured people. Her father has also employed Mr. Stillwood to tutor her daughter in classical literature. But the Englishman is the husband of an Indian woman, Gulab: Gulab is the only daughter of Uma, the sister of Ram Nath. The novel shows Uma a brave, energetic and confident woman even though she is a widow:

She was a free, bold, courageous woman, when she thought something was right she allowed nothing to stand in her way (36).

Uma's husband was a great man: "He had been an intellectual, a skilled economist and a subtle political thinker " (66). But he gave up everything for the cause of the freedom struggle. He was a great freedom fighter and died as a martyr during a hunger strike. Uma, too actively took part in the freedom movement: and she had been in jail many times. In fact, her husband had been an overwhelming influence over her and her brother during the freedom struggle. In this regard, Yasmine Gooneratne adds a point:

In the company of such heroes, Uma and Ram Nath had known greater freedom of spirit in jail then they do now in the aftermath of Independence.5

In the post-independent India, Uma is a widow whose life revolves round her daughter, Gulab. Besides her concern for Gulab, Uma engages herself in religious and social activities—she allows people, especially those associated with religion to stay as guests in her house. This is vividly reflected in the text:
People were always coming to Uma's house. They came from all over India -- old Congress workers, holy men, widows on pilgrimages, musicians from the south. They stayed a little while and then they went away again often Uma was hardly aware that they were there. The house was large, it did not really matter if someone rolled out a mat in some corner to sleep on; and there was always enough atta and dal, what difference did it make if one person ate or text? (65).

Uma is worried about her daughter whom she feels is not happy with her married life. Gulab is married the Englishman, Esmond Stillwood after meeting him for a short period of time. Before her marriage to Esmond, Gulab has been engaged to Amrit, the prospective son of Har Dayal. But Gulab turns down the proposal of Amrit for the Englishman much to the displeasure of her own mother and Amrit's parents.

Unfortunately, Gulab and her husband suffer from an incompatible marriage. This is because they fail to understand each other's views and attitudes to life, which are governed by their cultures. Their relationship deteriorates even after the birth of their son. Their dislike for each other is so deep that they feel comfortable and find peace of mind in each other's absence: the husband is involved in two affairs -- one with his English friend Betty with whom he finds warmth and solace from his marital problem. In the second one, he is involved with Shakuntala and the affair is not very serious.

Esmond came to India as a visitor but had decided to stay back in the alien country to mix with its people. In India, he earns his daily bread by being an expert on Indian art and culture. Thus, he is engaged in imparting knowledge
Esmond is one of the very few characters in the novel who possess some sensitivity to India and a genuine understanding of her culture and history. His professional and thorough knowledge of the subject is contrasted with the indifference and superficiality of other westerners in Delhi, and it is an ironic reflection on the amateurishness and ignorance of Har Dayal that he employs the European to tutor his daughter in Indian classical literature.

The novel portrays Gulab to be a beautiful young woman who feels attracted towards the Englishman whom she finds him handsome. At the same time, the Englishman is also charmed by the oriental beauty of Gulab. She had known him only for a short period of time i.e. while attending a few of the lectures given by Esmond. But they fell in love with each other and got married.

The interracial marriage between the Indian woman and her English husband does not last long; it proves to be a total failure and ends in their separation from one another. This is due to the difference in their attitudes towards life each of the couple's views of life is shaped by its respective culture and tradition; and they are unable to understand or adjust to each other's views regarding food habits, dress, housekeeping, bringing up of children and other aspects of life. In this regard, Mridula Bajpai says:

The difference in the life-styles of East and West lead to misunderstanding and discord. Consequently, their relations are strained and they drift apart.
The novel vividly describes how Gulab's Indian ways of life are constantly in clash with those of her English husband. The couple stays in a small flat in which the husband has decorated every room with fashionable furniture. In short, Esmond has arranged his flat in such a way that every space is utilised and there is no empty room in the flat. But the arrangement makes the wife more uncomfortable and she feels that it is quite unnecessary to have so much furniture in their flat. This is because she is not used to such an arrangement and has stayed in large spacious rooms with minimum things at her parents' place:

It was not really convinient to her way of living. In her mother's house she had been used to vast rooms and little furniture, so that she had been able to he on an old stringbed in the middle of an otherwise empty room, floating as on a great sea of cracked marble flooring under a high ceiling fretted--a sky with clouds with flaking frescoes. But here, in her husband's flat. She was crowded in by furniture: there was no room to move at her case. Oh yes, everybody said what nice furniture it was .... But Gulab could see no purpose in so much furniture; it only prevented one from being comfortable (19-20).

Gulab is lazy and would lie on her back in the bed for hours when her husband is not in the house. But her English husband is an energetic and active person. Therefore he hates Gulab's laziness and cannot tolerate it. As he screams at her.

What sort of a slut 's life is that to lie on your bed the whole day long? Answer me! (202).

Besides this, they couple's taste for food and food habits are quite
different: the Indian woman is fond of sweets and spicy food. On Wednesdays and Fridays, she feels very happy because her husband will be away for his classes; and her mother will bring her the food that she craves for. When her mother sends her the food through her servant Bachani, Gulab’s joy knows no bound:

Gulabs was too anxious to know what Bachani had brought to sulk any longer. Ravi was already taking the paper off the little earthenware pots. Carrot halwa! he cried. Gulab looked pleased; her large melancholy eyes flashed for an instant with a wonderful fire. In the other pots were gram, tomatoes and potatoes swimming in red curry, and chunks of meat soaked in curds. Everything would be very highly spiced: Gulab smiled with pleasure (19).

On the contrary, her husband, being a European dislikes the spicy Indian food of his wife, he loves raw vegetables in the form of salad and boiled English food. In addition to this, Esmond is different from Gulab in the way he eats:

He sat alone at his smart little dining table in his smart little dining corner and ate his cheese salad. Everything on the table was colourful and modern the bright table mats, the painted drinking glass, the earthenware plates of a rich dark green- so that it looked rather like a beautifully photographed full-page advertisement in an American magazine. It was very different from Gulab’s spicy meal eaten on the floor out of brass bowl (41).

Thus, Esmond “with his innate craze for orderliness, smart and sophisticated society and up-to-date furnishing” dislikes his wife’s unsophisticated, simple and informal way of eating.  

The Englishman is a social and outdoor person; and he loves to mix.
interact or socialise with other people at parties. Therefore, he takes his wife
to the parties he attends and loves to introduce her to other people; but his
wife feels stifled in such an atmosphere and cannot enjoy it. This may be
explained by the fact that Gulab is a typical traditional woman who is shy
and introvert; and she loves to remain indoor at home:

In the begining, five years ago, when they were first married, he had taken her everywhere. She hated going out. he knew, but he had forced her-- gently then -- to accompany him to all his parties. He had thought it would be good for her. But she had been so miserable; she had sat there, silent, with downcast eyes, defeating all attempts at conversation which the intrepid English and American ladies had made with her. She was so obviously unhappy and uncomfortable and only waiting to go home (42).

Being a typical European, Esmond Stillwood is very particular, about cleanliness. According to him, everything should be neat and tidy in his house:

The flat was its own neat modern cosmopolitan self again; it smelt of DDT which Gulab and sprayed to get rid of the smell of the food which Bachani had cooked for them. she knew Esmond would not object to the smell of DDT-- on the contrary, he was always insisting that things should be sprayed thoroughly and frequently (40).

Therefore, Esmond cannot tolerate when his wife Gulab does not keep herself or her things clean and tidy :

Esmond walked round the room. He picked things up here and there, her brassiere, an old blouse, very gingerly between forefinger and thumb, pointing his disgust. She kept her eyes lowered and wished her would go. She knew she herself was not very clean: but that was the way she
While the Indian woman feels comfortable in her traditional dress—the sari, her husband wants her to wear the modern western clothes especially the flimsy transparent nightdress with laces. The result is that Gulab wears the modern dress only in the presence of her husband and does not do so in his absence. Gulab does not feel comfortable in such dresses because they expose her body; and the exposure makes her feel indecent and awkward.

The birth of a son, Ravi to the couple does not even lessen their marital problems; rather it aggravates the present situation. The English father wants to bring up his son in the western style. According to such a style, Ravi should be taught to be independent since he is a small child. Thus, Esmond makes Ravi sleep alone, not with his parents in his own room. And he (Ravi) has to comfort himself even if he wakes up in the night and cries.

On the other hand, Gulab likes to sleep with her son and wants to comfort him when he cries. In fact, the Indian mother loves to pamper her son with all her love. In short, she wants to overcare and overprotect the child. But her husband strongly rebukes her overprotective attitude towards her son because Esmond feels that it will hamper the development of the child’s personality.

Esmond is also particular about Ravi’s food habits. He insists that he should be fed with English diet. So, he enquires Gulab about Ravi’s food:

What did you give him for lunch. Spinach soup and carrots with potatoes.(44)
On the other hand, the Indian woman wants to feed her son with her own Indian food such as hot curry and other sweet and spicy ones. And she allows her son to relish Indian dishes only in the absence of her husband:

One never can tell with you. The moment my back's turned, God only knows what tricks you're up to. Once he had come home unexpectedly early. He had found her and Ravi in bed... The whole flat had smelt of hot curried food; so had their breaths. She, however, had denied that they had eaten any curry 48).

Gulab loves to spend time with her mother, but her husband cannot understand the over-dependence of an Indian woman on her mother for guidance in all matters even after marriage. She will go to her mother's place secretly in Esmond's absence. When Esmond finds out that she has gone to her mother's house he scolds her for being irresponsible of leaving their flat with the servant. And Gulab bears his scolding in silence. But Esmond's western ways and culture are strongly opposed by her mother-in-law, Uma. Being an Indian, Uma feels her daughter should raise her son according to Indian custom and tradition. She gets annoyed with Esmond when he tries to impose his western culture and tradition upon Gulab and Ravi.

The Englishman does not allow Ravi's shaving ceremony to be performed in accordance with the Indian tradition. This is because Esmond thinks that the ceremony is a barbaric custom. On the other hand, his mother-in-law thinks that such a ceremony is necessary for every Indian child and her grandson should not miss it. She discovers that her daughter is unable to bring up her son in the manner she likes, to because of her husband. As a consequence Uma becomes totally disappointed with her English son-in-law and she insists her
daughter to leave her husband and come back to her parental home. Uma even goes to her brother Ram Nath for advice in this matter. Ram Nath advises Gulab that it is wrong to stay with Esmond because the difference between them have gone very deep and it is better for the husband and his wife to part at such a stage or they will start to hate one another.

On the other hand, the English husband has become quite frustrated with his Indian wife and her ways. He feels stifled in her presence and has been out of her sight on one pretext or the other:

He was trapped, quite trapped. Here, in this flat which he had tried to make so elegant and charming, but which she had managed to fill completely with her animal presence. His senses revolted at the thought of her, of her greed, smell and languor, her passion for meat and for spices and strong perfumes . . . he felt himself stifling in her softness and her warmth’ (207).

He begins to hate her and becomes more disgusted with her for her hopeless and passive attitude towards him. He even tries to hurt her physically in order to get some response from her; but it ends in total failure. This is vividly reflected in the novel:

Then he grabbed her upper arm and began to twist the flesh. You animal, he muttered through clenched teeth, why did you go away when I told you to stay home. But he was hardly thinking what he was saying because all his consciousness went into twisting the flesh of her arm. He felt it soft and full in his hand and he twisted harder and harder, she had given only one cry of pain, which shock had forced out of her. After that she kept quiet, quiet, (204).

In short, Esmond feels that his wife has failed to understand that he needs
a wife who will be his friend and companion, not his servant. Moreover, he considers his wife to be his equal and not his subordinate and he expects the same from her; but Gulab has no aptitude to digest Esmond’s views and beliefs. As a consequence, the English husband feels trapped in his marriage which is a total failure. His marriage has become a burden to him. As he says,

Every man has his cross. Only his was heavier than that of other men(46).

As a consequence, he tries to escape momentarily from his unhappy state in the company of an English woman, Betty. He feels she is the only person who can understand his problems and can communicate with his feelings and emotions. This kind of understanding is absent in Gulab. Ramesh Chadha makes a comment in this regard:

Esmond thinks of Betty as light, modern and airy, who talks and listens to him, which Gulab is incapable. 9

The dissatisfied Esmond has also an affair with Shakuntala, another Indian woman. Shakuntala is attracted towards Esmond in their first meeting; and she finds him handsome and appealing. She considers him to the man of her dreams. And the Englishman reluctantly responds to her romantic infatuation. Although she is different from his wife, Esmond can sense that Shakuntala will become another Gulab in the future. In short, Esmond is not serious with his affair with Shakuntala and their liaison does not lead to anything meaningful. However, Esmond feels a kind of communion with his English friend, Betty who offers him refuge and solace from his unhappy marriage:
Without Betty, life in Delhi would become intolerable for him. At least she always managed to stir him up with liveliness, even when she exasperated him as she so often did (230).

Thus, only Betty can empathise with him. She advises him to leave India and return to England with her. Betty’s suggestion makes him ease his troubled mind; and Esmond happily agrees to her proposal.

In the meantime, Gulab too suffers in silence due to her incompatible marriage. But she remains faithful to her husband who has already drifted towards two women. Gulab sticks to him even if he treats her in any manner he likes or becomes indifferent to her:

she must, whatever he might do to her, stay with Esmond since he was her husband and therefore her God (248).

Gulab also expects Esmond to protect her for it is his duty to do so according to the Indian tradition.

While Esmond spends most of his time with his friend and has been out of his house, his wife and son stay at home. The couple’s servant takes advantage of this situation and tries to molest Gulab in her husband’s absence. This enrages the passive woman for she feels defiled and dishonoured; and she holds him responsible for it. She has realised that she has nothing to do with him and must leave him for good. Therefore, she immediately packs up her things and leaves him immediately for her mother’s place without having a second thought and takes her son with her. Gulab has left her husband because she feels that Esmond is no more her husband for he has failed in his duty to
protect her honour. Thus, the novel ends on a separation between the Indian woman and her English husband: Gulab abandons her husband to stay with her mother and her husband plans to return to England with Betty.

Anita Desai’s *Bye-Bye, Blackbird* also deals with the theme of interracial marriage between two persons belonging to different cultures. However, in this novel, the author’s delineation of the intercultural theme is different from that of Ruth Prawer Jhabvala.

*Bye-Bye, Blackbird* is mainly concerned with the lives of the Indian immigrants, Adit Sen and Dev in England. The novel is divided into three parts. The first part concentrates on Dev’s setting his feet on the soil of England; the second revolves round Adit’s discovery and realization that he no longer belongs to England and he desperately longs to return to his own country, India and the third part focuses on Adit departure to India with his English wife Sarah.

The novel opens with the arrival of Dev at Adit’s place in England. Dev is the friend of Adit Sen; Adit has settled in England with his English wife, Sarah. In fact, he belongs to the middle-class Bengali family in India. Adit came to England in search of better opportunities in the west. His immigration to Britain may be seen as "an escape from the economic and commercial chaos prevalent in India". In fact, he was educated in English Literature during his school days at Calcutta; and then he went to England and he had managed to get a degree from a British university. However, this did not help him to get a respectable well-paid job in India. Therefore, he came back to England. Anita Desai says:
I stay there looking for a job for four months. All I could find was a ruddy clerking job in some government of India tourist bureau. They were going to pay me two hundred and fifty rupees and after thirty years I could expect to have five hundred rupees. That is what depressed me -- the thirty years I would have to spend in panting after that extra two hundred and fifty rupees. I took a look at some other people who had to live on that much and I said, no thank you, I'm not made for this, and I came back.11

In England, Adit works as a clerk in a little tourist agency and seems to be quite satisfied with it. Christine Langford, an Englishwoman had introduced Sarah to Adit. And he seemed to be attracted towards the Englishwoman in their first meeting: it all happened at a party held by Christine:

It was Christine who discovered him, a clerk in a little tourist agency to which she had gone in search of pamphlets on Greece—or, perhaps, Spain (Christine the sun worshipper and invited him to lend a touch of colour (as she humorously said, behind his back) to one of her cocktail parties. Sarah, a school friend, was invited too and her shyness and rectitude brought out the protective in Adit whereas all the other guests, and the hostess, had only made him feel uncertain possibly even humiliated. Humiliation and uncertainty were not sensations in which Adit felt at home, and so he chose Sarah for company (73).

Thus, they fell in love with each other and got married in India. After their marriage, they came back to England. In England, Adit and Sarah live in the flat of an old English woman, Emma Moffit at Laurel Lane, Clapham. In Clapham, the couple leads an isolated life because their English neighbours are least bothered about others and live in their own world. However, they mix with only a few fellow Indian immigrants. Thus, they have a limited social
The Indian husband seems to be quite satisfied with his English wife. This is because the wife has tried her best to adjust to the Indian ways of her husband. Adit says to Dev:

'She's used to being woken up. These English wives are quite manageable really. You know. Not as fierce as they look – very quiet and her working as long as you treat them right and roar at time regularly once or twice a week?'(29).

Besides this, she tries hard to make herself comfortable in the company of her husband's Indian friends and acquaintances. But she cannot join them in their conversation, jokes and laughter, and music for she hardly understand them:

Sarah, who was only vaguely aware of the existence of such jokes, had her lips pressed together in a thin smile of boredom. Occasionally she shot a look at the statuesque Mala, at the way her black hair gleamed in the light and her white teeth sprang out in a big laugh at a remark Sarah had considered smug or unkind but was evidently not so, and there was a thin envy on her face--or so Dev thought as he regarded her, every now and then, from over the top of his beer mug (25).

In fact, Sarah had married Adit in the hope of bringing into her bored and ordinary life certain changes – new and exciting ones. This has been substantiated in the text:

Formerly the problem had been the emptiness of her life. She had jettisoned most things out of it when she had
married—ordinary things with which an childhood, family, friends: all the normal ordinary person, of no talent must fill and adorn his life. With an Anglo-Saxon composure and serenity, she had put them away from her, meaning to fill her with life a new, with what her husband brought her. He seemed so rich to her, he seemed so much to give her—so many relations and attachments, pictures and stories, legends, promises and warnings (205-206).

Thus, she married the Indian with a positive and optimistic attitude. However, her marriage to the Indian immigrant alienates the English woman from her own English folk, her parents and the society at large. They do not approve it and cannot accept her alliance with the (Indian) immigrant. Even small children of her community make fun of her by calling her names, "Mrs. Curry". As a consequence, she visits her parents or her friends on rare occasions for fear of being sneered at by her own people.

Sarah works as a secretary of the Head of a school; and here her duty is to send out the bills and take in cheques, keep order in the school and is known for her efficiency. But she intentionally avoids personal interaction with her colleagues and maintains only a formal relationship with them. This is because she is afraid that they may ask personal questions about her Indian husband; she will be embarrassed if they do so:

There had been come dreadful tea breaks when they, had compelled her explain the various ways of cooking curry when they had questioned her about her parents-in-law and their whereabouts, when they had even come close, dangerously close, to asking her 'her plans, her husband's 'plans'. She had stammered out her replies, too unhappy even to accuse them of tactlessness or inquisitiveness and, for her pains, had heard Julia sniff, as she left the room, 'If she's that ashamed of having an Indian husband, why did
she go and marry him?' (37).

As a consequence, her Indian connection makes her uneasy and awkward in dealing with people at her workplace because she is not confident enough to acknowledge her association with India and is thus estranged from her own society in her own country. A critic, Asha Susan Jacob comments:

Even without getting transplanted physically to another culture, Sarah loses her identity in her own native soil.12

But she is also the wife of the Indian, Adit Sen. Therefore, she has to play the role of a wife to her Indian husband; and she cooks Indian dishes for him even if she cannot do it to his satisfaction. Thus, her identity is in a crisis because it is split into two by the two roles she has played as a wife to Adit and a secretary to the Head of her school. This has been pointed out by the novelist:

Who was she—Mrs. Sen who had been married in a red and gold Benaras brocade Sari one burning, bronzed day in September, or Mrs. Sen, the Head's secretary, who sent out the bills and took in the cheques, kept order in the school? (34).

In such a situation, Sarah can open her mind about her admiration for India only to her landlady, Emma Moffit because they both are romantic lovers of India:

She had hoped to spend a pleasant half hour with a woman who, like her, knew India, knew it well, but at one remove, and they sat together on many afternoons, often in silence, their curiosity and imagination on curious harmony, talking desultorily of a book one of them had been reading

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about Himalayan flowers or bandits in Rajasthan, of Adit's family in Calcutta, of a new Indian recipe Sarah had tried out the night before. To Emma; as to Adit, Sarah could voice her curiosity about the whiterobed widows who, she had heard, lined the bank of the Ganges, about the composition of henna that women used she had heard, to draw patterns on the palms and the soles of their feet (43-44).

When she becomes tired of playing the two roles, she asks her husband to go to India because she feels that she will be free from her present dilemma.

As for Adit Sen, England had fascinated him from the beginning. His fascination for the country is vividly reflected in the novel:

I love England. I admire England I can appreciate her history and poetry as much as any Englishman. I feel a thrill about Nelson's battles about Waterloo, about Churchill— (164).

By the time of Dev's arrival in England, Adit seems to have adjusted to the life style of the alien land. And he has overlooked all the racial prejudices and hatred heaped upon him by the English. A critic, Sumitra Krukreti comments:

He has molded and transformed himself entirely up to the expectation of England. He has fully adopted the life style of Britishers. 

In fact, he had come to England to break free from the poverty, corruption and other ills of his own country. His exposure to English literature and his stay in Britain have familiarised Adit with the culture of the west:

I like the pubs. I like the freedom a man has here Economic
freedom: Social freedom: I like reading the posters in the tube-oh I must take you to see my favourites, two of them hanging side by side- 'Beware of V.D. and I got it at the co-op. Do you get that kind of fun on your way to office in Calcutta? And I like the Thames-I'll take you to see it from Reliegh's walk up in the Tower, and can imagine yourself back in any period of British history you like(18).

Adit's marriage to Sarah is a realistic realization of his fascination for England. Being from a different cultural background, he differs from his English wife in many ways: for instance Sarah takes no care to protect food from her cat sniffing at it and Adit's appetite is killed when he thinks of eating the unclean food. Adit's Indian music is all dissonance to his English wife's ears for she hardly understands it.

Besides this, Adit cannot take British broths and stews; when Sarah cannot cook Indian dishes for her husband, her husband cooks for himself. As a result, the husband spends most of the time in the kitchen. Despite all these differences between the husband and his English wife, resulting from their different cultural heritage, the couple enjoys their married life.

However, later on Adit changes his attitude towards England to everyone's surprise later on: he begins to feel nostalgic of his native land and desperately longs for it and the things associated with it. This becomes intense during one of his visits to his British-in-laws. From this time onwards Adit feels a sense of alienation in the foreign land:

When Adit left the house for work, he stepped out with a look of astonishment on his face. He simply could not recognise this workday, weary London as his once—golden Mecca. He took to tramping it after office hours in a kind
of morbid search. He gazed at Big Ben's face looming through the first autumnal mists, and at the the chipped and dented surface of the sunlit Thames beneath Tower Bridge . . . . He visited all his favourite places and could recognise none of them. Then he went into the pub he had ever known one by one, and in each was hunted out by the black sensation of not belonging (181).

Thus, he discovers his real self which revolts against his unpleasant immigrant experience in the alien land of England: the English society do not accept him—the Millers with whom he had stayed during the early period of his stay in England, doesn't want to acknowledge their association with him; his English in-laws dislike him and do not accept him their own and do not include him in the circle of their family. The English society look down on him. And he realises that he does not belong to England. Therefore, he wants to go back to India where he truly belongs. This feeling of homesickness makes him frustrated; and it affects his life in England:

In the office, his colleagues found him so forgetful, so slipshod that they accused him of a descent into middle-age. The light hearted Girl Friday of the office who breved his tea, asked him why he did not take a holidays.

How can I 'he snapped' I'm saving up for any next visit home- do you know how much that costs?" he asked so savagely that she overturned the sugar bowl in surprise.

He snapped at Sarah as well when she tried to please him by getting mustard oil for his fish or an aubergine to fry (182).

When he is overwhelmed with such a feeling of nostalgia, he begs his wife to leave England and accompany him to India:
He grasped her knee and shook it. 'You will come, Sarah? You see why I must go?' (203).

And Sarah agrees to him.

The outbreak of the Indo-Pakistan war of 1965 arouses Adit's patriotic feeling; and he tells his pregnant wife that his son must be born in India; and it aggravates his longing for his own country and people. Thus, he is totally disillusioned with England:

But now his own education, his 'feel' for British history and poetry, fell away from him like a coat that has been secretly undermined by moths so that its sinews and tendons are gone and, upon being touched crumbles quietly to dust upon the wearer's shoulders (182).

Finally, Adit and his wife leave England for India to settle down in her native place for a 'real life' there for a 'real life'.

On the other hand, Adit's friend, Dev stays back in England. In fact, Dev came to England in pursuit of higher studies -- to study Economics at the London School of Economics. However, he had been put off by the biased attitudes and racial prejudices of the English against the immigrants in his initial encounter with the land and its people. He became very critical of the treatment meted out to the Indian immigrants who had somehow adjusted to such an unhealthy environment of England.

Towards the end of the novel, Dev changes his negative attitude towards England. He gives up his academic pursuits and search for a job to settle there. Thus, the novel ends with the reversal of the destinies of the two friends: Dev
decides to stay back in England; but Adit who had once loved the land, has come back to India.

In the novel, the intercultural theme of marriage is studied through the marital life of Adit and his English wife, Sarah. Adit is not the only one who suffers from social alienation in England; his wife too experiences the trauma of alienation from her own English people due to her marriage but she tries to accommodate herself to the native ways of her husband. And she fights against her alienation by playing the role of a dutiful wife to her Indian husband and that of an Englishwoman who works at an English school. Thus, she tries to be satisfied in her own world. In such a world she enjoys talking to people like landlady about her Indian husband, his custom and tradition.

When she becomes exhausted of playing the roles, she begs her husband to take her to India with him. Besides, she is too scared of becoming a lonely spinster like her landlady. And she is also afraid of being abandoned by her husband after marriage. Thus, she feels her marriage would bring her a sense of hope and optimism and saves her from leading a monotonous life.

In the meantime, Adit too is satisfied with his English wife. This has been exemplified by the fact that he is an Anglophile and is impressed by the Englishwoman's Anglo-Saxon composure and serenity. Thus, their interracial marriage brings assimilation of the east and the west to a considerable degree.

A close examination of the two novels seem to indicate the differences and the similarities between them in their depiction of the intercultural theme. Both the novels, *The Esmond in India* and *Bye-Bye, Blackbird*, attempt to
assimilate the values of the eastern and western cultures through mixed marriages between the Indian and the English. In such a cross-cultural marriage, both the husband and the wife have been initially fascinated with each other but the fascination does not last long in one novel, *Esmond in India*. But it is sustained in *Bye-Bye, Blackbird*.

In Jhabvala's *Esmond in India* the intercultural marriage between an Englishman and his Indian wife results in their disillusionment in their married wife and ends in separation. This is shown by the fact that they do not try to understand each other's values and attitudes, which are shaped by their cultures and traditions; and they are unable to adjust to each other's ways of life. This ultimately leads to mutual contempt for one another. The difference between the eastern and western cultures of Esmond and Gulab is responsible for bringing about the marital discord to the couple. As pointed out by Aruna Chakravarti:

Ruth Jhavala's analysis of the cross-cultural clash goes deeper than the depiction of incongruities of food habits and life styles. It reaches down to the gulf that separates Western materialism from Oriental idealism. Gulab is the idealistic passive female of Indian tradition who refuses to leave a tyrannical husband because her thinking is conditioned by the ancient ideal of marriage being a sacred state and her husband a woman's God. The modern European materialist Esmond dismisses all ideals as a matter of course. Marriage for him holds no inescapable conditions and can only be based on a combination of sophisticated living and an elegant intelligent companion. The two, naturally cannot be reconciled.¹⁴

Whereas, the other novel, *Bye-Bye, Blackbird* shows the success of the
cross-cultural marriage between an Indian immigrant and his English wife to a
considerable extent. Here, the character and nature of both the partners are
responsible for their fruitful union. They are not highly individualised persons
who would make sacrifices to enjoy the simple pleasures of life. In this regard,
S. Krishnamoorthy Aithal critically remarks:

Sarah and Adit are ordinary people, who make no great
demands on life. They are among those who become happy
and contented in an unambitious way. . . . They possess no
strong racial nor cultural self-identity.15

Thus, the novel seems to throw some light on some of the possible
solutions to the problems posed by cross-cultural issues. It reflects a positive
attitude of the novelist in her depiction of the intercultural theme. Inder Nath
Kher comments:

She calls for meaningful participation in inter-racial/inter-
cultural dialogue to promote racial harmony and mutual
accommodation of each other's difference (s), without
which the individuals or the society will not be able to
realize their full potential. In the context of multicultural
societies. Desai seems to be saying that the shared
perspectives and loyalties, of people lead to growth for
all, whereas the indifference, violence or hostility of the
host societies towards their invitees simply retard this
worthwhile goal.16

In this way, *Bye-Bye, Blackbird* is different from *Esmond in India*. In Jhabvala's
novel, the mixed marriage between people does not lead to any fruitful
assimilation of the two different cultures; rather it complicates the issues of
cross-cultural conflicts. Here, Jhabvala's idea of such issues of culture seems
to be pessimistic. Perhaps it may be related to the novelist's personal dilemma
of her expatriate experience:

As an expatriate writer, Jhabvala seems to have fictionalized the various phases of her own relationship with India; beginning with fascination, passing through emotional conflict and culminating in total rejection of India. 17

A similar case of a successful intercultural marriage is seen in Ruth Prawer Jhabvala's *A Backward Place*. In the novel, Judy, an Englishwoman marries an Indian, Bal. Their interracial marriage succeeds mainly due to the Englishwoman's sincere efforts to adjust to Indian ways of her husband. Roopali S. Chibber remarks:

In the Judy-Bal marriage we see the success of a marriage where individuals don't make compromises but their mutual love for each other smooth all problems. In this case, it is Judy's nature that makes her marriage a success. She fits quietly into the joint family of Bal and his brother Mukund. 18

On the other hand, Raja Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope* depicts the failure of the interracial marriage between a South Indian Brahmin, Ramaswamy and a French woman, Madeleine. The cross-cultural marriage between the Indian man and the French woman fails as a result of their temperamental incompatibility but the main difference between them is a metaphysical one—i.e. in their views of self and reality, a difference rooted in their separate cultures. Meenakshi Mukherjee remarks:

they are constantly interpreting their own and each other's action in terms of their national and cultural differences, invariably ending up with generalisations about 'Indian' and 'Western' traits of character. 19
NOTES


11. Anita Desai, Bye-Bye, Blackbird (Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 1985) 18. All the subsequent references are to this addition of the text.


