With Esmond in India Ruth Jhabvala selects another segment of her Indian experience. Returning to the working area of her first novel—cross-generation interactions in a community of westernised aristocrats—she broadens her canvas to include some social and political developments of the second decade of Indian Independence. The scene is set, once again, in Delhi—the locale offering a parallel to the real city and registering its developments as few fictional locales do.

The world of *Esmond in India* is confusing. In its complex fabric modern Western modes of life and thought are seen to be closely woven with traditional Indian living patterns. Talk of divorce is in the air at the same time that sentiments like "a woman’s husband is her God" are being uttered. Inter-racial marriages are not only being contemplated but actually accepted in society. The people who inhabit this world closely represent upper class urban Indians of the late Fifties. The rich educated westernised class whose intimate experience of an alien culture has made it develop an ambivalent attitude to its own. Foreigners, who form perhaps a higher percentage of the population than in the days of the Raj, are aware of considerable change in the Indian ethos. An impulse towards self-recovery is a motivating force in the characters making a quest for assimilation in a changed world in *Esmond in India*. Parents work on their children's behalf, though the younger generation is not absolved from the struggle. Equally the products of two cultures, the young of the novel, too, have to strive to belong and identify. There are some characters, however,
who are so confused by what they see around them that they reject a world they have ceased to understand.

The principal approaches to this quest in *Esmond in India* are formed out of, the materialistic and the idealistic views of life. The world of *Esmond in India* is divided between the haves and the have-nots. The haves or materialists are linked with the have-nots or idealists by ties of blood, friendship or marriage. Emerging from this dualism is an intricate pattern of cross-ideological relationships which the novelist represents with particular reference to an Indo-European marriage.

The chief of the materialists is Madhuri, the middle-aged wife of Hardayal, a wealthy gentleman of some cultural standing in Delhi. Worcly values emanate from her presence as potent as the aura of sophistication and refinement she breathes into the air. Her right hand in the pursuit of wealth and position is her eldest son Amrit who, matched with an equally ambitious wife, openly admits his philistinice values. Madhuri is happy too in her younger son but disappointed in her husband who, it seem to her, lacks the unswerving devotion to the material that she herself advocates.

Madhuri believes that she has striven hard for years to keep her "unstable" husband on her own path. In reality, Har Dayal has always shared her attachment to material possessions and her love of luxury. Though attracted in his youth to the ideals of his friend Ram Nath, he had allowed himself to be guided by his wife's gentle but unrelenting influence and had refrained from joining the struggle for India's freedom in which he would have had to set all his worldly assets at stake. Now, twelve years after
Independence, Har Dayal is flourishing in his career of time-serving. he cannot, however, stifle an occasional regret, a desire to offer his friend everything he possesses, when he thinks of Ram Nath Having been reduced to penury. Such twinges of conscience are rare for Har Dayal and are easily subdued for he has deluded himself into the belief that his has been a dedication too—not to a life of action such as Ram Nath’s, but to a life of the spirit. Unwavering in her point of view and with no need to delude herself, Madhuri has dedicated herself to indoctrinating in her husband and children the practical and materialistic values of life. Her success with her sons has been complete:

Amrit was safe. He had the sort of job and the sort of wife and the sort of attitude to life one could wish for. And now Raj too.

She looked again at the photograph, met that frank and sensible English gaze and thought that yes, Raj too was probably safe. ¹

Madhuri rejects as dangerous anything that threatens the only way of living she has known from childhood. To secure the same for her children, she brings them up beyond all point of contact with what she senses as the danger area in the new India. In practical terms this Cause, involving a need for education, health care and social and moral uplift for the masses, is calling hundreds of talented young doctors, teachers and social workers out of cities to villages and backward areas. Personifying this area of danger is Ram Nath’s brilliant doctor son Narayan who, having turned down the

¹. *Esmond in India*, p. 169
possibility of a lucrative practice in the capital, has gone out to an obscure village to serve his country's poor. Madhuri's dislike of Narayan is partly an extension of her dislike for his father, for Ram Nath had always managed to discompose her well-ordered existence and make her husband doubt the worth of the life he was leading. Most of it, however, stems from a shrewd instinct of self-preservation. For Narayan, has an unsettling effect on her husband and daughter. She prefers to place her faith in a foreign environment and culture:

...what can happen to a boy in Cambridge? It was such a safe place, where he could be exposed only to the best influences. She felt very comfortable about Cambridge. All the men in her family for the last two generations has gone there, all had come back polished and polite and ready to take up responsible positions.  

Madhuri's faith in Cambridge extends to other areas, indicating that her brand of materialism is not so different from the one that rules the West. Yet true safety for Madhuri lies in a reconciliation of basic Indian value systems with the Western way of life. Thus, while giving the highest priority in her scheme of values and tasteful living, she rejects the basic Western concept of individual liberty. A marked Indian trait in Madhuri is her refusal to grant her children the freedom of thought and action common in the West. Madhuri's home is run in a sophisticated Western style.

Madhuri's entire life centres around the acquiring and preserving of

1. *Esmond in India*, p. 96
objects. She does not mind adding to her collection an English daughter-in-law, "many of the very best families had had foreign daughters-in-law brought into them". But her identification with the West stops short at the point where exploitation ends, and is extended to her own country. Totally untouched by the greatness and glory of India in the past and unconcerned with her growth and welfare in the present, her assessment of what is truly valuable in India is materialistic:

She was a great believer in going abroad. Though she did not believe in staying there for good. Europe, England, even America, were all right for education or sight seeing, but one always had to come back to one's dear India. It was here that one's roots were, here that one could get the best positions, here that one enjoyed one's money and property and one's proper social status. It was safe here, comfortable.¹

Madhuri's views are shared by Amrit, who, is neither deceiving nor deceived about his expectations from life. Trained by Madhuri, he uses his Western education to get the most out of India. An administrative officer in a large British firm of paint manufacturers in Delhi, he was "part of their policy of gradually replacing British executives by Indian ones; and indeed he was very suitable for this purpose, as he had attended an English university and was also very English in all other respects, except in his complexion." Amrit's arguments in favour of the materialistic view of life are couched:

¹ I have always been suspicious of this Simple-Living-High-

¹ Esmond in India, p. 22
Thinking sort of thing. What is wrong with having a motor car, good clothes, a good bank-balance? Who would not accept these things if they came to him? It is only those to whom they do not come who say they would not. To me it sounds very simple. We have only one life, so why not get what we can out of it.¹

Opposed to such a view of life is Madhuri's problem child—the sentimental and unrestrained Shakuntala. From her friends in the college hostel Shakuntala has acquired a superficial knowledge of the condition of India. Unable to identify with her family conventions, she hankers for some undefined but wider scope of activity. Her aspirations, find a channel in an infatuation with one of the most materialistic persons in the novel—Esmond Stillwood the leader of the sophisticated Western community of Delhi. Shakuntala's ideas of what she would like to do. They range from giving up her life "'in the service of the sick and the poor and the ignorant’" to a pursuit of "'Art and Beauty—and Poetry’" and in the final analysis to an enjoyment of "'gracious living’" and "'things beautiful’"—none of which can be reconciled in practical terms to her desire of marriage with Esmond.

Madhuri, Amrit and his wife Indira have as few illusions. Madhuri sees through her daughter's ideals and puts them down. Her assessment that the proper treatment for Shakuntala is marriage with the right man. Through the course of the novel, the mother-daughter relationship seems to be precarious.

Her father, however, is totally deceived. Reality faces them both in the

¹. *Esmond in India*, p. 73
shape of a marriage proposal between Shakuntala and Narayan. While the true idealists Ram Nath and Uma believe that here at last is Shakuntala's chance to live the life of idealism. Har Dayal has to warn his daughter against the marriage and preserve her image of him as an idealistic at the same time.

'It means that we must, each one of us, find that way of life which brings the greatest contentment to our soul...For without contentment of soul we cannot live a good life. Let us say Narayan has found his sufficient beauty; but does it follow that this will also give contentment to Shakuntala and enable her to lead a good life?'

Shakuntala is more than prepared to meet him half-way:

'I think my ideals are different from his. Though of course I admire him very much...Daddyji, I love Art and Beauty and Poetry, how can I give these things up as I shall have to if I go and live with Narayan in a village to do good to the poor?'

The irony that Shakuntala is in the habit of directing against her mother and brother is turned against herself. Father and daughter are revealed as the hollow men that they actually are. Madhuri wins all her battles.

Har Dayal, though secure on his own mercenary path, had felt lost and alienated:

He had felt then that somehow the main stream of life was

1. *Esmond in India*, p. 82
2. *Ibid*, p. 83
passing him by and he was washed up on a ledge like some almost inanimate jellyfish. And though he had assured himself that he too was doing important work in upholding, as he put it to himself, standards of culture and refinement, yet he had never been able to stifle that feeling of missing something great, something vital.¹

But after Independence the tide had turned. History had been made. Gone was the world of Gandhian ideals. A crass materialistic world had taken its place in which Ram Nath, Uma and thousands of selfless freedom fighters had lost their moorings. Events had proved the materialists right. For it is now the Har Dayals who are caught up in the mainstream and in touch with the affairs of India. Uma and Ram Nath now belong to the “disinherited class”. They have lost not only their world of commitment and action but their compatriots as well. Barring a few who have adapted themselves to the changed circumstances and who hold high positions in consequence, that bright believing band has disintegrated and disappeared: “...after '47, people just seemed to no longer be there, even those who had been there always through all those years. Some had died and some had got very old and some had gone to Pakistan...And some had faded away”.²

Uma’s husband has been saved by his death in prison; Uma’s religion and fierce mother love have helped to sustain her identity but Ram Nath, who had once infected everyone around him with his sense of urgency, has

¹. Esmond in India, pp. 181-82
². Ibid, p. 176
faded away like so many of his companions. With no illusions to sustain him and nothing but the rational to fall back upon, Ram Nath disdains to seek a fresh channel of self-expression. Driven by his inner compulsions, he withdraws completely from public and private life. The only person with whom he is in touch is Uma:

He walked as in a daze, lost even he did not know in what thoughts of his own, and then he did not remember other lives and what he owed to them....

When he thought of......, he thought of him with love and tenderness and perhaps also some pride; but, he had to admit it, he no longer felt very close to him.¹

He who had once “darted about like a bright sharp little flame” has grown so dull and that he fails to see through Shakuntala’s pseudo-idealism and believes that Har Dayal will react favourably to a proposal of marriage. Along with the loss of his knowledge “of the values of the world...all the different values belonging to different classes and different people”, Ram Nath sustains a greater loss. He experiences a soul that cuts him off from surrounding life. He, who had always kept himself in the centre of events and who had always identified with larger causes, finds that with retirement and old age “he had narrowed and could see only himself and his own path”. Ram Nath has lost his capacity for “expanding and taking in all the world” because he has lost his preoccupation. He is almost envious of his materialistic wife’s whole-hearted absorption in her domestic arrangements

¹. *Esmond in India*, p. 194
and asks himself if any “great preoccupation, whatever it might be with, or thought ridiculous? It meant, after all, participating whole-heartedly in the affairs of life”. This then, in the author’s assessment, is the fate of the idealist in Independent India—that along with the loss of all material things he comes so perilously close to losing his ideals.

Following his father’s example of selfless service, Narayan has surrendered present comfort, prospects of wealth and position, and even the satisfaction of pleasing his deprived and frustrated mother, to work among the rural masses of India. The future of this worthy young man is left open to speculation. Will Narayan have a life of fulfilment? Will the marriage he is looking forward to be compatible? Will he too suffer a loss of ideal like Ram Nath? These are some of the questions that haunt the reader at the conclusion of the novel.

The loss of identity that threatens the idealist is seen in yet another context in *Esmond in India*, in Uma’s daughter Gulab’s marriage with Esmond Stillwood, an Englishman who has set himself up as an authority on Ind.a. Gulab brings her personal ideal of Indian womanhood to her cross-cultural marriage. This first East-West encounter is represented, as Meena Belliappa observes:

> You see things from Gulab’s point of view, participate in her languor; share her relish for hot, spicy, curries smuggled from her mother’s house...sympathise with her dislike for furniture which seems to her to restrict freedom of movement; understand her reluctance to go into smart society...and then you see it all
as Esmond does, a smartly furnished modern flat superimposed with the animal presence of stupid, slovenly Gulab, whose interests in life do not go beyond sleep and food. ¹

But Ruth Jhabvala's analysis of the cross-cultural clash goes deeper, 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. In marriage "Esmond seeks an equal-Gulab a God." The two, naturally, cannot be reconciled.

To use Vasant A. Shahane's words, "the rationality of the West and the spirituality of the east are given a complete holiday," Esmond and Gulab could never have come together. In the first phase of his response to India, Esmond had been rapt in her sensuous delights and had sought assimilation with her through marriage with a traditional Indian girl. Gulab, just ripening into womanhood, had lavished her awakening responses on this fair English youth who must have seemed to her to have stepped out of some ancient myth or legend. They had been happy in the birth of their dark-haired child. Esmond "had wanted an Indian son, a real piece of India, as he had wanted an Indian wife" But in a few years, the West had claimed

1. *A Stronger Climate*, p. 183
its own. In the second phase—that of disenchantment and withdrawal—Esmond thinks wistfully of Betty—"so light, modern and airy. Being with her was almost as good as being in England—" and of "fair sturdy little boys with blue eyes and pink cheeks". Yet Esmond's yearnings do not stem from a sense of being cut off from his own country and people. The superficiality of his alienation is revealed with startling clarity in the scene in which he is invited to tea by Madhuri and Indira. On the rebound from crude oriental Gulab who, to his overwrought senses, becomes an embodiment of India, Esmond recovers his identity in Madhuri's drawing-room:

A great calm came over Esmond as he watched.... dainty hands deft among the tea things, and the well trained servants bending over him with sandwiches and biscuits tastefully arranged on plates of finest China....All his worries left him and he was at peace. This, he felt, was where he belonged....Esmond thought if only it could always be like this. Then how he would love India, he would feel at home here and never want to go away...¹

Esmond's affinity with the materialists of the novel is complete in his speculations of the happiness that would have been his had he married a girl like Indira: "With such a wife, he was sure, he could have lived happily. Moreover, she probably came from a rich and influential family who would have helped him, so that he would not have had to sit and teach Culture to silly girls".²

1. *Esmond in India*, pp. 188-89
2. *Ibid*, P.186
Gulab's identification with the idealists of the novel is based on the blood link, and operates on the level of the physical alone. She needs her mother for the pampering of her senses—a powerful compulsion with her but not an all-consuming one, as there is another, distinct side to her personality. She yearns for her mother's way of living and the relaxed lifestyle that were part of her childhood. However, she draws sustenance neither from her fiery, energetic mother, nor from her cynical, uncle, nor from her socialist cousin. Through the course of the novel, she is seen as engaged in a silent battle to preserve an ideal of womanhood. Turning a deaf ear to her mother's pleas to leave her cruel husband, she clings to her suffering. She finds not the faintest echo in Gulab:

It was a husband's right...to do whatever he liked with his wife.

He could treat her well or badly, pamper her or beat her—that was up to him, and it was not her place to complain. But in return there was one thing, only one, that he owed her, and that was his protection: it was his duty to see that she was safe in his house and that no stranger could cast insulting eyes on her. Esmond had failed in that duty; so now he was no more her husband. Nor she his wife: since she considered herself defiled, she could not remain in his house any longer but had to return, as was the custom, to her own people.¹

Esmond's indifference to Gulab's deepest instincts and his own culture on her sensibilities have worn away whatever edges she may have

¹. *Esmond in India*, pp. 199-200
possessed. She sinks under the pressures of her husband's intolerance and an alien lifestyle and the whole burden of an alien culture to the level of a dumb animal that eats, sleeps and licks its wounds. Against this image of Gulab, reinforced by her uncle's vision of her as "a great amorphous mass of sensuous life", is juxtaposed the final one of a woman. The last is in terms of a fundamentalist ideal of female chastity.

Ruth Jhabvala seems to have had no direct experience of the brand of morality she assigns to Gulab. Indeed, one suspects that she had no model at all before her for the Gulab-Esmond relationship but had to fall back on literary sources. Ruth Jhabvala conceives the Esmond-Gulab relationship within these parameters, but goes a step further than her predecessor by relating Gulab's passionate allegiance to her husband. The lack of a causal sequence leading to Gulab's walking out on her husband indicates that in this novel Ruth Jhabvala is less interested in depicting the nature of marital discord and more in establishing the impossibility of the merging of two modes of thinking. By denying conflict, growth and self-discovery to Gulab, the novelist is sacrificing in order to establish an abstraction. Gulab, in the end, is neither asserting her elementary rights. Her final stance is a forceful vindication of the Sita myth as actually operating in life.

Gulab goes back "to her own people"—not in the spirit of belonging that had been hers when she was wearing her sufferings but in a spirit of defeat. "She was going to her mother's house and she would be staying there always—she knew it but did not feel about it. It was her fate, and she accepted it without emotional comment, in the way one should accept one's fate".
With her self-imposed stigma of desecration weighing her down, she will continue to suffer the pangs of alienation even when surrounded by loving faces in a dear familiar world.

For the Westerners of Esmond in India with whom Shakuntala identifies, there can be no question of assimilation with India and therefore no problem of identity lost or recovered. Connection with India for this community extends only to the point of making a comfortable short term living out of her for all its members. Jhabvala's introduction of this expatriate class for the first time in her novels may have come from a greater awareness of Europeans in India during this phase of her life.

The values of this expatriate class are not different from those of the ruling class of India's colonial past. The updating is limited to gestures in the direction of Indian literature, art and architecture and to a preference for Indian textiles and folk art as furnishings. An under-lying irritation and resentment that India is no longer subject creeps through their conversation and is highlighted in Betty's vulgar gibes at the glories of India on the road to Agra: "Ladies and Gentleman, you are now approaching the historic spot where four pimps of three successive Moghul emperors met with an honourable burial. On the left you will see a pee-house for jackals". But if Betty's approach to India is a survival of that of her memsahib forebears, Esmond's is that of the pukka sahib for whom India is "the white man's burden." Esmond's treatment of his servant is an example in point:

'Bearer! Esmond called... so thunderously, at the same time crashing his fist down on the table, that the servant jumped
with shock and came rushing out of the kitchen to see what had happened. 'In my house,' Esmond explained to the servant in his very bad but very careful Hindustani, 'I expect absolute and immediate obedience....' \(^1\)

The principal theme Jhabvala explores through these shifting, turning circles of activity is the dilemma of the Westerner for whom initial delight in India turns into a trap. To examine Esmond closely, she isolates him: he is the only Westerner among the Indian characters in households. They are inter-linked by blood, shared memories or old association. Although he associates with other Westerners in Delhi, Esmond is isolated even among them. He is also one of the very few characters in the novel who possess some sensitivity to India. His very professional and thorough knowledge of the subject is contrasted with the indifference and superficiality by other Westerners in Delhi. Har Dayal that he employs the European Still-wood to tutor his daughter in Indian classical literature.

Esmond is in different ways with other characters in the novel. Esmond is much more intelligent and sensitive than the stupid, Amrit whose prospective wife he has married. Narayan, on the other hand, would regard with contempt the luxurious life led by Har Dayal’s family. Gulab becomes a symbol of India as far as he is concerned, adopts a way of life that is in appropriate conflict with Esmond’s own representation of Western civilisation:

He was trapped, quite trapped. Here in this flat which he had tried to make so elegant and charming, but which she had man

1. *Esmond in India*, p. 33
aged to fill completely with her animal presence. His senses revolted at the thought of her, of her greed and smell and languor, her passion for meat and for spices and strong perfumes. She was everywhere; everywhere he felt her—in the heat saturating the air which clung to him and enveloped him as in a sheath of perspiration; in the sugarcane juice, which the people in the streets were drinking and which he could almost taste, filled with dust and germs and too much sweetness; in the faint but penetrating smell of over-ripe fruit; everywhere, she was everywhere, and he felt himself stifling in her softness and her warmth.

Esmond has begun to realize that 'the had to get out...quickly', that it is only the prospect of leaving India for good that can ever again make him feel 'young and free'. His admiration for Indian art, architecture and literature is genuine, and he believes that in giving the lessons and lectures on Indian classical culture that earn him his living he has found his 'true vocation'. But he has found that his intellectual and aesthetic approach to her culture is no protection against India. Despite his conscientiousness as a teacher, Esmond's personality begins to disintegrate along with his marriage as 'the strain of living with Gulab more and more intense'. His growing distaste for India merges with contempt for his lovely and slow-witted wife until she becomes the living embodiment of all he resents about India. Esmond is proud of his self-image as a man of culture, and is shaken and distressed by the violence of his own revulsion. He finds relief from his problems in his

1. *Esmond in India*, p. 207
relationship with the British Betty. His later attempt to console himself with Shakuntala, however, backfires on him. Fascinated by Esmond’s tragic melancholy, the romantic Shakuntala offers him her love and devotion. Esmond finally flees to England:

where there were solid grey houses and solid grey people, and the sky was kept within decent proportions.¹

Esmond’s main preoccupation in India is a sort of a mixed bag: he acts as a tutor to European women on subjects of diverse interests. He teaches these foreigners, especially the wives of ambassadors, Hindi or gives Sunday courses in Indian art and culture. He also acts as ‘a kind of very superior guide’ on their visits to historical places in Delhi and elsewhere. He prides himself on his knowledge of Hindi and treats his servants in an imperious manner. He takes his lunch of cheese salad, sitting alone at his smart little dining table which at once reveals his pseudo-romantic identity:

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 fullpage advertisement in an American magazine. It was very different from Gulab’s spicy meal eaten on the floor out of brass bowls.²

Esmond is not, however, a sophisticated Englishman. He still retains his

¹ Esmond in India, p. 252
² Ibid, p. 41
outdated colonial attitude:

‘In my house,’ Esmond said in Hindustani, ‘I expect absolute and immediate obedience....’

Esmond is overbearing and egotistic. Jhabvala as a European novelist can probe Esmond’s weaknesses and also the failings of Gulab, his Indian wife. In fact the scene of the dining table and the lunch underscores not only the difference in their tastes of food, in their attitudes of life, that divides them. Esmond is upset with the spicy smell, the uncleanliness, the untidiness—things which the westerner usually dislikes. Gulab is very fond of spicy Indian food. He becomes crude in conversation, and even offensive. He tries to evoke some response, some protest in her, but she remains very passive—‘the original dumb blonde’. He thinks that he is trapped in her stupidity; in her dull, heavy, alien mind.

1. *Esmond in India*, p. 41
In 1975, Ruth Jhabvala published *Heat and Dust* — her last and most controversial novel of India. More than any of her works, this one earned her the critics and reviewers in India. Convinced that the novelist was identifying with a tradition of writing which projected a damaging view of India, many of her Indian critics took a very negative view of the novel. F.R. Isar and Shantha Krishnaswamy criticised it as anti-Indian and viewed it as the epitome of the novelist’s twenty-three year itch in India. The Merchant-Ivory film version of *Heat and Dust*, eight years later, let loose a fresh wave of outraged feelings in India. Eunice De Souza and Sunil Sethi, among others, felt that the film was racist in spirit and “hollow at the centre.” However, *Heat and Dust* did find some admirers in India. Yasmine Gooneratne and Brij Raj Singh found much to appreciate in the book, and Anita Desai, in a spirited defence of the film, failed “to see any trace of an anti-Indian stance,” maintaining that “if any society was being criticised here it certainly wasn’t the Indian one.”

Coming after *A new Dominion*, *Heat and Dust* repeats the earlier novel’s warning of false assimilation at the same time as it projects a vision of a genuine merger—of the alien moving from a physical involvement with India to a spiritual one. *Heat and Dust*, in fact, hints at a renewal not only of the novelist’s own cycle of response to India but of her faith, lost to her in the last decade, in India’s genius for those who genuinely seek it.

Ruth Jhabvala’s analysis of the alien’s assimilation in India is seen in
her new novel in a double perspective. Using as her material a packet of letters and a journal written in 1923 and 1975 respectively, she adopts the Fowlesian technique of interlocking the two planes of time for her novel's structure. A juxtaposition of the two Indias, one ruled by the ideals of separation and one characterised by the social and racial mobility. Thus, while the novelist, on the one hand, revives the world of her forebears, she also continues to comment on the India she knows intimately. *Heat and Dust* then evolves as much out of Jhabvala's relationship with her literary ancestors as out of her continuing involvement with India.

A sense of historical continuity is in the novel by a depiction of the present commenting on the past. Two stories run side by side; their twists and turns following a common route in a common landscape of two hot, dusty little towns of Central India. They are the stories of two women linked not by birth but by the common sensitivity and openness they bring to the land in which they are expatriated. Though differing in character and temperament, their responses to India and their experiences in it are similar. An illusion of time having stood still is created by the device of projecting the two women's experience against a common cycle of seasonal change. Both come out to India in the early summer, experience emotional ecstasy through an inter-racial union in the hot dusty months, and are faced with the necessity of making a major decision—whether to cast their lot in favour of East or of West—during the monsoon and are seen thereafter among the mountains seeking a dimly visualised spiritual goal.

Yet, the ultimate fates of the two women differ, created as they are by
their differing times and environments. The break with the past is as distinct in *Heat and Dust* as the sense of continuity. It is mirrored in an Independent India, separated by a gap of fifty years from an Imperial India of undiminished glory effectively but crudely controlling the princely States, in which Imperialism and Royalty exist as relics. The beautiful bungalows in which the British lived their stately and gracious lives in 1923 have been stripped of their luxurious trappings and reduced to their utilitarian essentials to serve the needs of the new India. The palace at Khatm is no more than a shell, its owners compelled to make a living by selling family treasures. The marble angel put up by the Saunders in the British cemetery is worn away by fifty years of sun and rain to a "headless wingless torso", which comes far closer to the "armless Apsaras and headless Shivas" of Hindu architecture than to its Italian counterparts. Through this double perspective of continuity and change, Jhabvala presents her most composite picture up-to-date of a historical, sociological and spiritual India and examines the differing depths of the alien’s penetration into the two Indias—the separatist one of the Raj and the catholic one of post-Independence. Together they constitute an exploration of the theme of East-West relations that affirm Aziz’s prophetic remarks in *A Passage to India*: "We shall drive every blasted English into the sea, and then,... you and I shall be friends".

Jhabvala sets half her narrative in 1923—a year before the publication of *A Passage to India*—at a point of time when British rule in India had already spanned two centuries. Yet the British residents of Satipur, like their counterparts of Chandrapore, maintain the old divisions between the ruler
and the ruled in the same spirit of racist superiority that served as their predecessors' protection against the ever-present threat of submergence in a lower culture. The "old India hands" of Satipur whose "experience went back several generations" claim that they know all there is to know about India, but are actually still perplexed and repelled by the country in which they live. They believe that their only chance of survival in it lies in a meticulous fulfilling of their Imperial obligations which presupposes a scrupulous adherence to the line separating the white from the native and an unswerving faith in the rule of the white. Such a faith has, inherent in it, the seeds of restriction and immobility. By taking away his right to rule, the representatives of the Raj restrict and thwart the Nawab of Khatm's natural movement on the path of an inherited tradition, once fiery and dominant but now reduced by them to a bare nothing—the name of his kingdom Khatm being a symbolic one meaning exhausted or consumed. But it is not the native alone who is affected. Faith in the ruling power inherent in the blood of the white and the necessity, therefore, of preserving it from contamination by the native, exert restricting influences on the European who is open to his Indian experience and determines his position in the hierarchy. Thus, the "pukka sahibs"—the I.C.S. officials and political agents—who uphold and enforce the separatist ideal occupy positions at the top of the system while right at the bottom are the despised lower castes who have forgotten their racial superiority and given themselves over to India.

The officials at the top of the hierarchy in Satipur rise to their imperial obligations. Dr. Saunders, Major Minnies, Mr. Crawford and Douglas Rivers
strive hard, each in his own way, to preserve British rule in the district and by implication all over India. They share an unexpressed confidence that it was by the efforts of men like themselves that the Empire was built and that it is by such that it is being extended and preserved. The women too, believe that they have a role to play in the maintenance and preservation of British rule even though, for all practical purposes, their contribution lies in little more than an identification with the cause and a willingness to live the regulated life of the memsahib in India. Dr. Saunders runs the British hospital in Satipur according to the high standards of strictness and cleanliness that mark the British administration in India. He also sets the moral tone of Satipur and guards it closely. Major Minnies suppresses his innate admiration for the high standards of strictness and cleanliness that mark the British administration in India. He also sets the moral tone of Satipur and guards it closely. Major Minnies suppresses his innate admiration for the Nawab and struggles against the unpatriotic feeling that the British administration brings out the worst in a strong and forceful character like the prince of Khatm. He strives, instead, to keep him in strict order in accordance with the dictates of Simla. Crawford represents the type of ideal Britisher extolled by litterateurs of the first phase of expatriate writing, and is everything that Douglas has the potential for and aspires to be. It is this image of Douglas—the text-book image of the best type of Englishman in India—that Olivia falls in love with and marries.

However, the men and women who embody all that is best in the British community are transformed into dull in *Heat and Dust*. Jhatvala
recognised that the social immobility enforced by the politics of British rule demoralised the ruling race just as much as it oppressed the subject race. Jhabvala's point of view does not come through in the omniscient narrator's voice. Her moral stance is transmuted into those of certain characters who are either victims of the system or stand outside it.

That the novelist's stance approximates to a denigration of a culture governed by the separatist principle is suggested within a few pages of the book by her depiction of the fate that overtakes Mrs. Saunders in India. The breakdown of Mrs. Saunders' physical and mental health and her morbid fears and complexes are attributed, not so much to the harshness of the Indian environment as to the fact of there being something wrong in the system in which she is trapped. Mrs. Saunders complains of the heat and filth of Satipur and lives in constant terror of being raped by her native servants, yet she never goes up to Simla where she can escape the pressures of her environment for a good many months in the year like the other memsahibs. This refusal to leave Satipur cannot be put down to a devotion to her husband. It is the manifestation of an impulse for exclusion that may be self-generated or fostered by her environment. There is a suggestion that she is a misfit in her community, mostly because of her incapacity to make a successful life for herself on the right side of the dividing line, but in part at least owing to her origins: "...no one ever said this outright, but they were not the sort of people found in the Indian services". In fact, it is her second class status in her community that has, in the reader's conviction, provided the impetus for her physical and mental decline. A creature of excessive
sensibility, Mrs. Saunders finds herself incapable of meeting the demands of her life in Satipur. Isolated from her community; neglected by her husband, and deprived of the joys of motherhood, she grows lonelier, more hysterical, and more violent with each passing year in India. Victim of a narrow divisive code, she clings passionately to those very dividing lines that threaten to poison her existence.

Another character of sensibility and equally a victim of the system is Harry who stands at the opposite end from Mrs. Saunders in his relationship with India. Possessing a keener awareness than hers, he recognises that his sufferings in general and in India in particular stem from the restrictions imposed by the superior public-school Englishmen who run the administration in India: "They're the sort of people who've made life hell for me ever since I can remember", he remarks of the officials in Satipur. Harry's love for the Nawab whom he sees as the ideal anti-type of the public school moralists makes him hate the Raj and its coercive tendencies. He recognises that there is no basic difference between the way his countrymen tret Indians and the way they treat a member of their own tribe who does not conform. In reaction, Harry flouts the dividing line and firmly entrenches himself in the Indian camp. Though he experiences that joys of true friendship it is only temporarily, for through Harry's experience Jhabvala affirms the Forsterian conviction that inter-racial friendship cannot be sustained in an Imperialistic set-up. In fact, certain striking similarities between the two have led critics to suggest that the character of Harry is based on that of E.M. Forster's. Brij Raj Singh points out:
... devotion, his longevity, the fact that he has a mother in England to whom both he and the Nawab write, and his frank acknowledgement that he hates the Imperialists just as he hated his public school, where he was constantly bullied, all parallel events in Forster's life at the Dewas court; and this parallelism is Jhabvala's way of acknowledging the debt that Heat and Dust, as indeed all novels of India written by non-Indians owe to Forster.¹

Cronin suggests that the character of the Nawab of Khatm is based on Mahajnah Tukoji Rao III and that the reason for the latter's sympathetic attitude becomes clear after a reading of *Heat and Dust*.

It is true that the Nawab views Olivia's pregnancy largely in terms of a revenge on a race which believed that the secret of leadership lay in the English race. In a society that frowned on inter-racial unions and rejected the Eurasian, the Nawab gleefully looks forward to the birth of his half English child: "Wait till my son is born, he said; then they'll laugh from the other side of their mouths". But there is more to the Nawab's feelings for Olivia than his use of her as an instrument of revenge. Olivia undergoes an abortion to save her community from shame. But her action, though it frustrates the Nawab's revenge, does not drive them apart. She is forgiven by the Nawab but not by the Empire builders. Confronted by Dr. Saunders, she escapes to the Nawab and is permanently separated from her own people.

Cronin's assertion that the Nawab uses his "devastating" personal charm as "the last available weapon of war" fails to convince for even the Harry-Nawab relationship admits ambiguity. The Nawab coaxes, pampered and uses his influence over Harry quite shamelessly, but how much of it stems from malice and how much from genuine involvement—the involvement that prompted him to take Harry with him to Paris in the first place—is not clear.

This rejection is embodied in Olivia's fate. Of all the characters in *Heat and Dust*, it is Olivia who upholds the ideal that following the dictates of the heart in preference to those of the intellect is more conducive to acceptance and sympathy. Endowed with an exquisite sensibility that is denigrated by Major Minnie as "an excess of feeling", her heart trembles in response to the sorrows of others, irrespective of class, race, colour or even legitimate claim to sympathy. Thus, she is as sensitive to the suffering of morbid, vitriolic Mrs. Saunders and to that of effeminate, homosexual Harry—the outcastes of her community—as she is to that of one who stands totally outside it; the Nawab who organises riots, associates with dacoits and hates the British.

The young, beautiful and delicately bred Olivia begins her life in Satipur with little knowledge of the line that separates the ruler from the ruled. Her initial mistakes of understanding, common in a new-comer to the system, provide a good deal of amusement to the seasoned old sahibs and memsahibs. No one is alarmed at her behaviour, for there is no doubt in anyone's mind that she will eventually, like the others preceding her, "come to feel about India the way we all do". But Olivia, unlike the regulation heroine, does not
learn after a few false starts, how to develop into a pukka memsahib. Her doubts, deepened during her stay in India, as to the worth of this metamorphosis render her incapable of conforming to the pattern of behaviour expected of her. She gets involved with the country and its people, thus alienating herself from her own community. Her story ends not with a tearful reconciliation with her husband but with an ignominous flight with a native ruler.

Olivia's white and golden beauty may symbolise "all that is worth fighting and dying for" for the Empire builders, but she herself shares none of their convictions. In the face of Indian reality the time-honoured concept of the Ideal British attitude to India shows up as pompous and unworthy and, in the final analysis, irrelevant. Olivia resents interference with native customs on the arrogant assumption of a superior culture. "Who are we to interfere with anyone's culture especially an ancient one like theirs?", she declares at the Crawford's dinner party. Her comment on the Nawab: "He's just like...one of us" and her acceptance of his statement that they are fundamentally more alike than she and Mrs. Crawford, for example, indicate a Forsterian recognition of the innate unity of races. It is a grave comment on the consciousness of the British in India that this absence of parochialism in Olivia is described as "something rotten" by Dr. Saunders and Major Minnies as a "weak spot" often found in the finest people but one that aliens, need to guard against since "it is there that India seeks them out and pulls them over into...the other dimension". So fundamental is the separatist consciousness in the British community that even bright, practical Beth
Crawford "did not allow herself to speak about Olivia until many years—a lifetime had passed", after Olivia threw in her lot with the East:

Beth knew where lines had to be drawn, not only in speech and behaviour but also in one's thought....Beth felt that there were oriental privacies mysteries—that should not be disturbed, whether they lay within the Palace, the bazaar of Satipur, or the alleys of Khatm. All those dark regions were outside her sphere of action or imagination as was Olivia once she had crossed over into them.

She pushed that thought aside: it was unbearable. The deeper his immersion into the system, the more hopelessly narrow-minded and unimaginative Douglas becomes, and the more he mouths the platitudes of his community the more greatly he is estranged from his sensitive, artistic wife. Douglas is conceived by Ruth Jhabvala as stoical, idealistic and striving for perfection. Locked, within the Imperial system, however, his striving is reduced to a painstaking identification with those who rule, exploit and patronise India, and his ideal of perfection that of becoming a great colonizer and administrator. Douglas' pipe becomes, in Olivia's eyes, the symbol of officialdom in India:

Douglas had finished his breakfast and now lit his morning pipe.

He puffed at it as slowly and stolidly as he had eaten. She had always loved him for these qualities—for his imperturbability, his English solidness and strength; his manliness? He can't
even get me pregnant. She cried 'Must you smoke that dashed pipe? In this heat?'

Heaslop, he "highly respected his superiors and set great store by their good opinion of him" he makes a deliberate point of receiving the Nawab's congratulations with cool indifference. Olivia, with her keen unjaundiced eye and her heart full of the sensibility that is so astonishingly lacking in those around her, perceives and resents the arrogance and condescension of her husband and his fellow British in India. When they bring their unshakeable faith in the moral superiority of their race to the discussion of the Suttee at Crawford's dinner party Olivia is appalled. She notices that "not only did they keep completely cool, but they even had that little smile of tolerance, of affection, even enjoyment that ... was beginning to know well; like good parents, they all loved India whatever mischief she might be up to". In reaction Olivia is pushed to a defence of the custom and is suspected by an irate Dr. Saunders of having been influenced by "that bounder Horsham,"—a travelling M.P. who "had passed through the district the year before and had put everyone's back up".

Yet Olivia had not come out to India on a mission of friendship and understanding or even, like her step grand-daughter, out of a curiosity to find out the truth about the country her people ruled. She had been in the beginning only a pretty, frivolous young woman in love with her husband and determined to enjoy her life in India. Far from stripping herself of her cultural accessories like the narrator of the novel, her first action on moving

*Heat and Dust*, p. 116
into her bungalow had been to smother it in “rugs, pictures, flowers” and to write to her sister: “We’re beginning to look slightly civilized”. In her pretty drawing-room with her black and white prints, her Japanese screen, her yellow chairs and lampshades, Olivia had lived the life regulated for her—a arranging flowers and playing the piano. Though bored and lonely, she was completely oblivious of the natives around her; of her servants who padded around on naked feet, and of the millions who lived beyond the Civil Lines of Satipur. The limitations of her personality at this stage are suggested by her delight at the splendours of the Nawab’s dinner arrangements and the naivety of her conviction that “she had, at last, in India, come to the right place”.

Olivia starts going out with the Nawab and then to him at the palace at Shahm. And after a few visits, she discovers something curious—that she was getting to know the real India and to love her well, even her heat and dust—the two most dreaded opponents of the British in India:

Although the way was so hot and dusty, the landscape utterly flat and monotonous, Olivia learned to like these morning drives. Sometimes she glanced out of the window and then she thought well it was not so bad really—she could even see how one could learn to like it: the vast distances, the vast sky, the dust and sun and occasional broken fort or mosque or cluster of tombs. It was so different from what one knew that it was like being not in a different part of this world but in another world altogether, in
another reality.¹

Leah Hardinge becomes aware of a fundamental change in her vision: "This power of seeing, really seeing, was something new to her. It was as if this land, so far from her own, had jerked her awake, pulled the veil of ignorance and indifference from her eyes, making her look, see, as she had never done before." Endowed with a similar vision, Olivia loses her wavelength with her own people and, filled with a strength quite unknown to the earlier Olivia, resists the pressures that exact conformity and courageously places her personal instinct above the instincts of the herd. Her spiritual successor's estimate of her fifty years later is a valuable comment on the way India changed Olivia:

I still don't think there was anything very special about Olivia; I mean, that she started of with any very special qualities. When she first came here she may really have been what she seemed; a pretty young woman, rather vain, pleasure seeking, a little petulant. Yet to have done what she did—and then to have stuck to it all her life long—she couldn't have remained the same person...²

"India always changes people", the objective narrator declared at the beginning of her story, suggesting that her statement holds good for both eras. In Imperial India, as we have seen, normal healthy young men and women were metamorphosed into insufferable snobs and separationists or,

1. *Heat and Dust*, p. 85
2. *Ibid*, pp. 59-60
as in the case of Olivia, seduced from their community and claimed by India. Independent India, too, as depicted in the 1975 section, changes her aliens in one way or another. But what the narrator testifies, through a depiction of her own fate side by side with that of Olivia’s, is that India’s capacity for assimilating her aliens was considerably eroded in the separatist context of British India.

Olivia had given herself over in the spirit of surrender advocated by Sudhir Banerjee as the only approach to which India responds. She had cut herself off from her own people, had never gone back to England, and had even desired cremation after death, but was not swept into the mainstream of Indian life as was Judy and the narrator of *Heat and Dust*. Her destiny, unlike theirs, did not encompass the joys of physical affinity with India. While theirs is alive with movement and teeming with possibilities, hers is frozen and immobile. Olivia’s life in India in a little house standing “quite by itself on a mountain ledge” has held for her only a supreme, if picturesque, isolation.

In *Heat and Dust* Jhabvala shows that the two English heroines of the novel lack moral realism. They become victims of illusions generated by their liberalism and their sensitivity. They are carried away by their generosity. Therefore, they do not perceive the dangers of excess of feeling for a country they love but do not understand. Olivia admits that she does not understand India but she is not deterred from responding to the country unreservedly.
Five main themes, each of them closely connected with the other four and explored through an extremely skilfully managed series of parallels, run through *Heat and Dust*. The first of these examines the experience of Europeans in India, using flashbacks to incidents that occurred in the 1920s, in order ‘to add an extra dimension of time for the confirmation of a pattern...so far traced only in terms of contemporary India’. The reader is presented with a series of case studies of Europeans of both periods who are at different points on the wheel of change—change, both of principle and behaviour—that Ruth Jhabvala has suggested as being an inevitable part of the experience of living in India. The narrator, an Englishwoman in her twenties who has come to India in the hope of finding out more about the life led in India by her grandfather’s first wife, Olivia Rivers, both before and after her elopement in 1923 with the Nawab of Khatm, is at ‘stage one’ when she matter-of-factly accepts the sick and deformed citizens of Satipur as part of the ‘landscape’, and notes without further comment that her share in the bathroom facilities of her lodgings include ‘the little sweeper girl who is attached to them’. Olivia is at ‘stage one’ herself, when she casually accepts the idea that

there’s always something like that going on in the quarters.

Someone dying or getting born or married.¹

*Heat and Dust* is a remarkable work of art because it artistically portrays the processes of change, the processes of ‘becoming’ of two English women; and one of them, the young narrator, acknowledges this meaning

¹. *Heat and Dust*, pp. 129-30
India always changes people, and I have been no exception. But this is not my story, it is Olivia’s as However, the reader knows that Heat and Dust is as much Olivia’s story as it is the young narrator’s. This mode of double narration enables Jhabvala to cultivate a sense of detachment. It also enables her to project the novelist’s vision amidst a human and natural landscape enveloped in heat and covered by dust.¹

¹ Heat and Dust, p. 2