Ruth Prawer Jhabvala born of Polish parents but married to an Indian is considered as an Indian English novelist by literary historians like K.R. Srinivas Iyengar and Dr. M.K. Naik though she herself has declined to be identified as an Indian. In fact she has come to be regarded as an 'outside-insider'. Through her long association with India, she has come to acquire an Indian awareness. Her novels do depict a few of the Indian social problems, though there is not a sense of depth or involvement. Dr. Naik writes thus in *The History of Indian English Literature*:

The most distinctive feature of Jhabvala's novels is the subtlety and adroitness with which she unravels the gossamer threads of intricate human relationships - especially among the women in the Hindu joint family. She recreates admirably this drama of cattiness ....

Jhabvala's fiction reiterates a pattern of life that is a retrospect of the Indian life somewhere in the fifties and sixties. Like Jane Austen's comedy of manners, Jhabvala's fiction too is marked by a touch of humour, irony, comedy and
wit. And her fiction opens a panorama of Indian life with typical Indian characters and social manners. She writes about the burning problems like the dowry system, poverty, superstition, illiteracy, blind faith in traditions, customs and so on. Her ironic vision makes her fiction different from that of the other Indian English women novelists.

Jhabvala's opinions and attitudes towards Indians and Indian way of life are quite ambiguous at first glance for she gives only an objective picture of the life that she witnessed around her. However, her humanistic nature sorts out the problems around her and her characters are moulded out of this feeling towards India and Indians. Her concern is clearly implicit in whatever she wrote on Indian themes. She wrote in *How I became a Holy Mother*:

I think it is not only Europeans but Indians too who feel themselves compelled to seek refuge from their often unbearable environment. Here perhaps less than anywhere else it is possible to believe that this world, this life, is all there is for us, and the temptation to write it off and substitute something more satisfying becomes overwhelming.
One distinct factor we notice in her fiction is the way all her women characters last bow to tradition except Sarala Devi in *Get Ready for Battle*. Does she want to convey that this is the only option open for women in this tradition-conscious, caste-ridden society or does she feel that one should ultimately conform to tradition and embrace it blindly for happiness? Not necessarily. She wrote:

Another approach to India's basic conditions is to accept them. This seems to be the approach favoured by most Indians. Perhaps, it has something to do with their belief in re-incarnation. If things are not to your liking in this life, there is always the chance that in your next life everything will be different.\(^3\)

and

However this path of acceptance is not open to you if you don't have a belief in re-incarnation ingrained within you. And if you don't accept, then what can you do?\(^4\)

Her women-characters who are drawn from the contemporary Indian society also have problems. They (like their author) have difficulty to accept the "basic conditions" of India. If they follow the foot-steps of their ancestors, it is because they are moulded to be
subservient wives and firmly believe that a deviation from the well-established social order would bring disaster and unhappiness to the ones connected to them, as in the case of Sarala Devi.

Another factor to note is that while almost all characters ultimately bow to irrevocable fate and to the concrete roots of tradition, there is at the same time at least one cultured, emancipated, enlightened and all-knowing character in each of her novel like Gautam in Get Ready for Battle, Ram Nath in Esmond in India, Inder Lal in The Householder, Nawab in Heat and Dust. On the whole her fiction depicts Indian life with all its problems at different levels which still haunt us.

1. AMRITA OR TO WHOM SHE WILL (1955)

Jhabvala's first novel. To whom She will itself reflects her 'comic-ironic touch' and her knowledge of Indian Social Values. Here she writes about the social regulations, attitudes and tradition inducted in to the marriage by both Society and Parents.

As the title (derived from The Panchathantra story) suggests it is the story of a girl Amrita toying with the
idea of romantic love and marriage. Amrita is educated, working and has modern ideas about life. She loves Hari and wants to marry him in the 'Swayamvara' style. She does not want to be restrained by unfair moral codes. In the early stage she was ready to sacrifice everything for Hari, she even dared to defy her grandfather's wishes. Amrita tells Hari:

"But I don't care about what Grandfather says; believe me. Hari, I do not care what any of them say". And when he still looked sad, she went on. "Please, believe me please. What does my father matter? You know I would give up everyone and everything for you. Nothing matters. Only you".

Jhabvala shows that people like Amrita and Hari are in search of self identity and personal freedom from unbased moral conventions. Young men and women are caught up in a crucial phase of social change - a change from tradition to modernity. Though youngsters like Amrita, Hari, Krishna Sengupta and Sushila strive to achieve personal freedom, they can not free fully from the pull of social customs, conventional constraints and parental authority. Many a times they are forced to accept it. Amrita, in spite of her loud talk of courage and individuality bowsto tradition and to the wishes of her elders. She finally agrees to marry Krishna
Sengupta, the man of her parents' choice. So does Hari. He marries Sushila and is perfectly happy in doing so. In a way, Amrita appears more rebellious than Hari, in her attempt to come out of a conventional society.

Jhabvala's concern and awareness of the predicaments of married women is visible in this novel. Prema is not happy in her marital life with Suri. Her inner conflict, loneliness and sense of failure reflect the frustration and silent suffering of innumerable women in the contemporary Indian Society. Prema is discontented and she tries to fill the void of loneliness in her life by eating sweets and reading books. Tarala is another frustrated house-wife who turns to ladies committees and organizations to drown her personal grief and loneliness.

2. THE NATURE OF PASSION (1956)

This novel is primarily a saga of the newly rich contractors and businessmen. While describing their passion for wealth, show and hypocrisy, the novelist also deals with the hypocrisy, snobishness and backwardness of their women. There are also fully emancipated or emancipating women like Kanta, Nimm, Rajan and Indira. But they are not liberated in the real sense of the word.
Women in these orthodox families are a class of their own. They live a life apart in the women's quarters. All day long they cook food, serve their men, rear their children and gossip with other women. Lalaji thought:

He also knew that a woman is a woman and her duties in life very different from the duties of a man. He had heard it so often, had himself said it so often. How it is a woman's fate to leave the house of her father and go to a husband's house, to bear his children, to look to the comforts of his family..... Lalaji thought of the women of his father's house and in his grandfather's house. 6

Lalaji's wife said-

The women of this household have no power in this family at all. Even over the disposal of the daughters they are not consulted. 7

and

For thirty seven years I have served him with my own hands. I have prepared his food and laid out his clothes and now he will not listen to me any more as if I were a servant to whom he pays a wage of forty rupees a month. 8
Nimmi said to Rajen

- you don't know what it is like for a
girl in my family, how everybody expects
us to sit all day in the women's quart-
ers and learn how to cook and afterwards
to be married and have children and never
go out anywhere.9

Kanta and Nimmi are always making resolutions to be
different from the other women in Lalaji's family. But they
are not liberated or emancipated in the real sense of the
word. Each character appears to be a plain character
with mean, selfish motives to achieve personal satisfaction
in the name of "modern outlook" and "fashion". Kanta was
bold, English-educated, self-confident and above all was
married to a man of her choice. But her selfish, possessive
nature and her outward show of emancipation makes her a
snobbish woman. So also Nimmi. Nimmi is educated, intelli-
gent and modern in outlook. But at the end she opts for an
arranged marriage because her Parsi boy friend refuses to
marry her. Moreover she finds that her would-be husband
(Kuku) is easy-going, charming, fashionable and a member
of the club. She readily consents for an early marriage to
enjoy an exciting life with Kuku. Nimmi's narrow outlook can
be better evaluated from her own words to Rajen when she
advised her to be a teacher.
"You can become a teacher if you like.
.......
"What?" Nimmi cried, quite indignantly for this suggestion horrified her even more than the idea of her forthcoming marriage. "You want me to go and be a teacher in an ordinary school with poor people's children."

Jhabvala (as Rajen says) feels that the progress of Indian women is retarded because women are kept in ignorance. Many a woman is a victim of the society, social attitudes and social evils. Emancipation of women is possible only when the primitive customs, beliefs, faith and attitudes are replaced by positive role models. This is possible only when men, women and society change and also when women shed their inferiority complex and dependence.

3. ESMOND IN INDIA (1958)

Esmond in India appears like an Anglo-Indian novel with concocted unrealistic Indian characters drawn from Indian life. But one thing is certain. Jhabvala with her 'outsider-inside' approach could view Indian way of life and portray it objectively, though at times she exaggerates typical Indian habits like the Anglo-Indian writers of the crude moralistic and sentimental fiction.
In *Esmond* in India Jhāvala picks up the feminine problem of 'suffering wives! due to unequal marriages. Ram Nath's life is an example of a marriage made under 'false pretences.' Lakshmi belongs to a well-to-do family and her parents hope that her life would be safe in the hands of a foreign educated, ambitious youth. Ram Nath. But Ram Nath embraces the Gandhian ideals of non-attachment and simple life. On the other hand, Lakshmi who is used to luxurious life became embittered and curses him. It is his family and her parents who are responsible for making such an odd match of individuals having diverse expectations, habits and ideals. Now that they have already ruined his and Lakshmi's life, he could not do anything alone. As a Gandhian conformist he can understand the way ordinary Indian women suffer by the selfish adamant ways of their parents. He speaks about the cruelties done to innocent maidens by marrying them off to some strangers under certain 'false pretences:

That was a hard thing for women, he thought, to have their lives wrapped by circumstances to which they could not submit because they could not or would not understand them. When he thought about her like that, he felt quite tender towards her. She was one sad example of a girl who had been led into a marriage under false pretences.
Jhabvala exemplifies that most of the times a woman's life after marriage depends solely on the nature and character of her husband and inlaws. Madhuri is happy because Har Dayal is gentle, polite, prosperous and very affectionate to her. So Madhuri could bask in the light of prosperity and luxury whereas Lakshmi who once belonged to Madhuri's social class, toils in her lower middle class apartment. Even Indira (Madhuri's daughter-in-law) is satisfied in her life though she marries an ordinary man like Amrit. But most of the women are not that fortunate enough to get husbands who appreciate their aspirations. In reality, it often turns out to be a disastrous experience for a young wife who is quite innocent and inexperienced to face new challenges and problems of life.

It does not mean that Jhabvala advocates for love marriage. Love marriage is no guarantee for a happy life to any one. By Gulab's marriage, it is proved that individuals having diversified interests, habits, expectations and ideas cannot come to a compromise. Gulab with her lackadaisical life and Esmond with his gentle glamorous way of life belong to two different worlds.
Jhabvala also feels that it is foolish faith in tradition and in the roots of our religion that mar the happiness of many women. And she wonders why women conform to them when they know that that crucify women and degrade them. She feels that the ideal of Sati-Savitri is so deep rooted in Indian women that it will take a long time for them to realise the natural rights of a woman as a human being. Gulab thinks it appropriate to be a slave to one's husband and continues to suffer in Esmond's congested flat. She does not dare to divorce Esmond because she has some inbred notions about her husband as God and that it is her duty to suffer ill-treatment and his infidelity. Lakshmi too suffers in her marital life. She endures life in a rented middle class apartment and never dares to leave Ram Nath. Uma has the same dilemma to take a final decision about Gulab's divorce for she herself deifies husbands. Jhabvala speaks through Ram Nath about Indian women's meek submission thus:

"So like Animals, like cows", he said with sudden revulsion. "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."
Please try to think rationally. This is the trouble with all of you. You must always bring in these primitive myths whose original meaning has been lost or at least has no longer any bearing or significance for us, and you apply them or rather force them and squeeze them into every cranny of your lives.  

Jhabvala feels that most of the Indian women educated or uneducated tend to be like Uma when they come to their roots in religion, tradition, beliefs and faith. They lack strength to defy tradition, though they appear modern in outlook, manner, habits and in speech. Many a times women in India have no choice in their lives than succumb to their parents' wishes out of filial piety. Shakuntala seems to be created as an idealized, emancipated Indian woman. She is educated, free, idealistic and wilful. But she goes for an arranged marriage at the end. Finally, she loses her former self-esteem, ideals and identity as a woman by her humble request (to allow her to serve him) to Esmond at the moon-lit Park. Thus she degrades herself to one of those sensuous, materialistic, westernized Indian women. She says:

Esmond I know you are married and also you have a child, but I tell you all this means nothing to me. I only know you have come into my life and now it is my duty
to give everything. I have to you, to adore you and to serve you and to be your slave. 14

Jhabvala's perception in this respect proves realistic if we just glance the anomalies in the outlook of Indian women. Even in the last decades of the 20th century educated women may look westernized in their appearance, speech and manner, but are still continued to be the modern versions of Manu's era. It is high time that Indian women awaken from the darkness of blind faith and enter into a more enlightened world where one has individuality and self identity.

4. THE HOUSEHOLDER (1960)

In The Householder, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala speculates on the agonies and hardships of middle class Indian householders and their wives. Though Jhabvala lacks psychological perception, she manages to report with intense awareness and humour, the fears, hopes, dreams and frustrations of the middle class men and the mute sufferings of their women. She has much to say about the marital discords arising out of an arranged marriage of two strangers, the position of a 'bahu' in a family and her relationship with the inlaws, the silent sufferings and helplessness of the women wedded to men who do not make companions and the typical oriental
Jhabvala humourously criticizes the Indian way of arranged marriage by which a stranger starts living with another stranger. The result is that more often than not they are doomed to live a discordant life. Prem suffers because he is married to a girl whom his parents have selected for him. Indu is unequal to him in all respects and is not even educated enough to understand his needs. Prem who is like his patriarchal father cannot establish a rapport with that illiterate, innocent girl who comes to him with rustic expectations. Middle class householders like Prem, Raja and Sohan Lal toil to make a living and blame their parents for fettering them with unknown women called wives and burdening them with innumerable duties. Neither the husbands nor the wives can escape from the duties and roles. Sohan Lal says thus:

"Here in our India" said Sohan Lal, "it is so that while we are still children and know nothing of what we want, they take us and tie us up with a wife and children". "True" said Prem, nodding sagely.  

Prem feels the same when he attends Sohan Lal's brother's wedding.
Why should he be taken to be married to this girl whom he had seen only once and whom he had not found at all pretty? And he had been afraid too. He had known that, from that day on, everything would be different for him. And

He felt sorry for himself to be married to a wife who was not only quite different from what he had wished and hoped for, but who also opposed him in his wishes.

Jhabvala writes here about the typical middle class Indian snobbishness. She feels that women have only duties and no rights. Prem believes in the rights of a husband over his wife. So he is offended and furious when Indu laughs at him or contradicts him. He like other Indian men expects his wife to be chaste, modest and goddess-like in her words and deeds. Indu is obedient, but, when at times she failed to do her duties as a wife the patriarch in him spread his hood. Indu is pregnant and once in her boredom and loneliness she has gone early to bed without waiting to serve him. Prem thinks:

But, he knew it was not right for a wife to go to sleep before she had served her husband however late he came.
Yet he could not help suspecting that she was laughing at him. The idea of a wife laughing at her husband! He deliberately called to his mind his mother's deferential attitude towards his father in order to feel more poignantly how Indu was failing him.  

Jhabvala also discusses the unknown discontentment among the Indian women arising mainly out of the fact that their men hardly understand them. The difference between intellectual levels of the husband and wife combined with the patriarchal notions of men makes it difficult to lead a healthy life. So the Indian women who feel suffocated in their frigid home atmosphere turn inwards especially when they are doomed to live in an inane atmosphere having no escape routes. They feel quite lost like wretched forlorn souls. Jhabvala expresses this idea of fretting i.e. the helplessness of women through Indu:

'Yes it is often difficult for a woman to know where to turn for help and protection'. She spoke with an authority that surprised Prem and also made him feel guilty.

Jhabvala makes an attempt to trace why Indian women turn to their sons for love and protection in old age. Most of the women are discontented and unhappy by the time they
cover the hectic domestic drudgery and enter menopause and old age. When their husbands cannot satisfy their inner needs or forsake them they finally turn to their sons for comfort and consolation. The sons in turn attach themselves to the apron strings of their mothers. This finally leads to a dreadful end to both the parties when the mother has to share her son's love with another woman (son's wife) and the son finds it difficult to alienate himself from his mother.

Many Indian women are like Miriam in D.H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*, who turned to her sons for love and protection when her miner husband failed to satisfy her real needs. Jhabvala presents Prem's mother as another Miriam, but less tragic and more comic. Everyone thanks that she is perfectly contented and even proud to be the wife of a Principal and be in charge of his needs and his household. But, when she is trying to merge into the role of a Principal's wife there is no outlet to eject her inner woes, except the prayer hours. She cries out:

What is my life? What has become of me?"21

Jhabvala does not give any tragic intensity to her characters. She just makes fun of the attitudes of Indian mothers in-law towards their daughters-in-law and their
uncanny love for their married sons. Prem's mother creates conflicts which led to tension in the family. She gadded about the flat throwing tantrums and in her occasional fracas criticized Indu's indolence and indocility. She tries to hold him to her side, not even allowing him to talk to his wife. Jhabvala tries to prove that Prem's mother may look a fiend with all her petty jealousy and ferocious fracas; but it speaks about a middle-class woman's despondancy and her own unhappy days as a wife and mother. She is a forlorn woman like many Indian women who act well the roles of wife and mother, but fail miserably as a person or self-esteemed individual. So she unconsciously makes Indu her target of revenge and wrath.

Jhabvala also deals with the attitude of men and women to have male offsprings. She feels that there is a common aversion to girls and irrespective of age, position, education, class and sex, people long for male children. The following quotations illustrate Jhabvala's opinion about the attitude of Indian men and women towards the birth of a boy.

Mr. Seigal said to Prem:
"let us hope for a boy". 22

Prem's mother said:
"May it be a healthy boy". 23
Pram thought:

Only sometimes he wondered vaguely whether it would be a boy or a girl. Though one morning, as he passed a boisterous group of students on their way to the college, it occurred to him that he might have a son who would grow up to be like these boys.24

Raj's wife said -

"It will be a boy".25

Thus Jhabvala takes the readers to the middle class Indian families where women are second class citizens. She asserts that women are collectively equivalent to a social class - the subordinate class (represented by Prem's mother, Indu, Mrs.Seigal, Mrs.Sohan Lal, Mrs.Raju, Mr.Khanna, Seighal's daughter, and the wives of middle class teachers in Khanna private college) who lose all and the men as the master class rule them and gain all things by their tyrannical law and lust.

5. **GET READY FOR BATTLE** (1962)

Dissatisfaction of women as wives is a recurrent theme in Jhabvala's novels. Jhabvala recapitulates on this problem of women because arranged marriage is usually the
only option open to women in India. So the Indian women rich or poor should at last submit to a marriage arranged by their parents as in the case of Mala who belongs to an affluent class or Summi who belongs to a low class.

Jhabvala points out here that marriages which are often arranged by elders in the family according to their values, ideals and expectations, and hastily solemnized end up in unhappy marriages. Guzari Lal selects Mala as his daughter-in-law because he noticed in her the external qualities of a typical Indian wife. But he never counted that his pragmaticism and perfunctoriness would lead to an unhappy life both for his son and that strange girl Mala.

The dissatisfaction of a woman married to a stranger of different temperament and the agony of a woman who is replanted in a situation quite different from her house are poignantly portrayed here. Jhabvala portrays here not merely the personal agony of Mala but the agony of women as a whole. A frustrated Mala cried out to Vishnu:

"Yes I know - what do you care, if I sit here for ever, all alone with nothing to do and no one to speak with, what is it to you?"
"You have everything a woman can want".
"I have nothing".
"Nothing?" he said and then he swept his hand over her dressing table, where rows
of scent bottles and oils and creams and 
nail-lacquers and gold lipstics stood 
spendidly mirrored; and he opened the 
drawers, tapped on her locked jewel boxes: 
"Nothing?" ...... she began to pull her 
saries out of the wardrobe; she flung 
them on the bed and floor, wherever they 
happened to fall. "Take them then, what 
do I care for such things, what good are 
they to me? I would rather be poorer 
than any sweeper woman than be the way I 
am here- with all these things! Is there 
any love be got out of them, do they care 
what I feel, are they sweet to me like 
friends?26

and

"For you it is easy" she said. "You have 
the office, you have your friends. You 
drive off in your car and do what you 
like while I sit here only and wait for 
the day to be finished." 27

Jhabvala touches in this novel, one more morbid 
problem- the problem of dowry which disturbs the peace of 
mind of poor parents. Sumi is cursed to be born in a poor 
family with six daughters. It is hard on Sumi's parents 
to pay dowry for six daughters. So Sumi is considered as 
a burden. The young Sumi has to go in turn from one married 
sister to another for protection till her family finds a match
who demands less dowry. In her sister's (Mrs. Shanker) house she was ill-treated. She beat her and forces Sumi to slog in the kitchen.

Sumi talked of the dreariness of her life how hard she had to work at her sister's and how her parents could not find a husband for her because of the smallness of the dowry they offered.

Jhabvala here draws our attention to a social problem concerned with women and shows how young girls born in poor families are subjected to agony. Gautam who knows better about the barbarous custom of dowry and the ill-treatment that is meted out to women condemns Sumi for her blind faith and meek submission. But Sumi like other girls is so conditioned by the tradition-rid society that she is in a hurry to get married and embrace the murky future awaits her. Gautam like his creator resents the custom of forcing women into unequal marriages. He says:

Is it in your opinion a custom to be commended that a girl should be tied up by her loving family and handed over to the first customer?

He said to Shankar -

Hasn't she a mind and heart of her own to choose with?
The novelty of this novel is the character of Sarala Devi, Vishnu's mother. She is a rebel to abandon an affluent husband and son and go in for a divorce. She repudiates all worldly pleasures and her materialistic husband to pursue her will and a mystique way of life. She dedicates herself to social work. Jhabvala feels that random rebels like Sarala Devi are tortured and humiliated in this society. Sarala Devi is rebuked even by the prostitute Tara. Jhabvala proves here through the life of Sarala Devi that rebels who do not conform to social authority or attitudes are defeated either by the selfish nature of man or by general social mockery. It is not the result that matters here but Sarala Devi's courage to rebel against the established social standards and fight for the slum dwellers. She could be an example in overthrowing or renouncing what is not suitable for one's life and prefer to be a rebel than meekly submit to somebody's authoritative rule. In Sarala Devi's character lies a rudimentary feminism. In spite of all the infusion of failures in her social work and rebuff from the people among whom she works, she is not disheartened.

The novel ends with her departure to Tara's house in the red-light area. She wants to redeem the unlucky women from the clutches of prostitution. She is aware that it is their social conditions that force them
to make a living by selling their bodies. She can not reprehend them as fallen women. And thus the novel ends on a note of hope, salvation and redemption.

6. A BACKWARD PLACE (1965)

Jhabvala as a writer who witnessed and experienced life and its problems in the East as well as in the West could draw a comparative picture of the two cultures in this novel. In the East and in the West women do have innumerable problems but the intensity and the sum varies according to the situations. If Judy's mother has to find a hook in the lavatory to escape from her loneliness and boredom, her daughter Judy struggles to escape from numismatic problems in Indian surroundings. And if Mrs. Hochstadt is an obedient wife who attends to Mr. Hochstadt's needs like a mother, Shanti is the Indian version of Mrs. Hochstadt.

Women like Shanti, Bhuji are content and ecstatic to pound clothes, to cook and live in dingy courtyards. But there is always a longing in their minds to know, to experience life and enter into the wonderful world outside. It is circumstances and social attitudes that fetter women to their cloistered apartments. Jhabvala's perception of this
kind of a longing in women is truly realistic as a woman writer's capacity to perceive the suppressed psyche and the occult feelings of another woman. She has the candid opinion that, even a homely and contented looking woman like Shanti has a craving to escape from the monotony of domestic drudgery and step out at least once into the exciting world outside. Once she confides to Judy her secret desire thus:

One day we shall change places, and you will stay at home and I shall go to your office.  

and

"Then tomorrow shall I go to your office?"
"Why not?"
Shanti giggled "Can you see me?" Then she cried. "Oh I would never dare, not in one hundred years!" The next moment she looked sad and still massaging Judy's head she said, "with us it's like that. Only to sit at home day and night, cooking and cleaning and looking after children".

Jhabvala ridicules the typical snobbishness of Indian men and their rigid attitude towards their wives. Jhabvala presents a capricious picture of Bal's wife and his callous nature. It was inevitable for her in their dog-days to run about and hunt for a job to support Bal and children. Though Bal never had a proper job or never earns enough to
keep a flea,' he thinks. It is his right to apprehend his wife from going out to work. He also expects her full obeisance in the true 'Sita-Savitri' tradition. Whenever Judy does not condescend his frivolous plans, he brings in mythological allusions to emphasize her wifely duties.

You like it. But my position, this has never occurred to you, how it looks to other that I, your husband allow you to go out to work. What a disgrace this is to me......

and

This is not England! Do you see my sister-in-law leaving her home to go and work among strangers? Do you think my brother would ever allow?

"We've been over all that years ago". Judy said. "And I also won't allow! Why should you go there?"...

and

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 surest devotion and her own free assent on the path of wifely duty.
Etta being once married to an Indian knows the sexual double standard and the typical Indian male attitude towards their wives. Etta has the candid opinion that a European woman experiences and expects better treatment and parity as a human being and is not like Judy who slaves for Bal. She was so bitter about the primitive beliefs and fudgey customs by which men degrade the status of women. So she humiliates Bal in the presence of his friends.

Etta said dangerously, "Why did not you bring her?" Bal looked at her again and repeated inconsequentially but with a nice smile, "She is at home".

"Like a good Hindu wife," Etta sneered in an offensive way. 36

To bring a girl like Judy over here and then treat her as if she were one of your women - no. 37

In some circles, I dare say, it is the accepted thing for a husband to go out and enjoy himself and only to come home to eat, sleep and make one or two more children. 38

Jhabvala also deals with the problem of loneliness and dissatisfaction among the upper class women. Dr. Promilla
Kapur has analysed this problem of loneliness among the rich women thus:

It has been found in India that it is mostly to overcome this boredom and loneliness that educated housewives take to playing cards or to malicious gossiping or start indulging in frivolous shopping and visiting friends.

Mrs. Kaul in this novel belongs to that class of women who feel insecure in spite of all their material well being. She is 'like a gilded bird in a golden cage'. Mrs. Kaul is dissatisfied and lonely to the chore and her individuality is withering in her bungalow. When Mr. Kaul undertakes long term business trips and children live away in boarding schools Mrs. Kaul finds her loneliness and despondency haunting. She tries to get away from boredom and loneliness by working as a honorary secretary for the 'cultural Dias'.

Jhabvala's Bhuji is a pale shadow of the widows that struggle in India both by social attitude and by material dependence on some relations. Though Jhabvala does not go deep into Bhuji's plight and predicament she is conscious of the way poor widows in India are often drifted from one abode to another for food and shelter. Bhuji is a paradigm of the lonely, illiterate, pauper widows of India doing
penance for a sin they never committed.

... she was passed from household to household wherever it was judged she should be the most useful and the least burdensome. Her demands were few - her diet consisted of bread and a handful of lentils and she was content to spread her sleeping mat in any corner allotted to her - but nevertheless most families were not willing to keep her for very long, and she had often to roll up her little bundle of belongings and pass on to whoever would take her next.52

As a writer, Jhabvala can understand Indian culture and has the opinion that life plays a different rhythm in India. She also can perceive the psyche of the European characters especially Judy who wants to identify herself with Indian culture. Jhabvala shows that there are certain factors ingrained in their nature which cannot be altered just by a change of place. For example, Judy can never relish her dependence on Mukund for support when Bal can not provide anything. Because she has not grown up with the idea that other people are there to provide one with a living. Contrary to Judy's own idea of independence Jhabvala finds Indian women depending on their male earning members for support like Shanti (who symbolizes serving wives), Bhuji (helping, poor relations) and Guppy's women (satisfying man's lust).
In comparison with the other women Judy appears very adult and sensible. She is emancipated and economically independent. Jhabvala appears to resent the lives of the women who are forever dependent on men for support at the cost of their own individuality and self-esteem.

7. THE NEW DOMINION (1973)

In this novel the story revolves round Lee and another two European girls who get infatuated with a fake Swami. There are also Richard, Gopi and the princes from whom we get glimpses of other Indian characters and their mannerisms. Lee travels far and wide in India and come across many of our oddities in India—the crowded railway carriages, the mourning procession of a young daughter-in-law, the narrow lanes, the curiosity of people and so on. But Jhabvala does not deal with any of these incidents with strong and deep emotional involvement.

Gopi like any typical Indian believes that European girls are born and brought up for the purpose of sex. His deep rooted notion or prejudice against foreign girls prompts him to drag Lee to have sex with him when she goes with him to a hotel room just to see the view outside.
This Booker prize winner novel is about the adventures of Olivia and her great step daughter in the heat, dust and turmoil of an alien land. In spite of the external transformation India has undergone after the Independence, Viola finds that India is not much different from the one described in Olivia's letters. Viola is introduced to a fascinating, enchanting new world with all its strange customs, traditions, manners and mode of life. This gives Jhabvala abundant chance for an eloquent expression of her humanistic concerns - the deprivation, illiteracy, superstition, poverty and disease that affect the position and status of Indian women.

Jhabvala focuses our attention on the precarious living conditions of the middle class women in Indian society witnessed in the squalor of Santipur town. They live in drearily dark, smoky, dingy rooms aloof from the world outside. When Viola starts living in Inder Lal's rented portion upstairs, she notices how Rita and her mother-in-law spend their days. Rita like other subservient wives is virtually imprisoned in her living quarters as a machine for cooking and rearing children. Women like her have no personal will, voice or opinion for they are all moulded on the 'Sati-Savitri' image. Viola thinks...
I wonder his wife does not get tired of being shut up in her two small rooms all day and every day with her mother-in-law and three small children. I never see her go out anywhere except sometimes accompanied by her mother-in-law to buy vegetables in the bazar. Viola first met Inder Lal's mother and wife in one such situation.

I don't know whether I caught them at a moment of unusual confusion or whether this is the way they always live but the place was certainly untidy. Of course the rooms are poky and the children still at the messy stage.

Jhabvala is quite aware that most of the marriages solemnized in India are arranged ones and often end in unhappy married lives. Inder Lal is educated and wants an educated intelligent girl as his wife with whom he can share his problems, joys, sorrows and secrets of life. But his mother chose illiterate Ritu, for him because she is from a respectable family and above all possess a fair complexion. But it finally turns out to be an incongruous match. Inder Lal is not satisfied in his life and has to live a shattered life.
His wife, Ritu too is not happy in that grisly middle-class household. She is taught to forsake her personal feelings for the sake of her husband and his family. So her young mind tries not to grouse against her husband and mother-in-law. She suppresses her passionate longings for her happy childhood in her comfortable home. Yet she secretly longs for true love, warmth, comfort and understanding. This longing and a counter retrocession has deteriorated her health. And the well concealed emotions slowly turns her into a psychopath. Even after her nervous breakdown his domineering mother is reluctant to hospitalize Ritu. She was further subjected to torture by local quacks and witch doctors who apply a red-hot iron on various parts of her body. Viola criticizes Inder Lal for their barbarous treatment and superstition. Jhabvala's own attitude towards the primitive customs of India invariably finds expression in the words of her character Viola.

In conclusion, one might say that though Jhabvala is an 'outsider' she has proved very much to be an 'insider' by depicting the Indian Society with sensitive perception and concern, particularly for women's problems and condition.


3. Ibid., p.10.

4. Ibid., p.10.


7. Ibid., p.169.

8. Ibid., p.170.

9. Ibid., p.248.

10. Ibid., p.247.


12. Ibid., p.78.

13. Ibid., p.78.

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16. Ibid., p.132.

17. Ibid., p.24.

18. Ibid., p.46.

19. Ibid., p.34.

20. Ibid., p.80

21. Ibid., p.98.

22. Ibid., p.126.

23. Ibid., p.61.

24. Ibid., p.36.


27. Ibid., p.28.

28. Ibid., p.89.

29. Ibid., p.151.

30. Ibid., p.151.


32. Ibid., p.12.

33. Ibid., p.146.
34. Ibid., p.146.
35. Ibid., p.175.
36. Ibid., p.137.
37. Ibid., p.138.
38. Ibid., p.138.


40. Ibid., pp.63-64.


42. Ibid., p.12.