CHAPTER- III
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The most significant feature of Ruth Prawer Jhabvala's literary achievement is her awareness of socio-cultural patterns and values and her understanding of man in society. She writes about the conflicts and confusion which arise due to different values of different generations. She observed in India a clash between the modern and the traditional. As India had become independent recently the clash and differences of east and west could be observed by her very clearly. Jhabvala describes the domestic and social life of Indians in most of her novels and she also describes the traditions and routine life of people.

Jhabvala writes about India as she moulded her world and fictional art according to her experience. In most of her novels the central character is India. Her knowledge about India is of great significance. She writes as she observes and tries to depict the customs and traditions of day to day routine such as, that the reader sometimes gets bored.
Jhabvala knows that she is writing for the western readers. In her article "Moonlight Jasmine and Reckets" she says, "When one writes about India as a European and in English (as I do), inevitably one writes not for Indian but for western readers. Problems of communication present themselves; How to translate the idiom of one language into another, how to present a scene to an audience unfamiliar with its most obvious ingredients (such as temples, bazaars, and motorcycle, rickshaws)." And she is deeply conscious that she is writing for western readers who are not familiar with India and Indian culture, modes and society, therefore her area of observation is very wide and she renders all that she observes in a comprehensive coverage. Sometimes this tendency towards reproducing an actual scene is to an excessive degree with the result, as V.A. Shahane says, that "an Indian reader is almost bored, but the western reader who is unfamiliar with the scene is very thrilled."1

Jhabvala, finds in India two types of people who represent two societies, the Eastern as well as the Western. In the introduction to An Experience of India, Jhabvala comments on the cycle through which westerners pass in India. She says,
"First stage, tremendous enthusiasm ... everything Indian marvellous; second stage, everything Indian not so marvellous; third stage, everything Indian abominable. For some people it ends there, for others the cycle renews itself and goes on."

India is first stage for the ones who are here for short time and while they are towards the second stage they return back to their country. The life becomes difficult for those who have strong will power and so they fight for their identities. By reading Jhabvala's novels we can see in her characters every stage being lived incidents in the novel by Jhabvala reveal how India lays impact on the westerners.

India evokes different responses from the westerners who look at it as an imposing reality. The reactions are varied because some adjust themselves to the situations while others do not. The Hochstadts are extremely tolerant and accommodating and so take a highly detached view of India, an attitude which irritates characters (like Etta) who find themselves irretrievably caught up in India. The Hochstadts, Etta, Clarissa and Judy represent different strands of western attitudes to India, "For the new comer in India perhaps one of the most interesting aspects is the
correlation ... and here I have in mind not only physical facts but also intellectual and spiritual ... the correlation of the old and the new, of what has been and what is ..."\(^4\)

The westerners are attracted towards India because they are interested in the simple way of life led here. The narrator herself is enchanted by the natural attraction of India in the beginning. Her characters come to India to "find themselves". Douglas in also here in India because he thinks of India as a symbol of duty.

Through her characters of the West Jhabvala has satirised superstitions and orthodox views of India. In fact, as R.S. Singh says, "She has studied the characteristic Indian traits from the viewpoint of culturally advanced onlooker. This explains partly why she feels sometimes so terribly upset about social manners and even the postulates of Indian life."\(^5\)

INDEPENDENCE AND AFTER

The most important thing we have to keep in mind when surveying the socio-cultural content of Mrs. Jhabvala's novels is that when she started her literary career in this country, India was still getting used to its newly acquired
freedom and facing the problems it inherited. In this period of transition the clash between the Indian culture and the Western influence left by the British was becoming more and apparent. The older generation was trying to cling to traditions while the young were revolting against them. India was also facing with the problem of millions of refugees, who came in large numbers and settled down mainly in Delhi and neighbouring areas.

We come to notice in the novels of Mrs. Jhabvala a gradual change taking place in society due to the effect of a foreign rule. The Britishers are gone but their impact is seen in many facets in the middle and upper-middle class.

The young of this new generation, the post-independent India are trying to change themselves and break the old traditional bounds. In the characterization of Jhabvala we find the young people with new ideas though they may not be everlasting. In To Whom She Will we find the young generation trying to free themselves from the tradition bound society.

Amrita is influenced by the modern and western outlook but in the end she is submissive to the family decision about her marriage, we find the modern influence in the character of Amrita and somewhat in her aunts.
Nimmi in *The Nature of Passion* is a modern young girl who strongly believes in women freedom. She thinks that going to clubs, playing tennis, keeping bob hair, dating, dressing stylishly and attending lectures on English romantic poets adds to the grace of one's life. But all this is not permissible in her community. Her phuphiji who is not all in favour of women freedom says, "A girl of that age has no right to enjoy herself, she should be managing a household and bearing children and looking after a husband."6

Nimmi's brother Viddi shares her aspirations and joins in her quarrels with the elder brother, Om. But the irony of it all lies in the fact that these youngsters, craving for a better way of living, should yield to something even more superficial and shallow than when they resent in the traditional way of life.

Yasmine Goonratne writes, in *Silence, Exile and Cunning*:

"Despite Nimmi's claims to superiority her own standards are superficial; she plans merely to be more fashionable than her modern sister-in-law Kanta, and marry someone better looking than Chandra Prakash."7
In the same range of characters comes Shakuntala in *Esmond in India* who represents the modern youth in India. Just to show that she is modern she smokes and drinks and falls in love with a European. She is influenced by Western culture and hence does things, which could show that she is different from others and modern in her views. Jhabvala through these young characters want to overdo things in craving to become modern and in this trail cross those bars which are set by the Indian society.

Since Jhabvala settled down in Delhi in 1951 she could observe at first hand its changing face in the wake of the independence and partition. She registers the change in values for wealth and power. The large numbers of people who had been uprooted by the partition and had lost everything achieve "the miracle of self-rehabilitation in a new environment, by dint of sheer hard work keeping in mind the variety and complexity of the post independent Indian society.

Jhabvala shows a variety of people living in Delhi. Government officials, Lieutenant General, Brigadier, inhabited Aurangzeb Road and other big officers of the army, air force and Navy lived New Delhi; the newly rich were found walking at the India Gate and feeding their
children with ice cream. The poor and the middle class lived in old Delhi.

Western culture influences the Indian way of life because the Britishers had been a long time here and rooted their ways to much extent. The undercurrent idea that runs through the novels of Jhabvala in the post-independent India, a reader observes that the novelist is trying to show that though the countrymen have the feeling of freedom yet they find themselves under the influence of the western rule.

Jhabvala is critical about the pseudobehavior of Hardayal, who had been a freedom fighter. He wants his daughter to marry a rich man who lives in comfort in the urban area instead of marrying Narayan, who is a doctor and lives in the rural part of country to help the poor and needy. She wants to bring out the inner feelings of a freedom fighter or those who benefited a lot after independence though their contribution was little. She gives a comparative glance between Ramnath and Hardayal Ramnath was poor before independence and is so after independence.

The novelist has tried to show that the high class people bring up their position and try to be modern in following the mannerism of Britishers even in small everyday details like Hardayal preferring his 'Black Coffee at
eleven; Madhuri drinking her 'Chocolate', Shakuntala listening to 'The swan of Tuvela' (Pg. 12) discarding Indian music. They try to show their standard of living by these things.'

Jhabvala tries to show through her fiction the variety and complexity arising due to various changes in the post-independent Indian society. Her novels bring and cultural setting of Indian families and through them she tries to give a view of the person who is caught in between the changes going on due to tradition and modernity.

We come to notice in the novels of Jhabvala a gradual change-taking place in society due to the effect of a foreign rule. The Britishers are gone but their impact is seen in many facets in the middle and upper middle class. Aruna Chakravarti writes in Ruth Prawer Jhabvala: A study in Empathy and Exile,

The impact of modern Western ideology was seen at many levels of Indian life after independence. An era of science, technology and modern economy was being ushered in education in general and that of women in particular was gaining momentum. On the sociological level certain radical changes of
concept concerning the centers of power and influence in family and society were being introduced.  

The young of the generation at that time, the post-independent India were trying to change themselves and break the old traditional bounds, In Jhabvala's characterization we find the young people with new ideas though they may not be everlasting. She is interested is describing the cultural ceremonies in India. She has taken a keen observant eye in describing the marriage ceremony of Hari and Sushila. Small rituals of the marriage are given attraction by the novelist, "... the girl said, choking with laughter, that she would return Hari's shoes and let him go if she was paid ten rupees ... Suri pressed ten rupees into the girls hand ... the slippers were produced and Hari was released."

While living in Delhi in the year after independence, Mrs. Jhabvala had opportunities of closely observing the changes taking place from local to cosmopolitan, from traditional to conventional, from naive to sophisticated, only sometimes one hardly knows which is which. Indian society has undergone many changes just after from the day the British left India. The traditions of India were respected and
now the Indians tried to identify themselves with their country.

TRADITION VERSUS MODERNITY:

Jhabvala writes about the Indian customs and traditions sometimes with mockery and sometimes with interest. She is also interested in writing about the tensions created amongst the old and the new, the modern and the traditional. She deals with the upper middle class people in most of her novels, *Esmond In India*, *To Whom She Will*, *Get Ready for Battle*, and *The Backward Place*.

Ruth Jhabvala has taken a main subject as her theme and that is the lure to modernism. She describes Indian traditions with interest, some showing ignorance of the Indian people and some just for attraction. Young characters like Nimmi, Viddi, Amrita, Shakuntala are shown to be very enthusiastic in relation to their individual freedom breaking the old Indian custom of arranged marriages. Jhabvala is critical of arranged marriages, which causes this kind of situation, where the couple have problem to communicate with each other. Misunderstandings are caused at first step in these kinds of marriages.
Jhabvala is interested in writing about the joint family system. She mentions about it in many of her novels. She appreciates family living together and sharing whatever comes in their way, good or bad. Western culture mostly shows single family and isolation thus this kind of system in India must have interested her. She has also dealt with the single-family system now emerging amongst the Indian life, in *Nature of Passion*, and *The Householder*.

The women folk who are old are shown to be very traditional, they don't want to give away their customs and rituals at any expense and on the other hand the young want to follow the western life and its ways, which is the impact of the long British Raj in India. "Indian society has always been more an in-group society than its counterpart in the West. Although the joint family system is breaking down under various economic, industrial and social pressures, Indian society even in urban areas still retains this in-group feeling, mental outlook and the get-togetherness of family ties."

Ruth Jhabvala deals with the post-independent India and she has also tried to mention the pre-independent India in *Heat and Dust*. She brings out the social conditions of both the eras and finds that there has been no change. The heat is the same and so are the living conditions of the
people. She talks of the refugees during partition and gives us a vague idea how it was a social disaster. Hindu Muslims riots are mentioned, showing the conflict between the two communities. She through her characters gives the message that people in India are still ignorant and believe in all kinds of superstitions. Jhabvala tries to depict that independence has served no purpose. She also tries to say through her novels that in India there is no concern for human life, people die in streets and the hospitals are in bad condition. She is very critical of the roads and the whole social setup of India. Indian poverty was also a major point for Ruth Jhabvala to mention.

Jhabvala has also mocked at the orthodox caste-system of India. When Tikka Ram, in *Heat and Dust* is about to be hanged, he wants to know whether he is going to be hanged by a chamar or of a man from some other caste. By giving the example of Tikka Ram the novelist wants to show that some people in India are so much fanatic that even at the time of death they never leave the idea of caste system which really makes them fanatic.

Jhabvala has not spared even her European characters who are in the grip of orthodoxy. Miss Tetz of *Heat and Dust* believes that she will die according to the will of God because "you can't live in India without Christ-Jesus". In the
same novel when Olivia sees the grave of the baby of Mrs. Saunders, she fears that if she gets a child it may die in the same way which shows that living in India she too has become the victim of orthodox views.

Jhabvala has presented India's poverty and its backwardness. In *A Backward Place*, India creates the hothouse atmosphere within which people bloom of, more often, wither. In Jhabvala's eyes, India is a trial from which only the most secure and assured can survive and those who suffer from irritability of weak nerves simply go down.

In *A New Dominion*, as Gooneratne urges, we have a new economic entrepreneurial India in which modernity creates new kinds of stresses within the pattern of traditional life and class position. Again in *The Three Continents*, India is presented in all of its usual ambivalences ...the Indian landscape, the heat and dust the very nature of the sunlight etc. When Crishi draws back the curtains in the Delhi hotel, Harriet's room is flooded with a special strange kind of daylight... "But now everything, including our rumpled bed, was exposed to harsh daylight, blaring in throughout the picture window. The hotel, towering like a ruler's palace over the surrounding newly built flats, and stalls, and straw huts where the construction workers lived, stood in a very
exposed position in that raw, treeless land: so that the light coming through the window, unmediated by any thing green or pleasant, seemed to strike straight in from the desert and was white and laden with dust."

Jhabvala's fiction presents an objective picture of India. Yasmine Gooneratne, for instance, refers specifically to this quality in Jhabvala's *The Nature of Passion...* "Its title implies an attempt on Ruth Jhabvala's part to penetrate the Indian psyche and express it in its own rather than in imparted terms."

Indian cultural tradition has been painted in *The Householder* in this novel, Jhabvala has laid emphasis on the relationship of parent to child. And in *Gev Ready for Battle*, Jhabvala offers a conventionally Indian solution to ordinary everyday problem. So, India is not only a place in Jhabvala is works, it is in itself a major character.

Jhabvala depicts the most backwardness of Indians while discussing the suttee system and the thinking of the Hindus, in relating this barbarous act to religion. She has tried to mention the shortcomings in society, she portrays the old traditions which over burdened the society, "grain merchant had died and his widow had been forced by her relatives to burn herself with him on his funeral pyre." Here
the novelist is mentioning the "Suttee Pratha" which was followed by some communities in India in particular region.

The most important thing here is that Jhabvala deliberately writes about this incident perhaps to be convinced that this society is what it was so many years ago. And Prof. V. A. Shahane, while reviewing this novel wrote:

It seems rather strange to me that an incident of Sati could take place as late as 1923, through this is not impossible as an isolated case.

Shahane found a solution to the problem by calling it an isolated case, but can we find an explanation to the same type of incident, which recurred on September 4, 1987 in Deorala, a remote village in Sikar district of Rajasthan where a young woman of eighteen, Roop Kanwar, immolated herself on her husband's funeral pyre. She was a bride of only a few months, and had spent only a couple of days with her husband. The episode was hailed by the Rajput-community as one of the greatest events of the time. Ironically, the Imprint of October 1987 describing the incident, wrote:
Although the recent sati in Deorala village has caused a national outcry it is not an isolated instance of this barbaric practice (p. 26).

Is this not enough to prove that Indian society to some extent is still barbaric and primitive? What Jhabvala wrote in 1975 was bitter and hurt her Indian readers, but can we deny her allegations? Or can we say that we have changed and ready are or the new era?

Recently in 2002, 5th August in the backward district of Panna, in a village Patna Tamoli, again the Incident of Sati surprised the whole country. Again a question was raised whether we are going towards modernity or coming backwards to these old traditional rituals that have no life. Kuttubai sat on the funeral pyre of her husband Mallu Sen on 5th August, in the presence of thousands of people. One incident took place in 1923 and the other now in 2002. The question is, is the situation changed in 2002, which is after seventy-eight years. We are just the same or may be even worse. We have communal riots almost every year, and in all parts of the country - always on a petty issue. Through these incidents, Jhabvala perhaps wanted to show to the world, that India, a backward place, is still a backward place. Nothing has changed, a new dominion is a mere dream, and it will never be reached in this barbaric land.
EUROPEAN CULTURAL INFLUENCE:

Jhabvala is novels are like windows, through which her readers can see the changing image of Indian society as Jhabvala saw it. The thing, which strikes us most, is that Jhabvala in her relatively small number of novels was able to touch almost all the important aspects of Indian society. She starts with Indian social customs connected with arranged marriages, childbirths, name giving ceremony and 'mundan' ceremony. Then she goes on to the most important problem of modern Indian society – the clash between tradition and modernization. She also writes about the government offices and prevalent corruption. Indian religion and spiritualism are the focal points in her later novels. The East – West encounter is another important strand in her novels. She has discussed the plight and dilemma of those foreigners who come here in search of spiritual peace but all they get is disease and depression. Mrs. Jhabvala also never loses an opportunity of expressing her repulsion at the sights seen in Indian cities, overcrowded, railway stations, buses, trains, bazaars, hospitals, shops and colonies. Indian food and dress have, of course, been described by her in detail. Indian women also occupy a place of prominence in her novels. Infact, she has covered a fairly large spectrum of Indian society as seen by a foreigner trying to explore it and getting absorbed in it.
In her early years of her experience of this country wrote as an observer. She saw everything from a European's point of view and marveled at the things she saw in this country. Its colours, the vast sky, exotic birds and superb ruins-things she had never seen before overwhelmed her. She was young and full of enthusiasm and under the spell of her initial enchantment it was not difficult for her to merge herself completely in this new world and, as we have seen, it was under this initial enchantment that she wrote her first two novels, To Whom She Will and The Nature of Passion. In these two novels she took delight in writing about a few social customs and other trivial aspects of Indian society. Her third novel, Exmond in India, Clearly indicates that Jhabvala's initial enchantment was wearing off, Jhabvala the 'outsider', had more or less become an 'insider', able to pierce through the superficial layers of the glamorous society. She displays a remarkable understanding of the middle-class Indians of the society, especially of the woman that she saw in and around Delhi; Her five later novels display her enhancing attitudes, which colors her vision of India.

The novelist has tried to observe Indians very closely. She depicts the uneasy and comic manner in which East and West are shown meeting, but only superficially she describes how different this meeting could be. She is quick sharp and
intelligent, to observe that under the western influence only surface changes have taken place in Indian society. Its core remains unaffected. At the same time the blind imitation of the West is bound to have dangerous repercussions. She tries to picturise the middle class caught in the changes caused due to the new era beginning in India.

While reviewing the contemporary cultural history at the time of Ruth Jhabvala we find that she is conversed with the elite class and tries to portray them most because she is a European.

She has a biased view, which has been strengthened by her European descent. She tries to look at the Indian socio-cultural scenario from her own angle and not from the Indian outlook, which is widely accepted.

Jhabvala appreciates her characters in Esmond in India, like Madhuri. Mrs. Jhabvala has portrayed her character with great admiration. She is westernized to a certain extent and likes to maintain a style and status in society. She has been described as delicate charming and cared for by her loving husband, Hardayal:

Hardayal, as he came up the stairs to the upper veranda to bring his wife's morning cup of chocolate, felt it
too, that air of elegance and refinement that she distilled so that it prevailed in the whole house. (P. 25)

The description reveals her personality and the air of elegance Madhuri had about her. Mrs. Jhabvala describes her as being a lady who was punctual and immaculate in whatever she wants to do, may be as result of the western influence she imbibed through her husband. On the contrary, Jhabvala gives the example of Uma Ramnaths Sister as a typical middle-class Indian housewife.

Uma knew no such schedule, Her days were long and rambling and unpremeditated. Full of possibilities she rarely know whom she woke up in the mornings, what she was going to do, whom she was going to see. (p. 115)

Jhabvala satirically hints at the western influence, which is still prevalent in Indian society. It is a status symbol to have western friends and go abroad for higher studies. She tries to show that the western influence was seen after independence because the Britishers had just left the country. The youth was found to be influenced by the new western ideas and were juxtaposed with the old traditional Indian society.
Through Krishna Sen Gupta, in *To Whom She Will*, Mrs. Jhabvala has tried to describe how the Indians (young) want to go abroad and after staying there find it difficult to adjust themselves in India. After coming back Krishna Sen Gupta hates Indian atmosphere though he had been living here before in the same conditions. It was very shameful that he must change himself in a few years in the foreign country:

He hated the in complaining poverty, the apathy he saw all around him, in the streets, the bazaars, on the steps of the temples ... he hated the frank immortality of business and the unashamed dishonesty of shopkeepers. He hated the women because they were ignorant, innocent and submissive ...hated everything even his parents, because it was they who made him come back. (pg. 38-39).

But later in the novel we see that Krishna soon forgets the west and merges again in the Indian society. Jhabvala herself has admitted that Indian society is too strong for the Europeans to survive as westerners. If one wants to live here he has to merge himself in this society.
The most important question at this point is, was it India that was going from bad to worse? Or was it Jhabvala's own changing attitude and mental state? The answer comes from Jhabvala herself in her last novel *Heat and Dust*. The narrator in the novel says in the beginning of the novel, "India always changes people, and I have been no exception". (p.6). Nor was Jhabvala as is obvious from her novels. India did change her, but for the worse. She was one of those foreigners who could not merge themselves in this society that proved too strong for their European nerves. Those things, which had enchanted her initially, depressed her later on.

It is true that Jhabvala's novels do not project the Indian society as a whole; Mrs. Jhabvala's India is Delhi. Her society is the middle class Indian society; neither the rich nor the poor have any place in her novels. The question then is, can we say that Jhabvala presents an image, which is true of the whole of India? The answer definitely is no. She herself admitted this and V.A. Shahane, analyzing this aspect of Jhabvala's novel, wrote:

Jhabvals's merit as a creative writer lies in her being intensely aware of her limitations. She
writes about possibly the only social segment of urban India that, she knows at first hand.\textsuperscript{15}

Perhaps it was this limitation that she imposed on herself that gave her an opportunity to describe everything with accuracy. Though we see a marked change in Jhabvala's attitude and mood, there are certain common elements in her novels. Jhabvala wrote all her novels like a detached observer. Initially she wrote as an observer writing about things which enchanted her and later on, about things she knew too well and found them to be beyond her tolerance, and naturally she became bitter and critical. The question is, was she ever sympathetic towards Indian society? The answer has to be in the negative. At times we are tempted to interpret her initial enchantment as sympathy. But how can a person be sympathetic unless he involves himself completely with any society, and this involvement is missing in Jhabvala, so much so that she never even criticizes any of her Indian characters.

Jhabvala excels in presenting incongruities of human characters and situations. The incongruities have social, familial and cultural implications, and consequently in all her novels they become the main source of humour. She often uses the technique of comparison and contrast and also juxtaposes the old and the new. East-West encounter is
important in all her novels, emphasizing the fact that the
two worlds are entirely different. Perhaps it is because of
this that all her European characters, with the exception of
Judy in *A Backward Place* are unable to adjust in this
society and want to go back. We find Jhabvala also in the
same situation. She never loved this country in her later
years, as is obvious from her last two novels, *A New
Dominion*, and *Heat and Dust*. She just hated everything
Indian. She was herself one of those Europeans who could
not accept this society and finally left India. Though she left
India yet today she has a unique place among the Anglo-
Indian writers. She is one of those very few writers who
wrote about the post-independence India.
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RUTH PRAWER JHABVALA

'A WRITER OF GENIUS... A WRITER OF WORLD CLASS
A MASTER STORY-TELLER' — SUNDAY TIMES

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