PREFACE

No survey of the contemporary Indian literary scene would be complete if it failed to take note of the writings of Ruth Prawer Jhabvala. She, variously described as 'an inside-outsider' and 'outside-insider' stands apart from the other writers. The advantages and disadvantages of her literary situation are peculiar to her and they stem from her being a European lady of Polish-German-Jewish, origin brought up and educated in England, who lived in India with her Parsi husband and wrote about India. She has given new, literary currency to the old doctrine that India makes extra-ordinary and irreconcilable demands on a European, especially on a white woman. Faced with the choice of succumbing and breaking down in, the awfulness that is India or seeking survival by withdrawal and flight, she has chosen to quit India. She now lives in New York, and looks back, perhaps, on her years in India not as a transplanted European life but as a passage through that country.

Ruth Jhabvala today enjoys a worldwide recognition as a novelist and a short story writer. Though she started her literary career in India. She now seems to be better known abroad than in India. The reason seems to be that whatever she writes intrigues the Europeans more than the Indians who find her writings abounding in common places and in everyday occurrences.
Since Jhabvala started writing in the late fifties and gained recognition only after 1975, not many scholars have written about her literary works. V.A. Shahane wrote a book, *Ruth Prawer Jhabvala* in 1976, and in this book he has attempted a critical introduction to her fiction.

Jhabvala wrote ten novels and three collections of short stories. Her works are like a screen on which we see thirty years of post Independence India projected in many of its hues and colours. Jhabvala’s merit as a creative writer lies, in her being intensely aware of her limitations. She writes about only that urban section of modern Indian, 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 social status. Her endeavor is to portray the society caught in the phase of a change from tradition to modernity.

The fact that Jhabvala was born in a Polish family, brought up in Germany, educated in England and married to an Indian and settled in Delhi is to be taken into account. The fact is important for it was largely responsible for her outlook on life and India as well. She found herself tossed between the two worlds of her upbringing and of her permanent stay; her greatest
problem was whether she should merge with Indian soil or stay as a European.

Although she wanted to be merged with India, at the same time, the thought of her Europeanness never left her. All that was strange and was not in conformity with her thought and conviction attracted her. Therefore it should not be much surprising that her works should contain the oddities of Indian life. She picturises the queer customs and traditions of Indian culture.

Though Jhabvala, during her stay of three decades in this country, wrote about India, as a European and for the Europeans, yet, she has a place of her own in India. Her contribution to Indian writing in English will always remain incomparable and unique. The Indian image that she projected in her novels, will always be remembered by her readers. Her deep understanding, keen observation and deep insight into this less known society make her a novelist of careful study and analysis. I have tried to make a humble attempt in this direction.

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