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This study attempts to place in a critical perspective Ruth Prawer Jhabala’s exploration of cross-generation cross-familial and cross-cultural assimilations in India as manifested in her fiction written between 1955 and 1975. An examination of her work of these two decades reveals certain shifts in the nature and scope of this exploration. These shifts are seen as linked with the social and industrial development of India as well as with her self-confessed changes of response to India during the twenty-three years of her stay. At the same time, her observations are identified as part of a literary tradition with which she has close connections—that of the fiction written by European expatriates in India.

The Expatriate tradition evolved out of Britain’s encounter with India and found its most powerful expression in the genre of fiction. Through the two centuries of British rule fiction writers have analyzed this encounter. Though some have supported and others criticized the Imperial policy of separatism with regard to India, nearly all the writers have raised significant questions about its validity. Being in a state of exile themselves, the possibility and desirability of assimilation in an alien land was a dominant concern in the writing of the expatriates India become independent in 1947, but the
concern persisted. Writers like Paul Scott, Philip Mason, Jhon Godden and Rumer Godden continued to question the ideology that had kept the two races apart for two centuries and to analyse its effects on both.

Ruth Prawer Jhabvala is one of the European writers currently writing about India. Born in a Jewish family, she was aware, from her childhood, of her racial history of rootlessness, and having married a Parsee was exposed to a racial history of exile. She has also been an expatriate thrice over. In consequence, she brings a greater degree of personal involvement to her exploration of assimilation in India than her predecessors of the expatriate tradition for most of whom their state of exile was incidental and temporary. The extent and nature of Ruth Jhabvala’s involvement is perceived in her complex response to the question of cross-cultural assimilation as revealed in her autobiographical writing and the manner in which this response is transmuted into the varied responses of her western characters. In her last novel written in India, *Heat and Dust* (1975), the novelist structurally interlocks two planes of them, fifty years apart, in order to examine the differing depths of the alien’s penetration into the separate India’s of 1923 and 1975. Drawn from different segments of Western life both past and present, her Western characters represent, each in a special way, some aspect of
their creator’s quest for assimilation in an alien country. With Ruth Jhabvala’s racial and personal history of exile this amounted to a compulsion.

Her Indian characters also represent aspects of this quest. One of Ruth Jhabvala’s major contributions to the fiction written by expatriated in India is her introduction of the Intra-India context into a tradition of writing that obsessively viewed India as it affected the European. In her first five novels and in many of her early stories. Ruth Jhabvala explores Intra-India interactions on the cross-generation and cross-familial levels. The clashes and resolutions she depicts, in this early phase of her writing career, reflect in a vicarious way, her own predicaments and their resolutions vis-à-vis India.

Assimilation, in the entire context of Ruth Jhabvala’s fiction, has a wide range of connotations that reflect the development of the novelist’s response to India. In her first two novels *To Whom She Will* (1955) and *The Nature of Passion* (1956), and in a part of her third novel *Esmond in India* (1958). Assimilation is perceived in terms of a collective identity shared by members of a joint family or clan. The family—a microcosm of the clan—is viewed as a functional structure in which each part is assigned a role in accordance with conventional norms. When one part—usually a young woman—becomes conscious of the
limitations of her individual freedom due to these inhibiting norms, a struggle ensues between her and the guardians of the structure. The collective identity is threatened and the generations are alienated. However, as Ruth Jhabvala sees it, the India family succeeds in resuming its collective identity by stretching its norms on the one hand and by inducing assimilation by the power of wealth and the weight of an established tradition on the other.

The growth of Ruth Jhabvala’s fiction is, at one level, a paradigm of the history of India in the fifties, sixties and seventies. Her fourth novel, The Householder (1960), is set against a background of India’s industrial development and National Planning as well as that of a newly awakening female consciousness. Assimilation, as it emerges in such a context, is no longer the state of being merged in a joint family or clan. The protagonists of the India bureaucracy for only thus will he giant mechanism such as the Indian bureaucracy for only thus will he gain a collective identity with other workers. On the familial level, assimilation is seen in terms of marital harmony in a nuclear unit, which is threatened, in the early years of marriage, by the clash of cross-familial influences and the emergence of a dominant female consciousness.

In her next novel, Get Ready for Battle (1965), Ruth Jhabvala depicts an India characterized by a vast gulf
between the haves and the have-nots and a disintegration of traditional norms. The central character of her novel is an old woman who, unlike the rest of her family, is on a quest-not for security in a crass, materialistic world but for an escape from it.

A Backward place (1968) mark Ruth Jhabvala’s shift from the Intra-Indian context to that of the East-west encounter as manifested in India. Her growing awareness of herself as an exile (described in her autobiographical writing) finds an outlet in the depiction of cross-cultural clashes in this novel and the two that follow—A New Dominion (1972) and Heat and Dust (1975). In these novels Ruth Jhabvala explores the consciousness of the Western expatriate in India and depicts his struggle to effect or resist assimilation. The alien’s assimilation follows the pattern etched in Get Ready of Battle, except that for him there is an additional first.

Significantly, to Judge from her autobiographical writing, Ruth Jhabvala’s own life in India during the last decade of her stay held out no promise of a worthwhile merging. Though she personally did not come under the spell of India spiritualism, she visualized a spiritual destruction for herself if she continued any longer in India. So she left the country for the United States. Nonetheless, her imaginative projection, in her last Indian novel Heat
and Dust saw the possibility of an affirmative and meaningful assimilation for the alien in India. The difference between her personal and her literary choices creates a drama quite unique in the history of Expatriate fiction.

Before I conclude this brief Preface I wish to record my sense of gratitude to various persons and Scholars who have extended their whole hearted cooperation during my academic journey and venture. I am thankful to all those scholars whose books on Jhabvala I have consulted during my research period. First of all, I wish to express my Thanks to my parents and all family members who have always given their moral and fiscal support. I could complete my Thesis because of my supervisor Dr. D. S. Mishra, Reader in English K. S. Saket P. G. College, Ayodhya for their kind Support. I am Thankful to Mrs. S. Pandey for typing out the Thesis with patience and diligence.

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