CHAPTER – VII

CONCLUSION
The Comparative study of the novels of both the novelist, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala and Anita Desai reveals the basic differences and similarities between the two novelists in their depiction of the cultural theme. A close examination of the novelists's treatments of the concerned motif reveals the progressive growth authors' respective views towards the cultural theme. The development of such views of the novelists has been greatly influenced by their personal experiences.

Ruth Prawer Jhabvala's involvement with the theme of cultural conflict or tension can be explained in terms of her numerous expatriate experiences. Linda Warley says:

Ruth Prawer Jhabvala's personal experience of displacement and exile has had a profound effect on the
fiction that she was produced. Wrenched from her original home by World War-II at the age of twelve, she has since lived in England, India and the United States. Interestingly, a recurrent preoccupation of Jhabvala’s fiction is the theme of home and homelessness.

The significance of Jhabvala’s personal experience lies in her triple expatriation. A Polish Jew by birth, Ruth Prawer had been forced to leave Germany, her homeland under the pressure of Nazi holocaust and settled in England. She stayed in England for a long time till she met her husband, an Indian Parsi. Her traumatic experience of the terror of Nazi Germany seemed to haunt the novelist even after her family had left Germany and settled in England. But Jhabvala seems to shut out this painful experience from her memory. As a consequence, Jhabvala’s works do not reflect such experience except in one of her short stories, “A Birthday in London.” After staying in India for about two decades, Jhabvala moved to the U.S.A.

Ruth Prawer’s marriage to her Indian husband makes her establish a long lasting contact with the alien land of India. She stayed in India for about twenty four years. Her Indian experience forms an important part of her literary career as a novelist. It is viewed through the eyes of a European.

She has written many of her novels during her stay in India. Thus, her contribution to Indian English literature is significant. This may be the reason why she is placed among the group of Indian English writers such as R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Anita Desai and others. However, she wants to be remembered as a European who has written about India. This makes her occupy an important position among a group of Anglo-Indian writers like Rudyard
In her first encounter with India, Ruth Prawer seemed to be fascinated by the land and became acquainted with its tradition and custom. Later on, she became totally disillusioned with it. This love and hate attitude of the novelist may be due to her alien sensibility which does not allow her to understand the land in its totality.

Thus, in the land of India, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala is introduced to the alien culture of the land. This is a kind of encounter between two cultures—one which is that of Jhabvala's and the other which is that of her adopted country, i.e., India. This encounter leads to a sort of conflict or tension between the values and ideals of one culture with those of the other one. Thus, the theme of cultural conflict or tension becomes a hallmark of the works of an expatriate writer like Jhabvala. K. Meera Bai comments:

Expatriate writers have the complex experience of coping with the coalescing influences of the land of their birth and the country of their choice. Their vision gets suitably modified by a confluence of divergent cultures, of which they are the products. The artistic expression of such a vision might reflect their attitudinal adjustments which form an essential part of the expatriate experience.

It makes a meaningful study to compare Ruth Prawer Jhabvala with Anita Desai who is about ten years younger to Jhabvala. This is explained by some of the similarities in personal experiences of the novelists. Like Jhabvala, Desai too is of a mixed cultural heritage—she has an Indian father and a German
mother. R.S. Sharma says.

Anita Desai represents perhaps the finest blend of Indian and European sensibilities. A vivid reflection of this unique blend finds spontaneous expression in her novels and short stories.4

She got married to an Indian, Ashvin Desai and had lived most of her life in India. However, she moved to the U.S.A. in the nineties. At present, she is a member of the faculty at M.I.T., Cambridge, Massachusetts. In fact, her stay in the U.S. seems to provide a diasporic element to her novels.

In fact the diasporic experience along with the mixed cultural heritage has been responsible for Anita Desai's taking up the expatriate theme in some of her works. On the whole, she is a curiter who is highly conscious of the social changes which her country has gone through. And she focuses on the influence of family and society on the life of an individual—especially women. This is because she feels the women remain suppressed and oppressed by the patriarchal structure of the tradition. D.K. Paddy comments.

India had glorious cultural heritage that went back to the Vedic era. But the interaction with the western world through the Britisher, the Portuguese and the French for about three hundred years did bring forth some new patterns in society. Twentieth century Indian writers took due note of these, and the themes and art of characterization in their writing bear ample testimony to it. These writers including Anita Desai articulate questions in their works regarding tradition versus modernity, dwindling of the conventional value system, marital discords, collapse of the joints famliy system, lure of
getting rich even through questionable means, ambivalent cultural responses to the impact of the West, social and economic disparities, colonial consciousness as a hangover of the British rule etc.⁵

In the case of Anita Desai also, the cultural theme of expatriation is an important characteristic of some of her novels. Thus, it becomes quite inevitable that both the novelists have taken up the cultural theme in their novels. And the comparative study between them leads to a meaningful approach their novels.

In the present thesis, the chapters—three, four, five and six are concerned with the comparative study of the novels of Ruth Prawer Jhabvala and Anita Desai in their depiction of the cultural motif. The third chapter focuses on the comparative study of Jhabvala’s *The Nature of Passion* and Desai’s *Clear Light of Day* in their portrayal of the concerned theme.

In this chapter, an attempt is made to examine the intra-cultural conflict depicted in *The Nature of Passion* and *Clear Light of Day*. Here, the conflict is different from the usual one which results from the east-west encounter. Rather, it is brought about by a clash of two sets of ideas, values and attitudes in life—the old ones which are traditional and the new ones which are the influence of western values, thought and ideals.

In Jhabvala’s *The Nature of Passion*, the intercultural tension is generated as a result of the protagonist’s passion and zeal for a modern and western way of life as defined by the western ideals, thought and culture.

But Nimmi and other rebels who are against convention are brought back with the fold of their tradition and culture. As a result towards the end of
the novel, the intra-cultural conflict is easily resolved. This is explained by the fact that the western and modern values cherished by Nimmi lack depth and are unable to cope up with reality. In the end, Nimmi is proved to be not so different from the other traditionnal women of her community. The author has even offered a consolation for the disillusioned Nimmi in fulfilling her dream of a westernised life with her future husband from an arranged marriage.

However, the author's attempt of offering an abrupt resolution to such a serious conflict seems to indicate her limited vision. No doubt, Jhabvala has tried to deal with one of the most important aspects of Indian urban society. But she is unable to study the subject with penetrating eyes. This may be explained by her foreign sensibility which remains too detached from the real issue or problem of India. Evangeline Shanti Roy comments in this regard:

Jhabvala presents in this novels a kaleidoscopic view of the many facets of social life in the urban middle class. Her art, which is carefully disciplined and restricted, does not encompass the heights and depths of human emotion in its various aspects and she deliberately keeps out the tragic she keeps to the traditional format of the novel which has always been essentially a projection of the social situation and social criticism is implicit in the form. She keeps to the traditional format of the novel which has always been essentially a projection of the social situation and social criticism is implicit in the form. She never seeks to identify herself with her characters and enjoys high-lighting their shortcomings and peculiarities. Since she writes about India as a westerner and mainly for a western readership she remains totally uninvolved and unconcerned and while she avoids the pitfalls of sentimentality and superficial involvement, her detached, ironic approach precludes any genuine sympathy for her characters and limits her vision of India.5

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On the other hand, in Anita Desai’s *Clear Light of Day*, the conflict is of a different kind. The conflict within the same culture (Indian) is presented through the character and personality of Bimla Das, the protagonist of the novel. Unlike Jhabvala’s heroine, Nimmi who lacks will power and superficial in her attitudes and views, Desai’s protagonist, Bim or Bimla Das is a practical minded and strong woman with a sense of responsibility when circumstances force her to become the householder of her family, she takes it as a challenge and tries to give it her best with her education and independence. She has denied love, marriage and norms of tradition in order to fulfill her duties towards her family. Her defiance of the conventional role of a woman is in conflict with the tradition of the Indian society. As a consequence, the resolution of such conflict becomes difficult.

Thus, in this novel, Anita Desai has come up with one of the most challenging issues of the urban India. And she has approached to the problem in a challenging way. Her right approach seems to offer some of the possible answers to the questions raised in the novel regarding the role of Indian woman in the modern urban India. This may be related to the novelist’s view which tries understand the Indian society from close quarters.

In the fourth chapter, both the novelist, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala and Anita Desai have moved from the intracultural issues to the intercultural one. Chapter four tries to compare Jhabvala’s *Heat and Dust* with Desai’s *Fasting, Feasting* in their depiction of the intercultural theme. In *Heat and Dust*, the cross-cultural theme is presented in terms of binary oppositions.

The binary model seems to show a lopsided relationship between the two cultures, where one culture is likely to be dominated by the other. In this
case, one culture may be considered as “inferior” and the other as “superior”. In the novel, the Indian culture is shown inferior with all its backwardness, superstitions, adverse climate condition and decadence in terms of its natives and their social milieu. The east-west dichotomy depicted in the novel especially, is quite explicit. The novel draws a clear line of demarcation between two groups of characters—the Indian one as identified with the East and the British one with the West. This because the novelist’s deleniation of the Indian Characters seems to run closely parallel to social stereotyping. It seems to be visible in the portrayal of the Nawab who is shown as the oriental male specimen, ‘the other’ of the Englishman. The English woman is, however attracted to the Indian male. As a consequence, the novel is overwhelmed with intercultural tension and conflict.

Here, Jhabvala seems to offer a biased altitude towards the Indian mores and custom. This may be explained by her ambivalent position as a European writer who experiences a love-hate relationship with the adopted land-India. A critic, Meenakshi Mukherjee, feels that Jhabvala should go beyond “documentary realism to a more abiding version of reality where characters will not matter because they are Indians or British but, because they are authentic human beings. where the author’s device of detachment will not become a barrier to understanding.”

Whereas, Anita Desai’s novel does not present a one-to-one confrontation of cultures but only a cultural web which rules out the previledging of one culture over the other.

Here, Anita Desai has got only the geographical situation to differentiate the characters representing the two cultures. Both the two sets of characters
become a part of the situation. Thus, they do not represent either the west or the east. Hence, neither the American family can be identified with the east. On the whole, the novel shows the interweaving of the two worlds—that of the east and of the west. In such a situation, the bipolar character of the cross-cultural encounter loses its importance.

Thus, the separate identities of the two cultures remain indistinguishable from one another. As a consequence the novel does not generate much tension or conflict as in the case of the other novel. This may be understood as the author’s positive attitude towards the concept of a multicultural society, the novel does not generate much tension or conflict as in the case of the other novel. This may be understood as the author’s concept of inculcating a positive attitude to the presence of a multicultural society.

In the fifth chapter, the theme of interracial marriage is studied in the novels of Ruth Prawer Jhabvala and Anita Desai. In this respect, Jhabvala’s *Esmond in India* is compared with Desai’s *Bye-Bye, Blackbird*. In *Esmond in India*, the conflict between the Englishman and his Indian wife is represented as a clash of the values between the two cultures. The mixed marriage ends in a disaster because both the husband and the wife fail to understand the values and attitudes of each other.

Whereas, in *Bye-Bye, Blackbird*, the interracial marriage of the Indian and his English wife proves to be a success. This is because they are able to overcome the cultural differences as they are not individualistic people and have no strong cultural identity.

In the sixth, the intercultural theme is analysed at the spiritual level in Jhabvala’s *A New Dominion* and Desai’s *Journey to Ithaca*. Here, the
perception of the concept of Indian spirituality is the subject of comparison between the novels of the novels. In the novels of Jhabvala, the Europeans are caught in a conflict in their search for spiritual solace in India. This is because the spiritual leaders—Gurus and Swamis turn out to be prouds as they are guided by materialistic pursuits rather than spiritual ones. Whereas, in Journey to Ithaca, the spiritual theme and its association with gurus is being treated objectively with a view to justify its mysterious elements to the Europeans.

Thus the study seems to show how the writers have shown their sheer interest in handling the theme of cultural conflict. This is explained by the nature of their mixed cultural heritage. However, Jhabvala’s treatment of the cultural theme seems to be different from that of Anita Desai. This is because Jhabvala’s view is mainly shaped by her ambiguous position as a foreigner who has stayed in India for quite a long time. Thus, her stance as an observer of the Indian culture appears biased and one-sided.

However, such complications are absent in the case of Anita Desai. This is explained by the fact that she is Indian by birth and hence, her deeper understanding of her own culture is quite inevitable. Besides, unlike Jhabvala, Desai has only rendered an objective treatment of the concerned theme and does not complicate the issues of culture. However, it is interesting to note that both the writers try to explore the Indian culture and its heritage through their novels. There is an avenue or vista for further research in their influence and sensibilities and other related aspects or subjects.
NOTES


