

Chapter-V

DILEMMA OF WESTERN CHARACTERS IN RUTH PRAWER JHABVALA'S FICTION

Ruth Praver Jhabvala has lived in four countries on three different continents, and this has inevitably effected her work considerably. She has been forced to write as an outsider, and she has chosen to make her western characters outsiders too. So, Vasant Sahane calls Jhabvala as 'an inside-outsider' and 'outside-insider'. Jhabvala wrote mainly from the European point of view and her majority of readers are westerner too. She is constantly aware of her western values, of her western readers and this has affected profoundly the technique and the content of her novels. As she herself said, "When one writes about India as a European and in English, as I do, inevitably one writes not for Indian but for western reader" (Jhabvala, *Moonlight* 35). So, it is clear that she wrote mainly for westerners, and she intends to show the image of India to the world, for this she used her characters as a tools. Jhabvala nicely portrays how her western characters faced the problems in Indian society and how all of them overcome from all those problems. For example, expatriates like Esmond of *Esmond in India*, refugee like Etta in *A Backward Place*, seekers like Narrator and Olivia of *Heat and Dust* and Wishwell twins in *Three Continents*. This marginalization and the sense of being an outsider is a reflection of the authors own background.

Jhabvala's position as an outsider herself has always made her highly conscious of cultural differences and influences and consequently her novels and stories always force the reader to be aware of and even confront the cultural influence and prejudices she exposes. This aspect of her writing is implicit and at times focuses attention on the East-West

encounter, manifesting itself in such novels as *Esmond in India* and *A Backward place*. Jhabvala sees herself as an external observer and makes leading characters as her own image.

There are other writers like Kamala markandaya, Anita Desai, G.V. Desani who also have straddled with two cultures simultaneously. But unlike her, they go back to their grassroots in India frequently and with ease. Jhabvala remains consistently European, uninvolved and unconcerned. While this detached outlook promotes irony and satire in her works. She writes exclusively from the point of view of her own dilemma of her own personal anguish as a White European woman, caught in a mixed marriage, in a tropical country, unable to compromise, unable to forget her own culture.

Jhabvala has a marvelous ear for the rhythms of India speech and an observant eye for the modes of behavior in an adopted culture. However, a critic like B. Rajan states that, “But the case is limited, the tonal range is restricted and the joint effect of her many books is unavoidably one of accumulation rather than growth. Even we confine ourselves to the foreigners and their dealing with India, there are opportunities to move deeper which Mrs. Jhabvala avoids” (Rajan 80).

India has become noxious, harmfully a sort of white woman’s burden for her, she feels she can never become Indian, that her stay in India threatens her Europeanness, her personality. This personal dilemma is transposed as a generalization, as the principle problem of the European characters in her novels. They, like the creator, have to choose between staying on and suffering or else flee towards greener pastures abroad.

Esmond in India is the first major novel, where we can see the dilemma of western character. Esmond is the westerner who faced many

problems in India. This novel can be viewed as an expression of the author's inner dilemma: Whether to belong to India or not to belong, how to go about it. In *An Experience of India* she states this central problem that bothers the Westerner:

To live in India and be at peace one must to a very considerable extent become Indian and adopt Indian attitudes, habits, beliefs, assume, if possible an Indian personality. And even if it were possible-without cheating oneself-would it be desirable? Should one want to try and become something other than what one is? (Jhabvala, *Experience* 10)

Esmond, like any other foreigner came to India and stayed on. He learnt a lot about Indian culture, art, architecture and literature. So much so that he gave tuitions to foreign ladies who came to India for a short time and made them to learn as much as they could. Not only this, he also acted as guide and took these ladies to various places of interest. Accidentally he falls in love with an Indian beauty Gulab and marries her, and here starts his problems. When their rosy dreams come to an end, he starts to realize the real problems. It reveals the fact that Esmond and Gulab are poles apart as far their habits of sleeping, eating and dressing is concerned.

Gulab prefers more oil in her food, she enjoyed her food on the ground only, she eats more fatty items, totally she loves Indian food, which is spicy one but on the other hand Esmond is totally opposite to Gulab. He hates more oil in food and even he hates the spicy meal he prefers only boiled vegetable. Bachani, Uma's maid servant ridicules this European lunch she says, "What sort of man is that... who eats grass for his food?" (Jhabvala, *Esmond* 23). He gives much importance to outlook rather than inner look. Esmond prefers to sit on the dining table to eat

rather than floor. 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 bowls” (Jhabvala, *Esmond*. 33). He felt Indian food smell is like DDT.

Esmond faced lot of problems in the food, so he feels that he has committed a mistake by marrying Gulab because she could not adjust with him. It’s all strange to her. So, he is in a state of dilemma. He knew Indian history, Indian culture and folk-lore from this only he got money by guiding but the irony is that the same person is facing the problem to adjust to Indian food. At last he switched over to western way of life.

Esmond a master of Indian art and culture is the husband of an Indian wife and father of an Indian son. He was Indian only outwardly and to those foreigners who took tuition from him. He basically remained a staunch European. He has furnished his apartment as a typical European would do, making proper use of each and every corner, he took great pains in choosing proper colours and furniture.

Though Gulab doesn’t say anything to him, he was frustrated because of her behaviour. He forced her to follow the western culture, through this we came to know that he is trying to dominate over her. The most important thing is that whenever Jhabvala brings out this comparison between Esmond and Gulab she makes it quite obvious that her own sympathies are always with the Europeans and she describes Indians in satirical vein, leaving it to the reader to interpret the lines in his own way.

Esmond feels embarrassed taking her out to social gatherings. She is also miserable when forced to meet and mingle with his friends. In the end he leaves her alone and this process of estrangement suits them both, he found that her absence was for more impressive than her presence. He

gives his English friends the false impression of Gulab as a real old fashioned Indian lady, veiled, shy, sitting in a marble courtyard with the fountain splashing around, her maid singing love lyrics and serving her assiduously. He escapes social scrutiny by cleverly giving evasive or distant replies when questioned about his wife, “suggesting that the internal arrangements of his household were too private and oriental to be discussed” (Jhabvala, *Esmond* 34).

Ravi is another dispute for Gulab and Esmond, both want to bring him up in their own style. Uma, Gulab’s mother wants to bring him up in the Indian way. Like giving hair oil massage every day, shaving the hair once and serving him good meals. She tells Esmond:

Such food he needs, and also he needs to have his legs rubbed with oil to make them strong and his hair must be shaved... in the night he must sleep with his mother so that she may comfort him if her wakes with bad dreams. (Jhabvala, *Esmond* 112)

Esmond, a typical European, despises all these things. He wants Ravi to have light and healthy food : he does not believe in shaving the head and, of course, he vehemently opposes the idea of a child sleeping with his mother. He made it a point to keep Ravi’s bed in his room, for he does not trust Gulab and knows that she would be tempted to sleep with Ravi:

He had insisted that Ravi should sleep in his room. He knew that if the child slept with Gulab there would be far too much petting and unhygienic sharing of beds. He had now trained Ravi not to get up at night: or if he did wake, to keep quiet and still and not disturb his father. (Jhabvala, *Esmond* 43)

The above statement of Esmond is truly European way of bringing up of a child. We find Esmond clinging to his own culture as far as he can, but the question is, is he a true European, is he a typical example of a westerner? If he is, then we find him worse than Indian men or at least no better than them, and if he is not, then he appears to be a hypocrite, who wants to be a European but has long forgotten how he should behave like a true westerner. The picture a normal Indian would have of European, is of a cultured man who has full control over his mind and body. Esmond at times is far from that. He often uses abusive language towards his wife Gulab, he never hesitates in calling her an animal, he even takes delight in hurting her physically.

She looks pretty but she is so unresponsive and stolid that Esmond wants to break out from his trap of a dull, heavy, alien and meaningless marriage, “He thought of himself as trapped-trapped in her stupidity, in her dull heavy, alien mind, which could understand nothing : not him, not his way of life nor his way of thought.” (Jhabvala, *Esmond* 37).

Esmond gets attracted towards Shakuntala by her momentary passion and sensuality. With the Taj Mahal in moonlight, with the poetic beauties of Shelley in the background, she succumbs completely to the temptation of the flesh. Gone is her avowed admiration of Narayan. She has no qualms about betraying the domestic felicity of her friend and classmate Gulab, she said:

Esmond, I know you are married and also you have a child, but I tell you this means nothing to me. Only I know you have come into my life and now it is my duty to give everything I have to you, to adore you and serve you to be your slave. (Jhabvala, *Esmond* 148)

Esmond, on the rebound from Gulab, piqued by Betty, feels proud to be loved by a young romantic girl and gives in with tolerant affection

to her pleading for love. It is not an affirmation of love that Shakuntala enjoys but a brief moment of physicality ; she is too young and foolish to distinguish between the two. Esmond exploits his appeal to her sensuousness, awakens her responses and lets her share a night with him.

Shakuntala imagines herself to be in love and goes around singing ‘*Esmond, my love* telephones him often and makes herself a bit of a nuisance in his well manicured life. She engineers to him come home as tutor to herself and her brother’s wife. She is cloaked in pseudo-romantic thrills of her own imagination, while Esmond finds her as cloying and crude as Gulab. While Gulab is labelled as a slattern of the lazy variety, Shakuntala is called a slattern of the Bohemian variety. He endures the latter mainly for the sake of the money her father pays him, while at times he feels flattered by the devotion she showers on him. He had allowed her to sleep with him, one more conquest in a series of casual encounters. To him it is nothing more nor less than a temporary physical need and its fulfilment.

To Shakuntala it is of unspeakable significance and it has far reaching consequences in her life. She turns into a lover demanding constant attention from him and he starts feeling trapped by her too. Gulab behind him and Shakuntala before him and lessons in culture to silly woman with money paid out discreetly in envelopes--he is tired at it, the eternal shabbiness, internal and external.

Neither Shakuntala nor Gulab and Ravi mean anything to him. His has a negative response to love and life in India. The women who cross his path do not aid him in discovering an inner core of fulfilment. His restlessness drives him onward. One wonders whether Shakuntala would retrieve her balance and get settled down to married life with an arranged partner after Esmond’s departure from India. The pretentiousness and the

hollow philistinism of the so-called cultured and sophisticated people, Indian and European, have been expressed sharply by Jhabvala.

Mrs. Jhabvala is extremely sensitive and has developed an enormous guilt complex towards the poverty and misery which encircles the privileged, opulent few in India is seen in her novel *A Backward Place*. To the handful of foreigners leading artificial life in Delhi, India is not urbane but backward in every sense; poverty and backwardness are so predominant that it is impossible to pretend they do not exist. Clarissa, the Hochstadts, Judy and Etta agonise when confronted with the miseries of life in India, though not in the same way that Mrs. Jhabvala seems to have done:

The most salient fact about India is that it is very poor and backward. There are so many other things to be said about it but this must remain the basis of all- of them. We may praise Indian democracy, go into raptures over Indian music, admire Indian intellectuals-but whatever we say, not for one moment should we lose sight of the fact that very great numbers of Indians never get enough to eat...can one lose sight of that God knows. I've tried. (Jhabvala, *Place* 8)

The choice of women reflects on Jhabvala's own feminine affinity with the sensibilities and experiences of these expatriate women who have arrived in India as wives or beloveds or self-seekers on their quest for aesthetic or spiritual bliss in this country of the old renown. These three women are three versions of the European sensibility at different degrees of realization.

David Rubin's observation is worth mentioning here. He comments:

In this case the central figures are three European women who represent in varying degrees the East-West malaise and love affairs between Indians and Europeans; the romantic vaguely questing Westerners; the adventure and flight for survival of bored, superficial and idophobic drifters, mirrored by their egomaniacal, mindless and predatory Indian counterparts. (Rubin 674)

First there is Etta who hides her Hungarian origin by trying to put on a phoney, haw-haw English accent. She finds herself in India in consequence of her marriage to an Indian which has utterly failed. She discards Indian socio-cultural ethics which regards marriage an everlasting fusion of two souls in which woman's soul is submissive to the dominating one of man. Breaking the wedlock with her Indian husband she leads a life of permissive and sexually indulgent young woman having a long train of her lovers. For her, love is a matter of will and wish and, therefore, she has a pathetic series of transient affairs. In utter contrast to Judy who has committed to merge herself with conservative and backward social norms of her Indian husband Bal, Etta is offensive in condemning Indian norms of marriage she says:

Marriages, my dear, are made to be broken, that is one of the rules of modern civilization. Just because we happen to have landed ourselves in this primitive society, that is no reason why we should submit to their primitive morality. (Jhabvala, *Place* 5)

But more than these norms Etta condemns India that has a deteriorating effect on her physical charms. As India metamorphoses all the outsiders Etta has become miserably sick to the depth of her psyche since her only asset-her looks have failed her.

In utter despair Etta had once attempted to commit suicide on being deserted by her lovers. Finally, she takes shelter in the flat of her friend

Clarissa to safeguard herself from the heat and dust of India as far as possible. She is always anxious to find a possible rescue from this country through some new lover who might be induced to finance her return to Europe. This fading Hungarian beauty, quite arrogantly, declares that life in India is nothing but awkward and intolerable.

Clarissa came to India, out of her own conviction and idealism. The most important thing is that, once she came here she never looked back, she is not living in comfort or the best conditions one can wish for, in fact, she has a meagre income and lives in a shabby little room, in a little side lane off the crowded section of Delhi. She has no cooking facilities in her room and very few worldly possessions, and on one occasion when Bal, Judy's husband visits her he saw :

The room was cluttered, but not with anything either beautiful or very useful. There were soiled clothes, old paint pots, a copper jug, an earthen-ware water container. The only pieces of furniture were, a string cot, a sofa with springs leaking out from underneath, a wooden kitchen table and two cane stools. (Jhabvala, *Place* 76)

The description just goes on and on, and we are suddenly reminded of Etta's apartment, so feminine and elegant, with no Indian aura about it, enough to make some one feel as if he/she is in Europe. Clarissa is one of those Europeans who have completely merged themselves in this society, they have become a part of Indian soil. She is basically an artist and takes delight in painting the poor and humble people of India, as the 'simple earthy types' as she calls them. She herself leads a simple life in her, bleak untidy room in the office building, feeding herself on scraps of shop-cooked food, growing older and lonelier and dirtier year by year.

The most important thing about Clarissa is that she faces life as it comes, she never thinks of Europe, and has learnt to make the best out of her life in India.

After experiencing the Indianness on her pulse, she finds herself sick and eccentric and desperately seeks a home in India where she could be secure from gasping landlords and the cruel impudence of street children who mock her eccentric appearance and vulnerability to insult and pillage. Yet Clarissa has acquired a certain toughness of character through her disillusionment and suffering. Though disillusioned with India, she knows that she can never return to England to confess the failure of her dreams based on India.

Judy had married, like Etta, an Indian student in London. Both had come to India, taking their chances on a strange marriage in an alien country and there their resemblance ends. Etta, the typical European cannot adapt herself to India and remains what she was, “there is no conviction or idealism to carry her through as we see in Clarissa. There is no question of adaptation or involvement as we see in Judy” (Krishnaswamy 320).

Judy, with her long hair in a bun, clad in a cotton sari, in order to be like everyone else, tries her best to make her marriage work. Perhaps, she is more Indian than most Indian women like Mrs. Kaul, in the same novel. Her husband, Bal, is one more of those effeminate, good-for-nothing heroes, spouting philosophy in coffeehouse, doing nothing with inherent dignity, depending on relatives and womenfolk to see them through, like drones in hive. Here Bal is an out of work actor, waiting for his big chance, a dreamer who lives off Judy’s earnings as a secretary to the Cultural Dais.

Anchored firmly to the ground with two children and in-laws, any discussion of the unsuitability of her married life in India is purely theoretical to Judy.

Judy is urged again by her European friends that she has to face up to her mistake of a marriage to an out-of-work Indian actor, that she has to get out of it before it is too late. Yet Judy, with ten years of married life and two children with her, is phlegmatic by nature and sticks on with the stubbornness that the English sometimes display in adversity. Perhaps she is the only character in the whole novel, who has grasped the truth behind one of Dr. Hochstadt's axioms, "It is fatal to come to India and expect to be able to live to a Western rhythm" (32).

Judy, being pragmatic, has a family to support. She is busy earning a living as a typist- cum-receptionist at the cultural organisation run by Mrs. Kaul, one of Delhi's socialites, who-has plenty of money, time and energy on their hands and do not know what to do with themselves apart from shaping their lives to suit trends in fashion. Judy goes to work out of necessity, not out of choice. It keeps her busy, and this, with the running of the family leaves her no time for brooding, for developing trendy neuroses.

She maintains the stiff English manners, takes on her responsibilities seriously and tries to accommodate a husband who is childish, whimsical and difficult enough to live with. Etta needles Bal into fury by taunting him at the picnic site as the husband who comes home only to eat and sleep and make more babies, Etta said, "Of course, no one can accuse you of being a reactionary husband. You don't keep her locked up at home—Oh no, you're a modern man with advanced ideas. You send her out to work" (172).

While Bal is furious at being insulted, Judy carries on as usual. He shouts at her, orders her not to go out for work and let him be disgraced. The dreamer that he is he now wants to go to Bombay and try his hand in the film world. Judy is frightened of the prospects of arriving jobless with her meagre savings in a strange city with two children and an impulsive immature husband. She wants to be sensible, and responsible.

Judy becomes a tragic figure in identifying herself with a life totally unreasonable to her refined and sedate sensibility when she stoically follows her husband to an uncertain future in Bombay. Appreciating Judy's patience and modesty C. Saros and V.A. Shahane write, "Judy perhaps is one of the few women characters in Jhabvala's fiction who strike a note of hope and affirmation in the face of unexpected and sudden change of life" (Saros and Sahane 44).

She comes gradually to see her home, her job and her make-shift arrangements in Delhi as transient and too trivial a cause to say no to the challenges in life, too insignificant to be tied down to them whereas the out-side world is so wide and fluid with possibilities. She comes to terms with her life, accepting it as a paradox and yet rejoicing in it, giving herself to it the way a lover might. She is the only European woman who has managed to survive in India and exist as a woman, as a person in Jhabvala's active world.

A Jagan Mohan Chari, summing up the experiences of Judy, Etta and Clarissa in India writes:

Etta finds everything dull and backward ... Clarissa is after idyllic beauty available in plenty in India but is not able to get at it. Only for Judy, it is an easy and pleasant walk over. She has made the journey through the mirror as easily as if it were a child's play. (Chari 140)

The title of the novel is also very important and suggestive. After India as a *Backward Place* and then altogether a 'new dominion. Jhabvala ultimately left it as a bowl of 'heat and dust'. Heat and dust are two things that haunt Jhabvala constantly in this novel. The entire story has been set in the summer months, when the heat is immense, dust-storms are every day occurrence, and all these cause a mental depression. The readers are tempted to imagine that the heat and the dust storms are symbolic of Jhabvala's own state of mind. She was unable to adjust in India and wanted to run away from this oppressive land, but could not do so, as her strongest human ties, her Indian husband and children were in India. She was passing through a stormy period hating everything Indian - Indian smells, food, landscape, language and people. That is why she wrote this novel in a bitter mood, mentioning heat and dust storms over and over again.

The novel opens with the social and familial setting of Olivia's life, and these lines suggest the title of the novel. Olivia lives in Satipur as the wife of the Assistant Collector. Douglas wakes up early and leaves the house early only to return in the evening. She has a bungalow to herself which is large and dull. She feels bored and lonely in the spacious house. Describing her condition Jhabvala writes that the rest of the time Olivia was alone in her big house with all the doors and windows shut to keep out the heat and dust.

Olivia in this novel represents the lives of those English girls who come to India with great expectations, but find it dull and boring. Olivia, who was young and pretty, loved Douglas immensely, so much so that when the summer is at its peak and all the other European ladies, Mrs. Crawford and Mrs. Minnies plan to go to Simla and want Olivia to accompany them. But she refuses and tells Douglas, "...She be bored,

she'd be irritable, she'd be hot, she would quarrel with him - all right'. But please not to send her away from him" (14).

The Europeans, used to a cool clean climate, abhors the heat and the dust and also as Etta puts it, the germs and the disease that India offers to her visitors. The suitability of the title is evident enough in this light. However, she also hints that discomforts of life in India do not rest at the physical level. They symbolise obliquely other aspects of existence, more deeply embedded. The young tourist, the narrator meets at the guest house tells her that she came to find peace in India continuing she says, "But all I found was dysentery. Her companion adds his own sneering remark, "That's all anyone ever finds here." (21). this jaundiced view of India is found repeatedly in the novel that it ceases shock or mystify the reader. The Indian environment emerges as an oppressive factor that not only grips and warps. The characters take hold of the author's imagination, and creative skills.

The heat of the Indian summer aggravates the European sensibility already frayed by India's poverty and the rich Indians. Here Jhabvala comments on the impact of the heat on herself and her fellow Europeans as:

Only those who have lived through days of endless Indian heat know their effect on one's behavior. The Western characters in my novels are amazed at themselves. They yell at servants; 'My God,' they ask, what's happening to me? What's happening to me? My Western characters who of course include myself-have reason to be appalled at the transformation to which they are being subjected. Along with their behavior their most cherished principles and feelings seem to be changing. (Jhabvala 35)

The European woman used to a cool climate and a quieter organised life, perhaps changes her temperament when disturbed by this unbearable heat, dust, noise and disease that she is surrounded within India. She quarrels, loses her equanimity, her sense of decorum and balance, leading to a disintegration of her personality. Disorganized, disoriented that she is, her spiritual quest in India gets distorted, her frustrations lead to deep disillusionment and all kinds of acts, physical and mental involve her in sordid relationships that leave a lingering bad taste long after the novel is finished. This is one way of explaining the conduct of such heroines as Olivia and her step grand daughter who narrates the story.

Olvia's pregnancy sets into motion forces which bring about her decline. Douglas is extremely happy to discover her pregnancy and starts creating little castles in the air. While the Nawab, who is sure that it is his child, becomes more and more possessive about Olvia, who is in a dilemma because she knew that the child she was carrying was not Douglas's but Nawab's, finds the situation extremely difficult and decides to get an abortion. She approaches the Begum, who helps her and Olvia is taken to one of the Quacks to bring an end to her pregnancy. The entire episode is barbaric, and here once again the reader, especially the foreign readers gets a view of primitive India.

One wonders, is it possible ? And we can't help but think whether this is the same India which boasts of its traditions and culture, it appears nothing but a primitive and barbaric land. The quack was successful in her operation, and Olvia had an abortion the same night. She was taken to the hospital where Dr. Saunders attended her. He was familiar with the methods Indian midwives used for miscarriages and this was not the first time that he extracted a twig smeared with the juice of a plant, and here

Jhabvala, tries to make concessions for Indian women, grabs another opportunity of describing the primitive character of India and its people. She writes:

Dr. Saunders had extracted many such twigs from women brought to him ... he had strong ideas about morality and how to uphold it. But even he admitted that certain allowances might be made for these native women born in ignorance and dirt. (Jhabvala, *Heat* 173)

But Dr. Saunders could not excuse Olivia who had no such extenuating circumstances. Olivia on her part, never returned to Douglas, she went to the Nawab and he sent her to the hills a town which Jhabvala calls X town, and Olivia spent the rest of her life in that town.

This is the story of Olivia and of 1923. Now coming to the narrator of the story, who visits India to unravel the story of Olivia, we get a glimpse of India that she sees in 1975, and it is through her eyes that the readers get a view of post-independence India. It is this India, which Jhabvala hates and describes so strongly in this novel. She sees it in its worst form, and we find her in the last phase of the cycle through which every foreigner passes after coming to India. Jhabvala has reached the point where everything Indian is abominable and hateful. She finds this land, a land of poverty, hunger, disease and dreadful smells, and this is what the narrator learns soon after her arrival in Bombay. She spends a night in the society of Missionaries, where another foreign lady who had been in India for a long time, warned her that she has to be very careful with her food in the beginning, boiled water only, and whatever she does, no food from the street stalls.

The lady goes on to describe India in its most gruesome form. She tells the narrator about the famines and the smallpox epidemics, and what she has learnt in India is :

You can't live in India without Jesus Christ. If he is not with you every single moment of the day and night and you praying to Him, with all your might and main - if that's not there then you become like that poor man with the monkey taking lice out of his hair. (Jhabvala, *Heat* 10)

These lines clearly show Jhabvala's contempt for India through her western characters at its worst. One wonders, can any land be worse than this ? The important thing is that this is not the end but just the beginning of such detailed descriptions, like those of a beggar women, of hospitals, of poverty, and disease, which Jhabvala has given in this novel. The descriptions are enough to give the reader a view of India, if not worse, is in no way better, than what we think of hell.

The narrator decides to visit the Khatm, where the Nawab lived. The town was a big disappointment and she called it a 'wretched little place' (15), and her but journey to Khatm was even worse, but Jhabvala utilises it to describe the dull landscape and the horrible condition of Indian buses, once again the narrator says:

I have not yet travelled on a bus in India, that has not been packed to the bursting point. If the buses are always the same so is the landscape through which they travel. Once a town is left behind, there is nothing till the next one except flat land, broiling sky, distances and dust. Especially dust. (Jhabvala, *Heat* 15)

Dust seems to be an obsession with Jhabvala as she makes it a point to mention it on every occasion she can. The narrator and the other

characters in Satipur have been used by Jhabvala to reveal the India of 1975, and whatever she has written is repulsive and symbolic of Jhabvala's hatred for this land of "Heat and Dust".

Besides the narrator, we have a few more foreign characters, who came to India, in search of spiritualism and peace. Their experiences also has been described with a touch of ironical humour. The narrator meets a trio of foreigners (one girl and two young men) outside a travellers' bungalow. The girl is English with a pretty face, but now looks pale and dirty. The narrator asks her as to why she has come to India, the girl promptly replies, "to find peace, but all I found was dysentery," and her young man adds, "That's all anyone ever finds here" (25). This seems to be the climax of Jhabvala's bitterness and criticism of this country, and in these lines she has also been able to sum up the plight of foreigners in this country : how they come here with high hopes and return, sick both mentally and physically.

The third foreigner, an asectic (Chidanand) also came to India with a spiritual purpose. He was attracted by the holy scriptures and decided to visit India. He was not disappointed initially, as he was able to find a lot of it in the temples of South India, and spent quite some time there. He fully merges himself in the spiritualism that he could find there, so much so that when he did develop dysentery and worms, he did not bother about them.

Also on the instructions of his Guru, he had set out on a pilgrimage on foot with a begging bowl in his hand, and this is how he happened to be in Satipur. But he could not continue his journey beyond Satipur as he fell sick and after a few days, the narrator found him groaning and in a terrible state in one of the royal tombs. He lay there with all his belongings i.e. an umbrella, a small bundle, beads and a begging howl.

He had fever. The narrator who had met him outside the travellers' home, took pity on him and brought him to her room. Chid recovered within a few days, but didn't show any signs of leaving her apartment. The narrator not only provided him shelter and food, but she also had to satiate his hunger for sex.

The narrator is unable to explain her sexual experience with Chid, but later on she has a sexual intercourse with Inderlal, the clerk, who is also her landlord. They both visit the shrine of Baba Firdaus, and while she takes out sandwiches, Inderlal takes out two strings, to be tied in the shrine to get their wishes fulfilled (this reminds us of Olivia and the Nawab). After trying their string they are there alone and together. Their desire for communication becomes stronger and more intimate, the narrator lays her hand on his, and then he looks at her in an entirely different way and the narrator says, "... he was a healthy young man - his wife was away, we were alone in a romantic spot, getting more romantic every moment as the sun began to set" (12).

The entire episode is a recurrence of the Nawab's attitude and actions, in fact, Inderlal makes the same joke the Nawab had made earlier, about what had happened there on the original Husband's wedding day to make the barren wife pregnant and the thought that strikes our minds is : Why did Jhabvala repeat this incident? Is it to show to the world that, India is the same and the people also are unchanged? There is hardly an difference between the Nawab of 1923 and Inderlal of 1975.

The narrator of this story, seems to relive the life of Olivia. Just like Olivia she also becomes pregnant at the shrine. She decides to continue with her pregnancy. Not only this, she even goes to the town X

where Olivia was, and decides to go up in the mountains in an Ashram to have her baby there.

Major Minnie monograph on the influence of India on the European consciousness and character that the narrator quotes at length sums up in a concise way the European's reactions to India. It is Jhabvala who speaks through Major Minnies, when he refers to India as an enemy, to be guarded against, an enemy who finds out the weak spot and presses on it. The finest, the most sensitive of the Westerners are especially vulnerable as India seeks to pull them apart and destroy them. The author says:

Yes, concluded the Major, it is all very well to love and admire India-intellectually, aesthetically, he did not mention sexually, but he must have been aware of that factor too-but always with a virile measured European feeling, the moment one exceeds one's measure-one is in danger of being dragged over to the other side. (Jhabvala, *Heat* 175)

India to Major Minnies and Jhabvala remains an opponent to be fought against from without and from within, especially from within one's own being. This is the attitude of puny human beings, towards India as an overwhelming reality. The relationship is imbued with a sense of all the things it must not be, a sense of utter futility.

Jhabvala's characters dilemma is stated when they tells us that living in India meant a constant struggle to keep her own personality and not become drowned in India, to remain European. They feel her 'Europeanness' is threatened, that she can never become 'Indian', that if she stays on, India 'would attack her morally, it will destroy her personality'. Given the choice between staying on the suffering or escaping abroad ; she chooses like Esmond, the latter route. These

formulations may be all right for her personally but they seem to do a disservice to an old culture and an ancient country, when taken as generalisations. Perhaps she was worn out by twenty-five years of living in an environment alien to her particular physical and emotional temperament. India, to such a woman, tired as she is, may have proved to be too much of a burden to bear and she seems to have chosen, wisely enough, for her to stay out.

The third and final section of *Three Continents* in the Rawul's Kingdom is set wholly in India. The Indian landscape is consistently presented as hot and dusty in *Three Continents* again as in some of the previous novels. The view from the hotel room in Delhi is typical of many descriptions of the Indian landscape in Jhabvala's fiction, "Everything appeared dry, white, parched by the sun like skeletons, although it was the coldest season, with a sharp, frosty tang in the air at night." (Jhabvala 284). And when Michael is lost and Harriet desperately goes out in search for him, the descriptions of the heat and dust of Delhi are used to show how distressing the situation in India is for the American youth. The narrator comments, "It was hot, the season had changed, we had got into the Delhi summer, and its heat and dust blew through the open rickshaw in which I sat" (Jhabvala 351).

Indians are shown frauds but it is only in India that Michael really awakens and finds the truth behind the movement. Not only this, each of the characters in the novel brings out openly the dirty side of their life in India where the localities seem to be well-versed with the goings of the movement, the movement undergoes a change when the ambitious Rawul feels the need to form a political party in order to unite the world. So, it is in Delhi that Harriet and Michael are exposed to the background of the movement. As a result, Michael starts having unpleasant fights with

Crishi because Crishi doesn't take interest in the Movement anymore. He argues violently about it with Bari Rani, 'Yes I know,' he said when she was about to speak again, 'it's the climate. But there's nothing wrong with the climate, it's everything else. Every rotten thing else' (Jhabvala, *Continents* 332-333). When Michael starts having doubts about his involvement in the Movement, he gets murdered.

The Indian sky's positive image which was shown in *A Backward Place* is missing here, may be because there is not a single western character like Judy in *Three Continents* who is comfortable with India. The principle characters like Harriet, Sonya and Michael spend much of their time in their hotel with the curtains closed to shut out the hostile Indian environment. Even in Dhoka, Harriet immediately draws the curtains to shut out the landscape she has traveled through for two days on the train. In Dhoka again, Crishi tries to justify Michael's early cremation to Harriet taking India's heat as pretext, he states 'We had to', he apologized. "I wish we could have waited for you, but you know how it is with the heat in India; it has to be done the same day"(Jhabvala 382).

According to Ashri *In Three Continents*, though, Jhabvala firmly locates herself as an outsider looking inside with possibly bitter and hostile memories of India. We see her firmly as the 'in-law' bound to India not by propinquity but only by ties of marriage signified and personified by the fact that we think of her as Mrs. Jhabvala, daughter-in-law who never became part of the family. This symbol becomes an images as it falls outside the purview of simply being a textual signifier and becomes an overarching image of representations of Indians created in her work *Three Continents*. Unfortunately, her representation of Indians is so shocking and outrageous that one must question it in the strongest possible terms. India and Indians are generally represented as

Dhoka, literally translated as deceit, fraud, or Dhoka as verb meaning to dupe. It seems that Jhabvala, the outsider, looking back on India sees it entirely as a 'dupe'-a deceitful Dhoka. In creating the peculiar sort of 'imaginary relationship' between Indians and their real conditions of existence, Jhabvala is expressing a particular ideology, perhaps the colonialist British/European ideology of hatred and with the Western, hegemonic view of India and Indians as depraved (Crishi) and decrepit (Rawul). While one might want to say that this is an artist's fictional construction of ideology, we must respond with the Althusserian recognition.

However, while admitting that they do not correspond to reality, i.e., that they constitute an illusion, we admit that they do make illusion to reality, and that they need only be 'interpreted' to discover the reality of the world behind their imaginary representation of that world.

According to Feroz Jussawalla, the picture of India that Ruth Jhabvala has about the dilemma of western characters depicted appears to be prejudiced and coloured to the extent that she has not only exaggerated and distorted the real India, but also has added spicy and lurid details to make the descriptions and details more randy, infatuating and sensually gratifying. In the words of Jussawalla:

Jhabvala wants us to interpret *Three Continents* and to discover what she depicts as the reality, the image that all of India and all that India stands for—religiosity, spiritualism, etc.—is a fraud, a deception, and that through India one cannot know the Absolute—not yet at least.... She has appointed herself as the 'holy mother' who is to make this Maya or illusion fall from our eyes so that we can see all Indians acting out of fraud and greed and thus be warned of the deception that awaits us. (Jussawalla 48)

Jhabvala's stories about Europeans living in India deal with people who come out to India with their dreams, only to find disenchantment. These stories are built round the Europeans' initial expectations and their ultimate frustrations. In the end they all feel trapped in India.

Agarwal states about the stories i.e. in *A Stronger Climate*. Jhabvala's second collection where in Jhabvala deals with Westerners who come out to India, no longer to conquer but to be conquered. This theme is dealt with in all its complexity in the last three novels, but it is already present here.

Miss Tuhy, the Miss Sahib of the story, is a teacher by profession and by passionate inclination. When Independence came all her colleagues went home but Miss Tuhy decided to stay. She is fond of the country and likes her students. But soon she finds that she is not qualified enough to teach and so she retires. After some time she goes to England, but she finds England a very cold country and the boys reserved. So, Miss Tuhy comes back to India. She stays in an unclean place, for she cannot afford to a fashionable quarter in a posh locality. Sharmila, the granddaughter of her landlady is very friendly with her. Miss Tuhy helps her with her lessons. Soon Sharmila gets married. The bridegroom is stocky, ill at ease and no longer very young. Miss Tuhy's heart misgives. At first Sharmila is very proud of the jewellery her husband has given her. But soon the novelty of it all fades away, Sharmila quarrels with her husband and comes to live with her grandmother.

Unhappiness and frustration change Sharmila from a charming hoyden to a coarse, slovenly woman with a raucous voice. But Miss Tuhy, blind in her love, does not notice it. Her image of Sharmila remains static—a double image superimposed one on another—of a playful high-

spirited girl and a young woman in full bloom. Suddenly, one day she sees Sharmila from a distance and realises what she has become:

But the woman she now saw in the bazaar was fat and slovenly; the end of her veil, draped carelessly over her breasts, trailed a little in the dust, and the heel of her slipper was trodden over to one side so that she seemed to be dragging her foot when she walked. She was quarrelling with one of the shopkeepers, she was gesticulating and using coarse language... Miss Tuhy, in pain, turned and walked away in the opposite direction. (Jhabvala, *Climate* 184)

From that moment onwards Miss Tuhy's feelings for India suffer a recoil and she experiences an anguish hitherto unknown to her—a desire “to get away from the house and from the streets and crowded bazaars around it” (185). Instinctively, she thinks of going to Simla, which with its green mountains, clean cool air and its English boarding house with “very clean stairs and bathrooms” (188), comes closest to her memories of England. In a last bid to save her illusions, she takes Sharmila and her children with her, giving up her entire savings for the purpose. But the trip is a disaster. Back within ten days to Delhi in the height of summer, Miss Tuhy experiences a revulsion, from India that is inextricably mixed with revulsion from Sharmila. The author comments:

The sky was covered with an ugly yellow heat haze, and all day hot, restless winds blew dust about. Miss Tuhy hardly left her room. She felt ill and weak Miss Tuhy pushed her hand away and cried out, ‘Go away! I can’t stand the smell!’ She meant not only the smell of the food, but also that of Sharmila’s heavy, perspiring body. (Jhabvala 188-89)

With the death of Sharmila’s grandmother (a prototype of Sharmila) Miss Tuhy’s cycle of response is fully traversed. Death

becomes a symbol of Indian reality—of vultures, loud raucous wailing and a pall of white heat. She watches the flames of the pyre and a terrible desolation sweeps over her as she realises that she too is condemned to the same fate. She who had thought England too dim and cold—the grass not green and the flowers not bright enough.

Another story which uses the theme of the cross-cultural encounter is “The Young Couple,” which appears in *A Stronger Climate*. Cathy an Englishwoman marries Naraian, an Indian who goes to England for higher studies. Naraian is an idealist and full of ideas of doing social work in India. When they return to India they rent a small house, though Naraian’s parents protest against it. Naraian loves Cathy and both enjoy each other’s company. Naraian is offered many lucrative jobs through the influence of his uncle. He refuses to take one because he feels that a man like him should do something on his own.

When Cathy becomes pregnant, she is brought back to Naraian’s parents and Naraian finally takes a job in his uncle’s firm. Naraian’s parents also prevail upon Naraian to stay with them forever. Cathy does not feel that she is trapped but she feels unhappy because of the heavy furniture, the rich food and the petty quarrels. She also feels unhappy because Naraian falls into the traditional line.

“The Young Couple” shows that though difference in food, furniture and fashions are trivial, it is on these trivial things that one’s happiness largely depends. The meetings between Europeans and Indians initially produce an irritating effect on Europeans but in the end they succumb to Indian influences and become nonentities. The interaction between Europeans and Indians works in favour of Indians, so much that Europeans are destroyed by it.

Mr Boekelman of “The Man with the Dog” whose closed attitudes deprive him of a satisfactory relationship with India. Boekelman’s impatience with native servants, his lordly ways with Indian women and his insistence on every comfort in India as a divine right are colonial characteristics that he has cherished notwithstanding the facts of history. The spirit of the Bara Sahib finds its culminating expression in the insulting cry— “Monkeys! Animals! ... Idiots! Fools! Not fit to govern themselves... Damn rotten backward country”(207), with which he abuses India and Indians. Yet, through a suggestive exploration of the alien psyche by the middle-aged Indian narrator who is in love with Boekelman, he is revealed as a deeply suffering, sensitive man. The gap between the apparent and the real is mirrored in his appearance. During the day, as he appears before others, he is a grand old sahib— handsome, dignified and arrogant. At night, in his sleep, seen only by the narrator, he is transformed into a grey, sagging, inert mass of flesh breathing hard ugly sounds—utterly defeated by India. That this image of his comes nearest to the truth is borne out in the lady’s reflections. The author describes:

No one else ever sees him like this. All those friends he has, all his European lady friends—they only see him dressed up and with his front teeth in. And although they have known him all these years, longer than I have, they don’t really know anything about him. Only the outer part is theirs, the shell, but what is within, the essence, that is known only to me. (Jhabvala, *Climate* 202)

The narrator, who has herself known alienation in a soulless marriage with an elderly man, is sensitive to Bookelman’s suffering and that of his entire social circle of “nowhere” people who have chosen the pangs of rootlessness in preference to a merger with what, in their eyes, is

an inferior culture. The narrator's sympathy, however, does not blind her to their deliberate separatism and essential snobbery. She comments:

None of them has even tried to learn any Hindi or to get to know anything about our India. They have some Indian "friends," but these are all very rich and important people—like maharanis and cabinet ministers, they don't trouble with ordinary people at all. But really they are only friends with one another. (Jhabvala, *Climate* 203)

The acute isolation that Boekelman and his friends suffer as a result leads them to huddle together in a closely knit camp that is more like a family than a social circle. Mutual dependency creates distrust and suspicion and fosters love-hate relationships, but their common hatred of India keeps them inextricably together. The narrator observes their suffering and analyses her own:

Sooner or later they always come to this subject, ... [India] and their faces change, they look mean and bitter like people who feel they have been cheated by some shopkeeper and it is too late to return the goods... The fate which has brought them here and left them here so far from where they belong and everything they hold dear. (Jhabvala, *Climate* 204-05)

Like them, the narrator too suffers the pangs of exclusion from all that she holds dear. Overwhelming love, is, in Ruth Jhabvala's fiction, as we shall further examine in "Passion" and "Desecration", as displacing an influence as overwhelming hate. The narrator's great love for Boekelman deprives her not only of the respect of her children but her own self-respect. At the end of the story, she is completely cut off from her family and left alone with a man who does not love her but only shamelessly exploits her weakness for him. The fact that she knows Boekelman to be

a man of little moral worth is an additional torment. Yet, in the final paragraph, she proclaims a great peace and happiness.

Aruna is of the opinion that the aliens who resist assimilation, then, are sufferers in India. That, however, is not to say that the other kind—the ones who are open to India's influences and seek a genuine relationship with her—fare any better.

Margaret says that nobody quite wins in the new India but foreigners always lose. If 'losing' signifies a failure for the European in his quest for a personally satisfying experience of India, many foreigners, indeed all those who appear in her later stories are losers.

There is something unsatisfying partial and ambiguous in Jhabvala's reaction to India, even if one agrees that there are enough reasons to bring about disillusionment if one lives under the Indian sky. Her list of symptoms, the swamis embodying the corruption, degradation, the lies of human nature, the tide of poverty, disease and squalor rising all around, the heat, frayed nerves, and the strange, alien, often maddening Indian character, can be extended further. Yet for generations, there have been Western men and women in India taking this and more in their stride. The truth about India, or for that matter, about any country, cannot be reduced to such simplistic terms. It was defended by Shanta Krishnaswamy.

Always mixed marriages make the characters of East and West to land in trouble because of the different cultures in which they are bred and brought up. Because of lack of understanding and over domination of the husband especially foreigner who had married an Indian lady thinks always in a different way. The other reasons may be food habits and dress patterns, keeping the house in tidy condition etc. The failure among the partners is because of ego clash. Jhabvala's western characters have the

proper knowledge what we call as Indianness. They want to stay back in Indian retaining their culture without giving due respect to the other culture.

The dilemma in Jhabvala's fiction is evident in different forms sometimes it is visible in the title of the works. For instance *Heat and Dust*, *Esmond in India*. *Heat and Dust* signifies an atmosphere of confusion, chaos, suffocation and displeasure. The title itself signifies whole theme of the novel. *Esmond in India* signifies the dilemma of the protagonist in which a European feels confused and bewildered in Indian context. His arrival in India seems to be an adventure but ends up in disappointment.

At another level Jhabvala portrays the dilemma of her fictional characters both from East and West. For instance Esmond's dilemma is beautifully portrayed by introducing Gulab and Shakuntala in *Heat and Dust* two generations at two different contexts come to India, which proves to be an utter disappointment. It happens as they feel alienated in India being away from their cultures.

Different kinds of situations or shades of culture put the Western characters in dilemma. Food culture and social circumstances make the Western characters more measurable. Though they try to overcome the difficulties, in a long run their adjustment seems to be futile. They face a losing battle well confronting each and every day. But some characters succeed as they get adjusted to Indianness, for example Judy in *A Backward Place* feels comfortable by accepting the Indian life style, leaving behind her Western roots. Thus, Jhabvala has thrown lights on various faces of the dilemma of western characters in her fiction.

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