

## INTRODUCTION

Ruth Praver Jhabvala was one of the most outstanding Indian novelists, who wrote in English. Her novels stand in a unique relationship to Indian literature in English. Khushwant Singh, while bracketing Ruth Praver Jhabvala with R.K.Narayan, calls her “a fine interpreter of contemporary India in fiction” (Singh 574).

Ruth Praver Jhabvala was born on 7th May 1927 in the city of Cologne (West Germany) of Polish Jewish parents. Both her parents had come from different nationalities. Her Polish Jew father was a lawyer by profession. He had come to Germany during the first World-War to escape military conscription in Poland. Her mother Leonora nee Cohen was born in Germany but was not a native German as her father had emigrated from Russia. Even then, Ruth Praver Jhabvala’s family background was a comfortable, middle-European-bourgeois. Ruth Praver Jhabvala spent her early childhood in a well-integrated, solid, assimilated German-Jewish family, a family whose members proudly identified with the Germany around them. On the other hand, they identified with their Jewishness; Ruth Praver Jhabvala’s maternal grandfather, a respected German gentleman and citizen of Cologne, was also the cantor in Cologne’s largest synagogue.

While Jhabvala recalls early years of happiness in Cologne, she rarely speaks of the years 1933 to 1939. In 1933, the year Adolf Hitler and the national socialists came to power in Germany, Jhabvala was six years old at that time, she began her education in a segregated Jewish school. There were sign boards outside shops and cinemas proclaiming ‘JEWS NOT DESIRED’, effectively debarring Jews from entering. Jhabvala also recalls walking to school past gangs of youths breaking the

windows of Jewish owned shops. Yet despite the fact that Jhabvala's parents were arrested in 1934 and all her relatives were either killed in the holocaust or fled the country, it was some years before her father could persuade his wife to leave Germany. Only in April 1939, Marcus Praver along with his wife and two children (Ruth and her elder brother Siegbert Saloman) finally fled; they were among the last Jewish families to escape Hitler's Germany. They went to England where they settled in Hendon, a London suburb with a sizable Jewish population.

But the horrors of Nazi Germany followed them to England. As Jhabvala reminds us, everyone knows what happened to German Jews first and other Europeans, her family was not an exception. She and the members of her immediate family were the only ones to immigrate to England. By the end of the war, her father's entire family was dead. Every one was killed in a camp, they were more than forty. This terrible loss, together with the reports of how his family died, was too much for Marcus Praver, and in 1948 he committed suicide.

Jhabvala has never written about her childhood in Germany. She never thought of returning to Germany, as Germany for her, remains a part of Europe that does smell of blood. Since the age of 12 Jhabvala has ever been a foreigner in an adopted home, unable or unwilling to return to the land of her birth.

Jhabvala's first adopted home was England. They lived first in Coventry and later in Hendon, where her parents bought a house and her father started a clothing business. From an early age Ruth Praver Jhabvala had begun to write. She remembers her first composition at school in Germany which is entitled "The subject: a hare- in German, der Hase". She wrote under the title, Der Hase. At once she was flooded with her destiny; only she didn't know what it was. She remembered her entire

absorption, she was delighted in writing about and giving her impression of —’ der Hase. She was very happy and excited when she wrote this. Almost as soon as she arrived in England she made an apparently easy translation and started writing in English, and about English subjects. It appears that once in England, the young Ruth Praver deliberately tried to shut out the memory of Germany. In contrast, her brother eagerly read German at Cambridge, and in time became an authority on Heine. He retired from the post of Taylor Professor of German Language and Literature at Oxford University.

In retrospect Ruth Praver Jhabvala got her education completed at Hendon County School and Queen Mary College, London University (from 1945 to 1951) as the phase in which she acquired the tools of her trade as an author. It was because during this period, she had immersed herself in the novels of George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, and Charles Dickens and in many of the great European classics. According to Ruth Jhabvala herself:

This was the great gift, the inheritance that England gave me: my education which became my tradition the only tradition I had: that of European literature. It became my equipment, my baggage for the journey I didn’t know I had to make the journey to India. (Misellaneous 7)

Ruth Praver Jhabvala became a naturalized British citizen in 1948. Three years later she graduated with an M.A. degree in English literature. She met Cyrus S.H. Jhabvala, an Indian student of architecture, at a party in London in 1949. He went back to India but returned in 1951 to marry her. Shortly after graduating, Ruth Praver was married at Burnt Oak register office and left England for India. Nirad Chaudhuri, a friend of the Jhabvalas, describes their marriage as, “the case of a modern Persian

liberating a modern Jewish maiden from her Babylonian-exile in London” (Chaudhari 17). Thus again, Jhabvala found herself in an alien land. She never knew the India of the British raj nor did she marry into a family that had supported the raj. Her husband’s father was a trade union leader who had spent eight years in prison under the British, and her mother-in-law had been a prominent women’s leader. The India, Ruth Praver Jhabvala moved to, was a newly independent India, full of hope, unlike either the war torn Britain she had known during her early years in that country or the Britain of post-war rationing she had left in 1951.

The Jhabvalas settled in Delhi, where their three daughters, Renana, Ava and Firoza were born and grown up. Jhabvala’s early years in India were very different from those which an English woman would normally have expected. She met few Europeans and lived a reasonably typical middle-class Indian life. For almost 10 years, she was in love with everything she saw in India. She was very much attracted towards smells and sights and sounds in India- the mango and jasmine on hot nights- the rich spiced food- the vast sky- the sight of dawn and dusk- the birds flying about and the ruins- the music.

Her early impressions, then, were full of the sensuous beauty she saw all around her in the country which she describes as a ‘paradise on earth’ (Moorehead 16). Just as on her arrival in Britain she had begun to write exclusively about England and the English, so now she wrote exclusively about India and the Indians.

After staying in India for twenty five years she shifts her residence from New Delhi to New York. Jhabvala explains her move from India to New York in the following way :

You can’t live in a completely alien place... I got very homesick for Europe. It was a homesickness that was so terrible, so consuming.

And the only place that reminded me of the Europe that I once knew was New York. (Weinraub 113)

Jhabvala wrote eight novels and five collections of short stories when she was in India during the period from 1951 to 1975 and after moving to New York she wrote four novels and remaining short stories and she also wrote screen plays for movies and she died on April 03, 2013 at her home in New York city when she was 85.

She had a pulmonary disorder, said James Ivory, the film director who had worked with Mrs. Jhabvala since the early 1960s. Besides the Academy Award, her honors included the Booker Prize, Britain's highest literary honor.

After moving to New Delhi with her Indian-born husband in the 1950s, Mrs. Jhabvala wrote a series of novels and short stories set in her new homeland. In 1961, she received a phone call asking if she would write a screenplay of her novel *The Householder*.

The call came from Ismail Merchant, a young producer from India who was making his first feature film. The director was Ivory, an American who had previously made only documentaries. Mrs. Jhabvala accepted the project, despite knowing almost nothing about screenwriting, and the film was produced in 1963.

Merchant, Ivory and Mrs. Jhabvala formed what would become one of the most enduring creative teams in moviemaking history.

Together for more than 40 years, until Merchant's death in 2005, the trio made more than 20 films, including several genteel dramas based on the novels of Henry James and E.M. Forster. Mrs Jhabvala won Oscars in 1987 and 1993 for her screenplays *A Room With a View* and *Howards End*, both were adapted from Edwardian-era novelist Forster.

Out of twelve novels the researcher has taken nine novels they are : *To Whom She Will, The Nature of Passion, Esmond in India, The Householder, Heat and Dust, A Backward Place, Shards of Memory, In Search of Love and Beauty* and *Three Continents* the researcher has focused only on collection of short stories like *How I Became a Holy Mother* and *A Stronger Climate* because these works focus more on cultural confrontations and these works suits to the objectives of the thesis.

The concept of the global village coincides with the most modernist concept and Ruth Praver Jhabvala who has worked in a world where the condition of contemporary history is such, that, we may now be on the threshold of a new kind of person, a person who is socially and psychologically a product of the interweaving of cultures, in the present times. Modern man cannot resist this phenomenon knowingly or unknowingly he makes some element of foreign culture part and parcel of his consciousness. The more advanced a society, the wider is the range of foreign products available to people. “The western traditional antagonism towards India may only slow down the process of acceptance, but cannot resist it. This happens because man is an active processor of events and information” (Daisy 25).

In the post-war and post-colonial eras, therefore, either direct or indirect, cultural confrontations are an unavoidable phenomenon of the world, which prepares a modern man to modify, narrow mono-cultural views, and produce alternative and more flexible approaches and responses.

Jhabvala’s merit as a creative writer lies in her being intensely aware of her limitations. She writes only about the urban section of modern India which she knows well, namely, the middle-class Indian

society. She writes about the lower middle-class with understanding and touches the more affluent classes only here and there:

She never writes about the 'poor' as Indian poverty depresses her. Jhabvala includes the new rich class of Indian society in her novels, which is hungry for culture, in fact, it may be described as a social status. Her urban Indian is not urbane, in fact, it may be described as a back-water or may be more aptly, as a backward place. It is obviously involved in a social change and ferment and, therefore, her endeavour is to portray the society caught in the phase of a change from tradition to modernity" (Bijawat 8).

Though Jhabvala is different from all the Anglo-Indian and Indo-Anglian fiction writers, of pre-and post-independence India, yet we find her writings on the same themes as all other Anglo-Indian novelists have written, Indian caste-system, material dissonance, East-West encounter and tradition vs. modernity. It is her way of tackling these themes which make her unique. She has her own style and technique to portray these different aspects of Indian society. She often portrays the predicament of individuals in their relationship with their families. The East-West encounter is between the boss and the servant, but is on an equal level. It is the experience of European women married to Indian men and Indian women married to Europeans. Their differences have been presented with considerable power and acute sense of understanding. The interaction between two cultures, European and Indian, seems to be her forte. The most important thing about her novels is that she writes everything in its minutest details, which makes her novels occasionally dull for the Indian, but enchants her European readers. In other words, she basically wrote for westerners and not for Indians. Her western readers naturally are not familiar with Indian landscape, life and culture, and hence Jhabvala is

obliged to paint a large and comprehensive canvas, and this often leads to exaggerated portrayals in her novels, and perhaps this is the basic reason of her novels being more popular in the west than in India.

The Indian critical response to Jhabvala's works has been a mixed one. Dr. K.R.S. Iyengar discusses her work in his pioneering *Indian Writing in English*. He praises Jhabvala for her 'engagingly entertaining art,' and for being 'a consummate portraitist of social life in Delhi' (461). But Jhabvala does not figure in full length studies of Indo-English fiction by Paul C. Verghese and Meenakshi Mukherjee. Verghese has stated his reasons for not including Jhabvala in his book, *The Problems of the Indian Creative Writer in English*. In his Preface Verghese says: "In this book I am concerned only with the fourth category of Indian writing in English and have discussed only those writers (a) who are of Indian stock, and (b) who have used the English language for creative expression. I have thus excluded a discussion of R.P. Jhabvala who has in her novels competently dealt with urban life in India" (Paul ix). Meenakshi Mukherjee has also forwarded the same argument for bypassing her in her book called *The Twice Born Fiction*. In the "Preamble", she says: "I have, however, restricted my use of the term Indo-Anglian to include only the writings of those who are Indian and who have written in English. Thus I have left out writers like R.P. Jhabvala and V.S. Naipaul" (16).

In an interview with R.G. Agarwal, when asked whether she considered herself an Indian writer, she replied: "No, how I could be? I am not, am I? There is no getting away from that fact. I write differently from Indian writers because my birth, background, ancestry and traditions are different. If I must be considered anything, then let it be as one of those European writers who have written about India" (Agarwal 36). She

has the attitude of a daughter-in-law towards India. As she is not born in India, she thinks that she cannot be accepted among other Indian writers. She has been the most neglected writer, writing in and about India. In an interview with Yolanta May she says : “Every writer is lonely that I don’t think there’s greater loneliness than being a writer in India” (May 57).

The Present thesis is an attempt to study of the fiction of Ruth Praver Jhabvala which deal with the theme of cultural confrontations. Cultural confrontations are found to a greater extent in Jhabvala’s novels. Her first eight novels which are set in India provide the best example to this. Apart from this her collection of short stories are also having the problem of the thesis. The four novels which are set in America also deal with the theme of cultural confrontations.

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