CHAPTER THREE

CULTURAL DICHOTOMY

The central fact of all my work...is that I am a European living permanently in India. I have lived here for most of my adult life and have an Indian family. This makes me not quite an insider but it does not leave me entirely an outsider either. I feel my position to be at a point in space where I have quite a good view of both sides but am myself left stranded in the middle. My work is an attempt to charter this uncharted territory for myself. Sometimes I write about Europeans in India, sometimes about Indians in India, sometimes about both.

(Contemporary Novelists 468)

Man-woman relationship is a never-ending battle. For, no two minds can be identical. Taste, temperament and talent differ from person to person. Hence, a man and a woman united in marriage face contradictions and complexities. In this respect, a successful marriage is a myth whether it is an arranged marriage, love marriage, or inter-cultural marriage. In mixed marriages incompatibility is bound to
reign supreme due to the differences in their way of living and upbringing. So, inter-cultural marriages often prove to be a more miserable trap. Unfortunately, it is women -- whether eastern or western -- who become victims in such cultural contracts too, since sacrifice, adjustment, endurance fall more on their part than on their male counterparts.

Ruth Jhabvala's treatment of intercultural marriages marks the second phase of her literary career. Having discussed marriage in the Indian context, Jhabvala, in this phase moves to the international context. As a feminist, Jhabvala observes the sufferings of women in inter-cultural marriages and satirizes the male-tyranny prevailing in both the cultures.

The author, being a western lady and having married an Indian, experiences the difficulties in such marriages. This personal dilemma gets reflected in her works and hence her novels and short stories of this phase are dominated by a cultural tension -- that is, between an eastern woman and a western man (as in Esmond in India), or an eastern man and a western woman (as in A Backward Place) or a western woman and a western man in India (as in Heat and Dust). Hence,
critics like David Rubin find a close connection between

... Jhabvala's sense of her own identity and its relation to the world she has created, a world populated by wanderers, refugees, westerners who have lost all sense of a national identity. ("Ruth Jhabvala" 77)

One could trace Jhabvala's changing attitude towards India through the novels that delineate East-West confrontation.

Initially, she feels elated and profited by her migration to India. For, India inspires her creativity. She has written her early novels, based mainly on Indian milieu and with Indian characters. She is so 'enraptured' by India that for the first nine years she had never thought of visiting England. But, slowly her nostalgic longing towards England creeps up. In this state of mind, she creates her first novel, *Esmond in India*, on East-West theme. The novel pictures an Englishman Esmond, who, after his futile attempt to compromise with his Indian wife and Indian ways of living, seeks an escape route to England with his English mistress, Betty. The East-West encounter is a prominent theme in post-Independence Indian English fiction. In Raja Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope* this theme is well-established through the characters Rama and Madeleine. In an
interview with Ramlal Agarwal, Ruth Jhabvala agrees that *Esmond in India* indicates a turning point in her career:

I suppose it could be put down to my change of attitude towards India. I loved everything during my first years here -- I really loved it and was wildly excited by it and never wanted to go away from here. But later that changed. I saw a lot I didn't like. I'll go further: a lot that horrified me!(112-113)

As she comes closer to Indian milieu, she is disillusioned. Naturally, her attitude to India hardens and her writings become harsh and bitter. The initial compassion is replaced by distress because the sense of being in India gives her pain. Hence, she plans a brief visit to England in 1960. Ironically, England fails to provide her the comfort she needed:

I do sometimes go back to Europe. But after a time I get bored there and want to come back here. I also find it hard now to stand the European climate. I have got used to intense heat and seem to need it. ("Myself in India" 20)

This restlessness has given her a feminine source of stoic
endurance in India. At such a juncture, she writes the novel, _A Backward Place_, presenting Judy, a western girl endowed with a sense of patience and adaptability. In fact, many critics like Vasant Shahane, H.S. Mahle, R.S. Singh have observed that Judy with all her modesty and endurance is "cast in her own image by Mrs. Jhabvala" ("Ironic vision of a Social Realist" 152). But one cannot accept their point of view whole heartedly, because unlike Judy, the author detaches herself from India by settling in New York. Here, migration does not prove to be the failure of her inter-cultural marriage, as in the case of Esmond, but it is for the sake of convenience, as she declares: "For personal and professional reasons I have to travel out of India" (Ramlal Agarwal "An Interview with Jhabvala" 116). Jhabvala's divided views in her attitude towards India are expressed through the characters, Judy and Etta. While Judy signifies adjustment and acceptance, Etta becomes the symbol of European disgust at everything that is Indian. This view is further strengthened by H.S. Mahle:

... a portion of Etta's personality is akin to that of the author.... She is on comparatively safer ground when she blasts out Indian primitiveness through the medium of a high strung character like Etta. The author would
always get away with benefit of doubt. (Indo-Anglian Fiction 69)

Both the westerners, Esmond in *Esmond in India* and Judy in *A Backward Place* lend themselves to a study in contrast which reveals the feministic spirit in Jhabvala. She presents Judy as a successful housewife and a career woman in contrast with Esmond who flees to England.

Jhabvala's commitment to stay and to adjust with her life in India does not last long. The Indian climate thwarts her permanent stay. She feels that the heat is very oppressive on her:

... it is not only those two -- heat and time -- that are laying their weight on me but behind them, or held within them, there is something more which I can only describe as the whole of India....India swallows me up and now it seems to me that I am no longer in my room but in the white-hot city streets under a white-hot sky; people cannot live in such heat... ("Myself in India" 16)

This outside atmosphere affects Jhabvala's inner sensitivity and creativity and gradually she longs to leave
India. An interesting comparison with Nissim Ezekiel is possible at this context. Whereas, Nissim Ezekiel, a Jew, admits his commitments to India:

I have made my commitments now.
This is one: to stay where I am.

My backward place is where I am.
(Contemporary Indian Poetry in English 7)

Jhabvala seeks withdrawal from India, which results in a permanent escape from India, 'a backward place'. She moves to New York and settles there except for a brief visit to India now and then. Her last novel in India Heat and Dust reflects her mood of withdrawal from India. As Shantha Krishnaswamy observes:

With the last two novels, A New Dominion and Heat and Dust, the process of withdrawal is completed. Everything falls apart. All relationships, whether Indian or Indo-European, wither and die, lead us nowhere and there is nothing but endless ennui.(289)

Her women characters in Heat and Dust are caught between two cultures -- the East and the West -- unable to accommodate
themselves to either of the places. Finally they withdraw themselves from India and move towards lonely places like mountains or hill resorts.

In her autobiographical essay, "Myself in India", Ruth Jhabvala reveals the emotional response of an outsider:

There is a cycle that Europeans -- by Europeans I mean all Westerners, including Americans -- tend to pass through. It goes like this: first stage, tremendous enthusiasm -- everything Indian is marvellous; second stage, everything Indian not so marvellous; third stage, everything Indian abominable.(7)

Almost all the European characters in Jhabvala's novels undergo this cycle of experience in India. Undoubtedly, Jhabvala's European women as well as men come to India with great expectations. But ultimately they happen to be disappointed with India. The predicament of a European living in India is transposed in her novels Esmond in India, A Backward Place and Heat and Dust. The title of all the three novels imply the cultural conflict depicted in them.

Since Jhabvala has been well informed and has also experienced both Western and Indian cultures, she presents
the problem as it is or as it could be to any westerner. Some of her European women, like herself, happen to land in India as wives of Indian husbands and some others as seekers of Indian spirituality. Reason may differ, but still, women -- whether Western or Indian -- face the universal problem of victimization.

In *Esmond in India*, Ruth Jhabvala delineates the cultural clash between an Indian wife and her English husband, by presenting how their microcosmic upbringing affects their macrocosmic life in inter-cultural marriage. Esmond earns his living in India "by giving private tuitions"(33), on Hindustani or the History of Indian Art or Indian Literature or Indian Culture, to foreign ladies and Indian sophisticates. Gulab is attracted towards his lectures and she falls in love with him, which proves to be an infatuation:

She [Gulab] hardly knew him; none of them knew him. He had given one or two lectures in the College which she had for a short time attended -- that was all any of them knew about him. But Gulab had been quite certain that she wanted to marry him.(29)
After their marriage, they are unable to overcome their habits and ways of living which are moulded by their cultures. They realize the impossibility of any cultural integration between them and finally they drift apart. As David Rubin states:

... relations between representatives of the two cultures are certain to be difficult, dangerous, and often tragic in their consequences. ("Ruth Jhabvala in India" 670)

Despite the cultural tension and incompatibility, Ruth Jhabvala and Anita Desai try to arrive at a cultural adjustment in their novels, _A Backward Place_ and _Bye-Bye Blackbird_ respectively.

India, initially, appears to be a marvellous place to Esmond, a lover of India. He is so attracted towards India that he wants an Indian wife. Similarly,

At first, when Ravi was born, Esmond had been very happy about this: he had wanted an Indian son, a real piece of India, as he had wanted an Indian wife. Now, however, he thought wistfully of fair sturdy little boys with blue eyes and pink cheeks. (_Esmond in India_ 34)
This exposes his hypocritical nature to which Gulab becomes a victim. The theme of appearance and reality works out well in this novel. Esmond has acquired a sound knowledge of Indian culture, hence his lectures seem to be better than those of Indians. That is why another Englishman introduces Esmond to Shakuntala, a westernized Indian thus: "... he's come specially to India to teach you people all about your own country" (65). It is this interest and commitment of Esmond in teaching Indian subject that has attracted Gulab. So, he appears to be a promising husband held up to her expectation. But when she finds out that Esmond's love for Indian art and culture remains only at theoretical level and not in any way practical, her hope turns out to be a mirage and she faces disappointment in life. All the more, Esmond shows his over-powering, domineering nature and forces Gulab to adopt European ways of life. Freedom is completely denied to her, even from polishing her nails (since Esmond despises the smell of Indian cosmetics) to visiting her mother's house. Hence, she resorts to a dull, monotonous life with "no expectations at all" (13). As a feminist, Jhabvala presents Gulab in such a way as to evoke one's pity and sympathy for her predicament.

The sharp contrast between the life-styles of the East and the West does lead to disharmony in married life. In this
respects, David Rubin rightly observes:

It is clear from the beginning of the novel that Esmond and his Indian wife, Gulab, have nothing at all in common and interact only to make one another unhappy, a situation that will suffer no development or transformation in the course of the story. ("Ruth Jhabvala" 84)

Though the traditional Gulab finds it miserable to move with English and American ladies, Esmond initially has "forced her -- gently forced her then" (Esmond in India 34) to accompany him to all fashionable parties. But later he finds that

... her absence was far more impressive than her presence. It gave him the opportunity of implying that real Indian ladies, from the best old Indian families, still stayed secluded at home; which thrilled his foreign friends by giving them a glimpse of the India they thought they had so far missed: the India of veiled woman ... Esmond tended to foster the impression... that the internal arrangements of his household were too private
and oriental to be discussed. (34)

It is a pity that oriental and western modes of life cause unnecessary tension in their life. Food, eating modes and custom differentiate one's culture and hence they are sharply focused in this novel. As Ramlal Agarwal aptly observes:

Jhabvala... deals with the clash between two cultures in its simplest aspects. Putting oil in the hair, eating fried food or the smell coming from the kitchen is a trival thing, but perhaps she means to suggest that life is made of trivialities and much depends on them in our day-to-day life. (Ruth Prawer Jhabvala 34)

Gulab prefers highly spiced food whereas Esmond likes 'dainty light lunches' and follows, strictly, the western etiquette:

He sat alone at his smart little dining-table in his smart little dining-corner and ate his cheese salad. Everything on the table was colourful and modern -- the bright table mats, the painted drinking glass, the earthenware plates of a rich dark green -- so that it
looked rather like a beautifully photographed full-page advertisement in an American magazine. It was very different from Gulab's spicy meal eaten on the floor out of brass bowls. (Esmond in India 32-33)

Esmond hates even the smell of Indian food and this hatred intensifies when his son, Ravi is also fed with spicy food and sweets. He scorns Gulab and his mother-in-law for giving ghee and dhal to Ravi and insists that he should not be given any Indian food. He objects to Gulab's applying plenty of oil to the hair, since the traditional Indian habit of taking oilbath seems to Esmond a "filthy habit"(130). The meek Gulab never reacts to Esmond's objection but fulfils her desire to take oilbath at her mother's house, as "it was cooling to the brain, she knew"(130). So also, Esmond hates the smell of Indian perfumes and nail polish used by Gulab and he has, in fact, "forbidden her the use of it"(34). Hence, Gulab's wish to use them is carried out in his absence from home. If Esmond sniffs the smell, she has to tell him a lie in order to escape his anger:

... poor Ravi by mistake spilt some of my scent. A little of it fell on him too. I was so angry with him, I told him you know your
father cannot bear this smell, it is even bad for his health, what will he say when he comes home. (35)

Thus, the possibility of individual freedom for Gulab is completely ruled out. Even in bringing up Ravi, Esmond resorts to his own taste and tradition. He never allows his son to practise Indian custom. Shaving Ceremony seems to be "a barbaric custom"(55) for Esmond. Uma, his mother-in-law tries to persuade him by tracing out the reason behind such habits:

... he (Ravi) also needs to have his legs rubbed with oil to make them strong and his hair must be shaved so that it may grow luxuriant, and black shadow must be applied under the eyes to shield them from the strong sun, and in the night he must sleep with his mother so that she may comfort him if he wakes with bad dreams!(114)

When Esmond fails to understand them, Gulab as a typical Indian wife speaks on behalf of her husband in order to defend his views: "Mama, your ideas are so old fashioned; we are educating Ravi according to modern theory"(114). This
stirs the contempt of the mother-in-law towards Esmond:

Who is he to come and teach us modern scientific ideas? What does he know about our children and how they have to be tended in our country and our climate? (58)

Unlike the traditional mother-in-law and daughter-in-law quarrel, Jhabvala presents here, an unusual mother-in-law and son-in-law feud. Uma's hatred for Esmond grows rapidly and she starts persuading Gulab to leave him pointing out the emptiness and unhappiness in her life with Esmond. But Gulab refuses to do so, because "the Hindu woman in her and her sense of duty to her husband assert themselves" (Paul Verghese "A Note on Esmond in India" 34). In spite of her conventional views, Gulab's mother appears to be different from a traditional Indian mother who would even allow her daughter to die in the hands of her cruel husband rather than suggest separation. By this, Jhabvala strikes an advancement in the stereotyped role of a mother, that is needed for the uplift of women.

In this novel, the relationship between mother and daughter runs smooth, unlike Radha and Amirta in To Whom She Will. But Esmond is against his mother-in-law's intrusion into their life. He also restrains Gulab from going to her
mother's house. Whenever he leaves for a picnic or a tour with the ladies of the Western Woman's Organisations, he orders her imperiously:

'You're to stay in the flat,' he had impressed upon her several times. 'No little excursions to your mother's house, understand?...' (131)

But Gulab seeks the freedom in her mother's house in his absence for she finds no freedom in his flat even to move about. Esmond has stuffed his small flat with too much of furniture and Gulab finds in it no other purpose than being uncomfortable:

It was not really convenient to her way of living. In her mother's house she had been used to vast rooms and little furniture... But here, in her husband's flat, she was hammed in by furniture, there was no room to lie down, no room to move at her ease. (15)

Though suffocating, she has to stay there and keep it clean whenever he returns home after his tours. But she happens to disobey his order during one of his tours. So, on his return, he finds the flat as a 'pigsty' and in this
incident, Esmond reveals his dominant cruel male instinct:

He shouted aloud, 'Animal!' and then grabbed her upper arm and began to twist the flesh. 'You animal', he muttered through clenched teeth, 'why did you go away when I told you to stay at home;... he twisted harder and harder. She had given only one cry of pain, which shock had forced out of her. After that she kept quiet. (164)

It is pathetic that his "model little wife"(38) has now become an 'animal'. In this context, Joanne Tompkin's observation is complimentary to Jhabvala's satirical treatment of her characters:

To recognize... the 'animal' in Esmond in India is to understand the depth of the satire surrounding the central characters. An awareness of Jhabvala's 'animal' introduces a more bitter, Juvenalian tone to the satire, a bitterness overlooked by critics concentrating on Jhabvala's apparently light satire. ("Universal Satire or Eurocentrism?" 29)

By calling Gulab an 'animal', Esmond is no better a human being. In fact, it reduces his state to a non-human level
perhaps, inhuman:

He was like the tiger who has once tasted human blood: for, since that day when he had twisted the flesh of her arm, he felt himself wanting, almost irresistibly wanting, to hurt her again. (Esmond in India 185)

But, in spite of his manhandling, Gulab is determined to bear any kind of torture -- both mental and physical -- meted out to her by her husband. This submissiveness of Gulab makes her uncle comment on the ideal of Indian womanhood with a feeling of disgust:

'So like animals, like cows'... 'Beat them, starve them, maltreat them how you like, they will sit and look with animal eyes and never raise a hand to defend themselves, saying do with me what you will, you are my husband, my God, it is my duty to submit to my God.' (78)

Such is the disposition of an Indian woman and Gulab comes under this category by accepting the traditional role of a meek wife. She prefers to endure all the sufferings passively and patiently rather than opposing her husband:

...she must, whatever he might do to her, stay
with Esmond, since he was her husband and therefore her God... It was a husband's right, so her instinct told her, to do whatever he liked with his wife. He could treat her well or badly, pamper her or beat her -- that was upto him, and it was not her place to complain. (199)

She never dares to question her husbands' atrocities and cruelties, instead reduces herself to a suppressed state, to which woman has been tuned right from her childhood days. Indu in Shashi Deshpande's *Roots and Shadows* seems to be a prototype of Gulab when she laments:

As a child, they told me I must be obedient and unquestioning. As a girl, they had told me I must be meek and submissive. Why? I had asked. Because you are a female. You must accept everything, even defeat with grace because you are a girl, they said. It is the only way, they said, for a female to live and survive. (174)

This is the plight, not only of Indu but any Indian woman. Gulab, certainly, is no exception to this phenomenon. In addition to Esmond's tyrannies, she has to tolerate his
infidelities too. For,

Whenever he [Esmond] felt particularly oppressed by Gulab, went to see Betty. Her flat was so light, modern, and airy; she herself so light, modern and airy. Being with her was almost as good as being in England -- which was the one place where he wanted most passionately to be.(139)

Though everybody hears about Esmond's promiscuous behaviour including Gulab, she "always quickly drew comfort from the fact that they were only with white women. This made it somehow less humiliating"(60). But it is ironical that she is unaware of Esmond's relationships with Indian women too, especially Shakuntala, Gulab's classmate.

The author satirizes the westernized, Indian sophisticate Shakuntala and her snobbishness. Through Shakuntala, Jhabvala depicts how Indian women are victimized by aping the western life-styles. Drinking, smoking, attending fashionable parties are part of her life. Her knowledge of modernity is entrenched on such habits. Hence, on her first meeting with Gulab, she questions: "You do not smoke?", for which Esmond sarcastically replies: "I've tried so hard to corrupt her ... but her virtues are too deep-rooted for my
little arts"(102). What Nimmi longed to achieve in The Nature of Passion, are open to Shakuntala, thereby the author hints at the bad repercussions behind westernization of the Indian society.

Uma and Madhuri stand poles apart in their system of living. Unlike Uma, Madhuri wishes to give western education for her children and bring them up according to western ways of life. She wants Shakuntala to mingle with western ladies and gain their friendship. So she sends her to Western Woman's Organization led by Esmond. Moreover, Esmond is appointed as her tutor. Gradually, their relationship grows thicker and that leads to the willing surrender of Shakuntala to Esmond: "Let me be your slave, please allow me, I want to humble myself before you"(148). One finds in Shakuntala only another Gulab. As Yasmine Gooneratne points out:

Gulab, Uma and Shakuntala have left mere convention behind them, yet appear to be more effectively bound by their upbringing and their instincts than by any formal rule of purdah. (Silence, Exile and Cunning 101)

As Gulab is victimized, so is Shakuntala, when Esmond decides to return to England along with his English mistress Betty: "Gulab behind him and Shakuntala before him: and all
he wanted was to be free" (201). This reveals his unsteady nature. In fact, the pretentious Esmond has no belief in any permanent tie either with his wife or with any other Indian woman.

On the other hand, Gulab does not believe in estrangement nor does she have the courage and strength of will to overcome the instinctive inbred notion that a husband is a woman's God. Ram Nath's effort to rationalize her views, stating that these primitive myths have lost their original meaning and that they do not bear any significance at the present age, ends futile. Though her mother too believes in ancient myths, she considers Gulab's case an exception "because she is married to a foreigner" (78). Ram Nath categorically presents the problems in inter-cultural marriages:

He [Esmond] is a very different person from you and he does not understand you and the way you live and think... it is wrong for you to stay with him. It happens very often that there are differences between husband and wife, that they quarrel and do not agree with one another. When these differences go very deep, it is better for husband and wife to part because otherwise they will begin to hate
one another and that is very ugly. (132)

Ram Nath's "logical and emancipated mind" (28) finds no chance of adjustment or compatibility between Esmond and Gulab. Hence he advises her:

... in such circumstances it is not wrong to leave your husband.... No person has a right to treat another person in any fashion he likes. Please remember you are an individual being first and a wife only second. (132-133)

Unlike Nora, who realises that "before all else I am a reasonable human being" (A Doll's House 77), the tradition-bound Gulab fails to assert her individuality and freedom, when it has to be claimed.

But, ultimately, Gulab's stoicism weakens, when her servant tries to molest her and without any hesitation she leaves the flat immediately with her son:

She left the door open; the flat meant nothing to her any more, it was dead, finished, so how could she be expected to shut the door and lock it and worry about Esmond's possessions. (200)
Since Esmond fails to protect her, Gulab seeks a permanent escape to her mother's house. In Gulab's case, it makes one feel, along with Vasant Shahane, "that she should have left Esmond for better reasons than the one manipulated in the sequence of events" (Ruth Prawer Jhabvala 94). The initial rebellious nature in Gulab -- in protesting against her parent's wishes to marry Esmond, though she was already fixed for Amrit -- turns out to be a conservative one in the end. Both in marrying Esmond and in leaving him, Gulab's decision is based on her own instinct. The end is not convincing, yet, as Mridula Bajpai sums up:

If a man wants to be free and happy, it can also be a woman's prerogative. Throughout the novel Esmond feels trapped in an unhappy relationship. In the end he decides to be free and so does Gulab. ("East-West Encounter in Jhabvala's Esmond in India" 102)

It is obvious that it is Jhabvala's feminine interest and concern for women that has liberated the passive Gulab from her strained marital relationship with Esmond.

If Esmond in India pictures the failure of an Englishman to adjust himself to the Indian custom and way of life after
his marriage with an Indian girl, *A Backward Place* proves that a western woman can adjust herself to an alien milieu: "it's possible for a nice healthy English girl to be an Indian wife in an Indian slum" (*A Backward Place* 27). In his course of stay in India, Esmond regrets having married an Indian woman like Gulab and longs for Europe. On the other hand, Judy "had the good sense to realize that the only way to live here was to turn herself into a real Indian wife" (20), which in turn echoes the author's point of view as described in "Myself in India":

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. (19)

Judy, like her creator, happens to settle in Delhi, as the wife of Bal, who "had persuaded her to marry him and follow him to India" (*A Backward Place* 54) while he has met her at an International Youth social in London. Though hard, she acclimatizes herself to the new way of life in India. One finds a parallel between the author and Judy -- when she tries to acquire an Indian personality:

... because she [Judy] wanted as much as possible (and it wasn't very possible) to look
like everybody else, Judy had grown her hair since she had come out here and wore it in a bun...(12)

She follows the Indian fashion of wearing cotton sarees and has given up the western ways of living. In fact, she tries to identify herself with India -- its people and its surroundings, unlike Esmond. By this contrast, Jhabvala exhibits the remarkable adaptability of a woman to any given environment and the capacity to endure and tolerate its shortcomings. In this novel, she exposes the problems of adjustment of westerners to an alien culture.-- the dominant international theme of the novels of her second phase -- from a woman's point of view. As David Rubin observes, in A Backward Place.

... the international theme becomes all important. As in all of Jhabvala's fiction the focus here is on women -- there are no memorable male characters in her work. In this case the central figures are three European women who represent in varying degrees the East-West malaise exemplified in the recurrent subjects and themes of Jhabvala's work: the troubled marriages and love affairs between Indians and Europeans; the romantic, vaguely
questing Westerner; the adventures and fight for survival of bored, superficial, and Indophobic drifters... ("Ruth Jhabvala in India" 674)

Unlike Judy and Clarissa, Etta is conscious of her European-ness. Clarissa's attachment to India is spiritual, and she is drawn towards that aspect of India throughout her stay in India, whereas Etta comes to India on 'a chance marriage' to "an Indian student whom she had met in Vienna: the handsomest, most cultured, charming boy one could imagine" (A Backward Place 20). Back in India, she is alarmed by the backwardness of her husband's family and his close attachment to his 'most uncultured family', and hence she gets estranged from him. Similarly, she has married and divorced several times and all she wants is to lead a luxurious life. Hence this decision:

She had given up on husbands long ago for, after three attempts made rapidly in succession and all of them with handsome, educated young Indians, she had come to the conclusion that, while she had no objections to the institution of marriage as such, a more flexible arrangement was better suited to her particular temperament.(33-34)
This reflects her western attitude towards marriage. Though she finds many admirers in her early age, an aged businessman, Guppy seems to be her 'only admirer' in her mid-forties. But when he too has left for Europe, she "appeared totally uninterested" (176). With the loss of glamour and youth comes the realization of her predicament in India. Hence to forget the bitter life, 'this unhappy woman' resorts to an exorbitant number of cigarettes, alcohol and sleeping pills. She almost becomes a neurotic and even attempts suicide. Her flat seems to be a cage for her and she calls herself a "prisoner" (86). Jhabvala is sympathetic in portraying the sad plight of a European woman caught between two cultures. Whereas Judy and Clarissa try to merge with the 'Hindu Civilization' in India, Etta says, in agony, "Oh I'm one of the drowned ones" (21). Hence, she seeks escape from India. She longs for Europe but she is afraid of her identity:

Here at least she had her personality: she was Etta, whom people knew and admired for being blonde and vivacious and smart. In Europe... there would be nowhere to go, no one to meet her, no one to know who she was. (171)

She feels that if she had gone with Guppy, she could have established an independent luxurious life. She also
realizes the futility of her own establishment in Europe. But, she is not prepared to drown any more in this 'hell' either. Hence, a sense of escapism predominates: "Now it's time for me to get back where I belong. To a civilized place" (173). India appears to be a primitive place for her and her attitude to India becomes critical. Taking into account, her bitter, personal experience in India, she persuades Judy to leave her husband and accompany her to Europe:

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

But to the practical Judy, Etta's idea seems purely theoretical, for she has no intentions of leaving her husband. As Ramesh Chadha differentiates:

Though both come from the same cultural background, temperamentally they are poles apart. Judy is ready to make any kind of sacrifice to make her married life a success,
while Etta... is not ready for any compromise.

(Cross-Cultural Interaction in Indian English Fiction 81)

Unlike Etta, Judy has established a sense of belonging to her adopted country, and "never cared to think much of home nowadays" (Backward Place 10). She maintains a healthy relationship with her in-laws! As Saros Cowasjee and Vasant Shahane correctly explore:

It is Judy's love that sustains their marital happiness, as also her being able to adapt herself to the trying conditions of the Hindu joint family situation. She identifies herself admirably with the lives of Bal and Shanthi, her sister-in-law, and Bhuaji, an old pious woman. (Modern Indian Fiction 44)

Moreover, she has learnt to tolerate a lot of noise and lack of privacy -- the inconveniences in such a system of living. But in contrast, Peggy a western girl, in "The Aliens" finds it difficult to cope with such discomforts: "Oh, I can't tell you how fed up I am with it all and how awful it is and the heat and everyone shouting all the time and they are all so" (Like Birds, Like Fishes 93). Like Peggy, Cathy in "The Young Couple" feels that she is caged in the joint family
system, in spite of her in-laws' concern for her: "The trouble was they cared too much..." (A Stronger Climate 52). She prefers a nuclear family and an independent life. But, the reason behind Judy's attachment to the system of living together is obvious as Connie Hayball puts it:

She has rejected her own prim lower middle-class English background... its narrowness -- drawn curtains, closed doors, tightened lips -- a life lacking all wider human contact, which had ended for her mother in suicide. ("Ruth Prawer Jhabvala's India" 49)

Hence, she enjoys the Indian joint family system, which acts as a "protection society" (Haydn Moore Williams "The Yogi and the Babbit" 82) by shedding poverty, isolation and unemployment. While presenting it as an advantage to Judy, Jhabvala neither favours nor attacks this system. In fact, in an interview with Yolanta May, Jhabvala enumerates the advantages as well as the disadvantages of this joint family life in India:

The joint families are no answer to personal problems, but they're a very good answer to practical ones. There are no social services in India and the family takes the place of
social security: earning members look after the non-earning members, young people look after the old-people... Don't imagine that the joint family is a basic good to be adopted. It's the social security of a backward society. ("Ruth Prawer Jhabvala in Conversation with Yolanta May" 56)

It is true that Judy feels secure in this system of living with her unemployed husband, who "was not in a position to send money home as regularly as they had hoped. For a time she [Judy] had had to rely on her brother-in-law Mukand, who lived upstairs" (A Backward Place 13). But her western consciousness did not relish her dependence. Hence, she goes out to work -- "not out of choice but necessity" (12) -- as assistant to the General Secretary, Sudhir, in the Cultural Dais. As a practical and intelligent woman, she plans the family expenditure and tries to save a little amount every month, from her meagre income. But such hard-earned money is at times misused by her husband in his high but vain pursuits in finding a job. Apart from his irresponsibility, Judy has to tolerate his immaturity too. Here, one cannot but agree with Haydn Moore Williams' observation:

The marriage of Bal and Judy is difficult not because of the difference in race so much as
because of the clash in their temperaments between the dreamer [Bal] and the pragmatist [Judy]. (The Fiction of Ruth Prawer Jhabvala 49)

Though Bal, like Esmond, is an incorrigible dreamer, their marital life is equipoised by Judy's rational mind which thinks logically and acts sensibly. Thereby, Jhabvala strikes the potential of a woman to lead the dual role in family life -- both as a houselife and as a career woman successfully. All the same, she never fails to picture the patriarchal attitude of Judy's husband to whom "it was humiliating... that his wife should go out to work, and he even said... that he would not allow her. For the first few days of her job... he made many scenes, sometimes acting great anger and sometimes great sorrow..."(23). But this traditional attitude is soon replaced by a modern outlook and he starts extolling

the virtues of female independence and what a wholesome advance it was to see women going out into the world and taking their place side by side with men.(24)

Again, this momentary suppression of Bal's male-dominated spirit gets burst out, when Etta ironically criticizes his
irresponsible nature during one of their picnics:

In some circles, I dare say, it's the accepted thing for the husband to go out and enjoy himself and only come home to eat, sleep and make one or two children.... Naturally, someone in the family has to go out to work and earn some money to feed those darling little mouths. And if she doesn't, then who will? She looked up at Bal with amusement, smiling at him in such a friendly way. 'Not you surely?' (138-139)

Consequently, this stirs Bal's ego and he feels that his honour has been insulted. Insult turns into anger and he shouts mercilessly at Judy:

How often I have said I don't want you to go to any office! How I begged and begged you not to... You like it. But my position, this has never occurred to you, how it looks to others that I, your husband, allow you to go out to work, what a disgrace this is to me... (145-146)

Judy tries to please and comfort Bal saying that Etta would not have meant it at all, for, in England everybody --
unmarried as well as married women -- go out to work. But the Indian traditional consciousness mounts up in Bal:

This isn't England! Here do you see any of our ladies going out? Do you see my sister-in-law leaving her house to go and work among strangers? Do you think my brother would ever allow? ... And I won't permit you to go out to your office, no, not ever again will I let you go there!(146)

By contrasting the different attitudes of the East and the West, Jhabvala attacks male-chauvinists like Bal and as a moderate feminist, she claims economic independence for women in India, which has been achieved in western countries long back. Bal becomes so sensitive that after this incident he never allows Judy to help him even in getting his shoes, for fear that "your friends will say that I'm not treating you properly, that I make you work for me"(145). Similarly, he also rejects her endeavour to fulfil his ambition in starting a theatre movement. His ego forbids him to accept this opportunity. The repercussions of Bal, when Judy becomes the breadwinner of the family, remind one of Joseph's in Saul Bellow's Dangling Man: "Living on his wife's salary constantly gives Joseph the disagreeable
feeling that he is 'kept' by her" (Ada Aharoni "Women in Saul Bellow's Novels" 96). Judy, who has taken sincere efforts to find Bal a job, feels 'fed up'. She starts worrying about their future life:

Judy had to go on worrying by herself. She thought, with more intensity than she had ever done before, of the future and of their children growing up and all the money that would be needed for their education and how everything depended on her and her little job at the Cultural Dais. Supposing she were to lose it, as she had lost that other job? Or fall ill?... She wanted to be absolutely serious and realistic; these were the attitudes their present situation demanded, she felt, and Bal's (and her own) happy-go-lucky frivolity would no longer do.(110-111)

This exposes her role as the bread-winner and care-taker of the family. As a mother, she is the embodiment of love and affection for her children. Unlike Bal, she looks after her children -- Geetha and Prithvi -- with sincere care. When Prithvi is sick, she applies for leave in the office and "stayed with him to soothe him, sponge him and put ice on his head"(21). Bal, who arrives home late in the evening, is
again getting ready to meet Kishan Kumar in the Delhi Airport, hailing a taxi. When his son pleads him to get ice, he is ready to leave the scene immediately rather than buying it for him. So Judy runs after him in the street, shouting "Are you getting it or not?" (25). After hesitating for a while to spend his money Bal said 'all right' but

She was not happy with her victory, though. In fact, she felt mean for the rest of the evening, especially when she thought of him with Kishan Kumar. (25)

Believing Kishan Kumar's words that "you can be my production manager... Better come and see me in Bombay!" (115-116), Bal plans to leave for Bombay immediately. Though Judy has no faith in Kishan Kumar's production unit, she never discourages him but thinks practically about the security of the family: "She thought how they would all arrive in Bombay, with nowhere to stay and no money and nothing but Bal's vague prospects, she was afraid" (147). The 'ever-smiling Bal' fails to share her reasonable fear. It is again the Indian male superiority that dominates even the western rationality. In comparison with Bal,

Judy felt herself to be very adult and
sensible, and very English. English people didn't behave like that, they didn't on the whim of the moment give up everything they had and go wandering off in search of no one knew what. (176)

So Judy tries her best to make Bal realize the situation and think practically; but her attempt ends futile. She becomes tired and gives up quarrelling with him, except saying that she will not accompany him to Bombay. But the conservative Bal easily wins over her stand 'I won't go', by relating it to the precept of Sita:

Had Sita said 'I won't go' to Rama? Had she, or had she not, followed him into exile, into the jungle, into whatever places and hardships fate might lead them? And all this without hesitation or demur, following with sweet devotion and of her own free assent the path of wifely duty. (175)

It is obvious that Bal expects implicit obedience from his wife. Though obedient, Judy decides to go with him with the hope that she too could find a job in Bombay. The character of Judy resembles that of Sarah, in Anita Desai's Bye-Bye Black Bird, who too, is made to give up her job and
possessions in England by Adit and to accompany him to India, his homeland. As Sarah prepares herself to enter a world of strangers, so also Judy to Bombay. She hands over all her savings --725 rupees -- to Bal and he feels happy on that day. At the end of the novel, Judy, to whom "five rupees... is a fortune"(124) cries at seeing her hard-earned money being lavishly spent by her husband in no minute -- by supplying tea to his friends and buying dolls and toys for his children at the railway station. Though the novel has an open ending, it strikes not an optimistic note. For, Judy is seen weeping silently for her husband's 'irresponsible' character and her helpless condition like any Indian woman. It is a pity that with all her practical knowledge, Judy fails to convince Bal and finally loses her individuality. May be, Judy strenuously follows the concept of living together, which is the essence of any Indian marriage, by transforming herself into an archetypal Indian woman. Here, one should note the fact that [Jhabvala's depiction of Indianness in Judy is quite rare and exceptional]. As Saros Cowasjee and Vasant Shahane observe:

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
the unexpected and sudden challenges of life
(Modern Indian Fiction 44)

If Judy and Gulab can be grouped under pure-chaste-virtuous women, Olivia and the narrator of Heat and Dust prove to be the opposite of it. This is aptly observed by Ramlal Agarwal:

In Heat and Dust Jhabvala shows that the two-heroines of the novel lack moral realism. They become victims of illusion generated by their liberalism and their sensitivity. (Ruth Prawer Jhabvala 77)

They are also victims of Indian environment and superstitious beliefs.

The European women find it difficult to withstand the Indian climate. This, in fact, intensifies their conflict. The title Heat and Dust, here, gains symbolic significance: "The 'heat' and 'dust' of India are, as it were, the symbols of discomfort, dirt and disease which the Westerners must encounter and overcome" (Cross-Cultural Interaction 106). They have to get accustomed not only to an alien culture but also to an alien environment. This works hard on their European sensibility and personality, leading them to a life of disappointment and disillusionment. The process of their
transformation is well-reasoned out by Shantha Krishnaswamy:

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 with in India. She quarrels, loses her equanimity, her sense of decorum and balance, leading to a disintegration of her personality... 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.(330)

This is what happens to Olivia and the narrator of Olivia's story.

Unlike in the previous novels, Jhabvala presents in this novel, a couple belonging to the same culture but living in a different cultural milieu. Olivia lives in a British residential area in the pre-Independence India with Douglas, the assistant Collector of Satipur. Since her husband is always busy with his work in the district, for most of the time Olivia happens to be "alone in her big house with all
the doors and windows shut to keep out the heat and dust" (Heat and Dust 14). Her days are too long and Douglas often finds her "half-in-tears with boredom and fatigue"(19).

It is in this period of ennui, that one day Douglas takes her to the Nawab's dinner party in his palace at Khatm. This meeting with the Nawab revitalizes her life. She feels happy in the company of the Nawab who 'was fond of entertaining Europeans' and she relishes having come to the right place, at last in India:

His eyes often rested on her... but she had seen it and realised that here at last was one person in India to be interested in her the way she was used to. (17)

This initiates her relationship with the Nawab and she begins to visit him secretly, during Douglas' office-time. Though Douglas notices a change -- an excitement replacing boredom -- in Olivia, he allows her the freedom only to alleviate her loneliness. But Olivia takes sexual freedom for herself. Freedom is essential but more freedom often leads to disaster. While fighting against women's subjugation, Jhabvala never hesitates to picture the extreme side of liberation in which women tend to lose themselves.
During the period of her friendship with the Nawab, Olivia and Douglas plan for a child. Since it is delayed, she fears Douglas' sterility: "What manliness? He can't even get me pregnant"(116). At times, she is found quarrelling with Douglas desperately, but he could not understand her sudden outbursts. More than heat, her barrenness troubles her most.

When the Nawab explains to her about Baba Firdaus, a fertility shrine, "sacred to Hindu women because it is thought that offerings at this shrine will cure childlessness"(66), Olivia readily opts to visit it. The shrine is sacred to people for only one day in a year and the day of the festival is called Husband's Wedding Day. The shrine, the offerings, the red strings tied to the lattice in the shrine for wish-fulfilment, the grove, the tree -- all gain superstitious dimension. Though, to their rational mind, all these appear unscientific, they fall victims to emotion. Having come with the Nawab, "she could not escape him now even if she had wanted to"(137) and under the tree, he indulges in "the secret of the Husband's Wedding Day"(137) to make the barren wife fertile. "Perhaps", as Shantha Krishnaswamy says, "it is Jhabvala's way of mocking at Indian superstitions"(331). But Olivia's pregnancy neither brings happiness nor wish-fulfilment to her. In
fact, as Laurie Sucher observes:

She was 'caught' in a peculiarly female dilemma, brought about by the combination of biology and patriarchal rule. She became pregnant at the wrong time, by the wrong man.

(104)

It is ironical that both Douglas and the Nawab are eagerly expecting the birth of Olivia's baby. But, Olivia suffers from guilt consciousness because of her extra-marital relationship. Hence, out of fear that the complexion and the black hair of the baby could reveal her illicit relationship with the Nawab, she seeks abortion with the help of Indian midwives. Thereby, Jhabvala criticizes the cruel and harmful practice of abortion prevalent in India.

Thus, Olivia's relationship with the Nawab ends in frustration. As Vasant Shahane highlights:

... sex in Heat and Dust has hardly any heat or real life-giving fire. It stays too much on the surface, or becomes an instrument of disaster. (Ruth Prawer Jhabvala 131)

Even her secret but painful abortion does not help her. Dr. Saunders who "had always known that there was something
rotten about Olivia" (Heat and Dust 170) proves it to be true when she miscarries in his hospital and reveals everything to Douglas. Olivia, to hide her shame, runs away from the Hospital straight to the Nawab's palace. Never again does she meet Douglas, who after his divorce, marries Tessie and returns to England. But Olivia does not live happily and peacefully with the Nawab either. Later when the Nawab too leaves for London, Olivia chooses to lead a life of isolation in a lonely, secluded place -- "in the house in the mountains he [Nawab] had bought for her"(172-173) away from the heat and dust.

The narrator who is the grand-daughter of Douglas' second wife, comes to India, with a time lapse of fifty years, to find out the mystery behind her step-grandmother's elopement with an Indian prince. But she too falls a victim to the Indian environment and its superstitious beliefs. Change is inevitable for a European living in India. Like Olivia, the narrator is also transformed by the Indian society and she admits it as irresistible:

    India always changes people, and I have been no exception. But this is not my story, it is Olivia's as far as I can follow it.(2)
that the same story gets repeated in her life too. The narrator's fall is presented through film technique in which Jhabvala has acquired a mastery:

By this method of strictly controlling the length of her 'flashbacks', Ruth Jhabvala creates the impression -- essential to her theme -- that the experiences of the two women, which seem to begin from points set very far apart both in time and as regards their apparently different personalities, start to run parallel from the time they reach India, and become at length indistinguishable from each other. (Silence, Exile and Cunning 219)

The film technique is so symmetrically made that the narrator also has her relationship with Inder Lal, her landlord at the Baba Firdaus shrine on the same day at the same place where Olivia has had. Not only that, both Inder Lal and the Nawab share the same dialogue too. But the only difference between them is that, though the narrator is unmarried, she has the courage to become a mother:

It was absolutely clear to me now that I wanted my pregnancy and the completely new
feeling -- of rapture -- of which it was the cause. (Heat and Dust 165)

Finally, the narrator decides to take refuge in an ashram in the Himalayan mountains where she hopes to find peace and security. Whereas the narrator's relationship with Indar Lal is left unnoticed, Olivia's elopement with the Nawab has left a lingering, yet disturbing thought on the minds of the Britishers in India. Major Minnies, the political agent of Khatm, has banished Olivia from his thoughts. After his retirement in Ooty, he even published -- a monograph on the influence of India on the European consciousness and character. Through this piece he strikes a warning to the Europeans living in India:

There are many ways of loving India, many things to love her for -- the scenery, the history, the poetry, the music, and indeed the physical beauty of the men and women -- but all, said the Major, are dangerous for the European who allows himself to love too much. India always, he said, finds out the weak spot and presses on it.... One should never, he warned, allow oneself to become softened (like Indians) by an excess of feeling; because the
moment that happens -- the moment one exceeds one's measure -- one is in danger of being dragged over to the other side. (Heat and Dust 170-171)

This is what happens in the life of Olivia and she is, finally, disturbed and destroyed by her excess of feeling and emotion. But, where Olivia fails the narrator succeeds, by seeking spiritual comforts in the mountain ashrams.

If the incompatibility between Gulab and Esmond, Judy and Bal is one of economical and socio-cultural factor, that of Olivia and Douglas is environmental and sensual. Through their marriage, Jhabvala seems to emphasize that any meaningful relationship between a man and a woman -- whether Indian or European or mixed -- cannot exist. This proves, again, that any marriage can only be a mismatch and it becomes a trap for women. This makes one question and conclude along with Indu in Shashi Deshpande's Roots and Shadows:

A trap? Or a cage? Maybe the comic strip version of marriage... a cage with two trapped animals glaring hatred at each other... isn't so wrong after all. And it's not a joke, but a tragedy. (66)
Gulab-Esmond and Olivia-Douglas experience this futility of marriage, while Judy tries to establish a rapport in her married life through her adjustment and compromise. All the European characters, inclusive of Judy, do not find solace in India. In fact, their disillusionment is sharp and painful. Not only in marriage, but in the spiritual context too, India calls for the westerner's adjustment and compromise. Jhabvala deals with the predicament of the western women who are caught between the materialism of the West and the spirituality of the East and their conflicts and sufferings, in the final phase of her writing career, which is the focus of the next chapter.