MATERIALISTS AND IDEALISTS
ESMOND IN INDIA
CHAPTER IV
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With *Esmond in India* (1959) Ruth Jhabvala selects another segment of her Indian experience, analyzing it in depth to give, in V. S. Naipaul’s words, “an acceptable type of comment,” on the Indian situation. Returning to the working area of her first novel—cross-generation interactions in a community of westernized aristocrats—she broadens her canvas to include some social and political developments of the second decade of Indian Independence. The scene is set, once again, in Delhi—the locale offering a parallel to the real city and registering its developments as few fictional locales do.

The world of *Esmond in India* is ideologically confused and confusing. In its complex fabric modern Western modes of life and thought are seen to be closely woven with traditional Indian living patterns. Talk of divorce is in the air at the same time that sentiments like “a woman’s husband is her God” (Ell, p. 29) are being uttered. Interracial marriages are not only being contemplated but actually accomplished and accepted in society at the same time as marriages with due regard to caste, class and dowry
are being arranged. The people who inhabit this world closely represent upper class urban Indians of the late Fifties and lend themselves easily to ideological stratifications. The vanguard of India’s destiny is, ironically, the rich educated westernized class whose intimate experience of an alien culture has made it develop an ambivalent attitude to its own. Even more ironical is the fact that those who had felt the pressures of an alien rule strongly enough to fight it are now, in their declining years, in the midst of a social and political ambience which finds them dispensable. Foreigners, who form perhaps a higher percentage of the population than in the days of the Raj, are aware of considerable change in the Indian ethos. Consequently, an impulse towards self-recovery is a motivating force in the characters making a quest for assimilation in a changed world a common and recurring theme in *Esmond in India*. Parents work on their children’s behalf, though the younger generation is not absolved from the struggle. Equally the products of two cultures, the young of the novel, too, have to strive to belong and identify. There are some characters, however, who are so confused and bewildered by what they see around them that they reject assimilation with a world they have ceased to understand.
The principal approaches to this quest in *Esmond in India* are formed out of, what may be termed, the materialistic and the idealistic views of life—such a dualism being inherent in the Indian situation in the novelist's assessment. The world of *Esmond in India* is rather unequally divided between the *haves* and the *have-nots*—each group having arrived where it is seen by following certain basic instincts. The *haves* or materialists are linked with the *have-nots* or idealists by ties of blood, friendship or marriage but separated from them by their respective ideologies. On the whole, the separations rather than the links are respected and upheld. Each group, however, has to reckon with dissatisfaction and disharmony within its ranks. Emerging from this dualism is an intricate pattern of cross-ideological relationships which the novelist represents with particular reference to an Indo-European marriage. Thus, two important new themes, that of marital dissonance and the futility of East-West unions also appear for the first time in Ruth Jhabvala's fiction.

The chief of the materialists is Madhuri, the middle-aged wife of Hardayal, wealthy gentlemen of some cultural standing in Delhi. Worldly values emanate from her presence as potent as the aura of sophistication and refinement she breathes into the air. Her right hand in the pursuit of wealth and position is her eldest son Amrit who,
matched with an equally ambitious wife, openly admits his philistinic values. Madhuri is happy too in her younger son (recently engaged to an English girl) but disappointed in her husband who, it seems to her, lacks the unswerving devotion to the material that she herself advocates.

Madhuri believes that she has striven hard for years to keep her "unstable"3 husband on her own path. In reality, Har Dayal has always shared her attachment to material possessions and her love of luxury. Though attracted in his youth to the ideals if his friend Ram Nath, he had allowed himself to be guided by his wife's gentle but unrelenting influence and had refrained from joining the struggle for India's freedom in which he would have had to set all his worldly assets at stake. Now, twelve years after Independence, (in the struggle for which Ram Nath has lost all he had) Har Dayal is flourishing in his career of time-serving. He cannot, however, stifle an occasional regret, a desire to offer his friend everything he possesses, when he thinks of Ram Nath having been reduced to penury. Such twinges of conscience are rare for Har Dayal and are easily subdued for he has deluded himself into the belief that his has been a dedication too—not to a life of action such as Ram Nath's, but to a life of the spirit. Unwavering in her point of view and with no need to delude herself, Madhuri has dedicated herself to indoctrinating in her husband and
children the practical and materialistic values of life. Her success with her sons has been complete:

*Amrit was safe (not that there had ever been much to fear as far as hr was concerned—that was why he was really her favourite child). He had the sort of job and the sort of wife and the sort of attitude to life one could wish for. And now Raj too. She looked again at the photograph, met that frank and sensible English gaze and though that yes, Raj too was probably safe.* (Ibid., p. 169).

*Sensible and Safe* are key adjectives in Madhuri’s vocabulary—the former connoting a thorough grounding in the values of the world and the latter an uncomplicated pursuit of material gain along the lines of one’s inheritance. Madhuri instinctively rejects as dangerous anything that threatens the only way of living she has known from childhood—that of a calm and selfish grasping of life’s fruits. To secure the same for her children, she brings them up beyond all point of contact with what she senses as the danger area in the new India—defined by her non-conformist daughter as “the Cause we must work for is no longer... [India’s] Independence but her Prosperity and Greatness” (Ibid., p. 97). In practical terms this Cause, involving a need for education, health care and social and moral uplift for the masses, is calling hundreds of talented young doctors, teachers and social workers out of cities to
villages and backward areas. Personifying this area of danger is Ram Nath’s brilliant doctor son Narayan who, having turned down the possibility of a lucrative practice in the capital, has gone out to an obscure village to serve his country’s poor. Madhuri’s dislike of Narayan is partly an extension of her dislike for his father, for Ram Nath had always managed to discompose her well-ordered existence and make her husband doubt the worth of the life he was leading. Most of it, however, stems from a shrewd instinct of self-preservation. For Narayan, even in his absentee state, has an unsettling effect on her husband and daughter. She prefers to place her faith in a foreign environment and culture:

....what can happen to a boy in Cambridge? It was such a safe place, where he could be exposed only to the best influences. She felt very comfortable about Cambridge. All the men in her family for the last two generations has gone there, all had come back polished and polite and ready to take up responsible positions. (Ibid., p. 22)

Madhuri’s faith in Cambridge extends to other Occidental areas, indicating that her brand of materialism is not so different from the one that rules the West. Yet true safety for Madhuri and her kind lies in a reconciliation of basic Indian value systems with the Western way of life.
Western living with its emphasis on appearance can be adapted in Madhuri's estimation, to suit the needs of the Indian extended family based on emotional ties. Thus, while giving the highest priority in her scheme of values to elegant and tasteful living, she rejects the basic Western concept of individual liberty. A marked Indian trait in Madhuri is her refusal to grant her children the freedom of thought and action common in the West, for it endangers the assimilative spirit of the family. Thus, while Madhuri's home is run in a sophisticated Western style, to the point where Hindu images of worship are reduced to ornamental pieces and ritual is conspicuous by its absence except when performed around her person, its living is as static, conditioned and routined as that of any Hindu household.

Madhuri's entire life centers around the acquiring and preserving of elegant objects. She does not mind adding to her collection an English daughter-in-law since the possession of one might be regarded as a status symbol, "many of the very best families had had foreign daughter-in-law brought into them" (Ibid., p. 168). But her identification with the West stops short at the point where exploitation ends, and is extended to her own country. Totally untouched by the greatness and glory of India in the past and unconcerned with her growth and welfare in the
present, her assessment of what is truly valuable in India is straightforwardly materialistic:

*She was a great believer in going abroad. Though she did not believe in staying there for good. Europe, England, even America, were all right for education or sight seeing, but one always had to come back to one's dear India. It was here that one's roots were, here that one could get the best positions, here that one enjoyed one's money and property and one's proper social status. It was safe here, comfortable.*

(Ibid., p. 22)

Madhuri's views are shared by Amrit, who like her, is neither deceiving nor deceived about his expectations from life. Trained by Madhuri, he uses his Western education to get the most out of India. An administrative officer in a large British firm of paint manufactures in Delhi, he was "part of their policy of gradually replacing British executives by Indian opens; and indeed he was very suitable for this purpose, as he had attended an English university and was also very English in all other respects, except in his complexion" (Ibid., p. 43). Amrit's arguments in favour of the materialistic view of life are couched in imported jargon and have a distinct Western flavour.

Fiercely opposed to such a view of life is Madhuri's problem child—the sentimental and unrestrained
Shakuntala. From her friends in the college hostel Shakuntala has acquired a superficial knowledge of the condition of India and a smattering of ideals on the subject which she proceeds to use, on her return him, in the form of a resistance to her mother and brother's bourgeois attitudes. Unable to identify with her family conventions, she hankers restlessly for some undefined but wider scope of activity. Her aspirations, quite ironically, find a channel in an infatuation with one of the most materialistic and snobbish person in the novel—Esmond Still wood the leader of the sophisticated Western community of Delhi. Shakuntala's ideas of what she would like to do and be are thoroughly confused. They range from giving up her life "in the service of the sick and the poor and the ignorant" (Ibid., p. 74) to a pursuit of "Art and Beauty and Poetry" (Ibid., p. 156) and in the final analysis to an enjoyment of "gracious living" and "things beautiful" (Ibid., p. 157)—none of which can be reconciled in practical in practical terms to her desire of marriage with Esmond.

Madhuri, Amrit and his wife Indira have as few illusions about Shakuntala as about themselves. Madhuri sees through her daughter's ideals and puts them down, quite correctly, to lack of discipline and decorum and mostly to a love of talking too much. Her assessment that the proper treatment for Shakuntala is marriage with the right man is
instinctive and in keeping with traditional Indian norms. Through the course of the novel, the mother-daughter relationship seems to be precarious (Madhuri pulls the reins a little too tight), but the reader has a sixth sense that Shakuntala will shed her pretensions and merge her interests with those of her mother’s the moment she is faced with reality.

Her father, however, is as she is in him. Reality faces them both in the shape of a marriage proposal between Shakuntala and Narayan brought by Ram Nath. While the true idealists Ram Nath and Uma believe that here at last is Shakuntala’s chance to live the life of idealism and purpose she has been talking about and Har Dayal’s his to render the service to Ram Nath that he has been talking about, the two pseudo-idealists are faces with the difficult task of advising each other to reject the offer. Har Dayal has to warn his daughter against the imprudent marriage and preserve her image of him as anti-bourgeois and idealistic at the same time. With characteristic cunning, he quotes a line from H. G. Wells6 — “for every man there is his own sufficient beauty”—and proceeds to explain it thus:

'It means that we must, each one of us, find that way of life which brings the greatest contentment to our souls...
For without contentment of soul we cannot live a good life.
Let us say Narayan has found his sufficient beauty; but
does it follow that this will also give contentment to Shakuntala and enable her to lead a good life?

Shakuntala is more than prepared to meet him half-way:

'I think my ideals are different from his. Though of course I admire him very much..... Daddyji, I love Art and Beauty and Poetry, how can I give these things up as I shall have to if I go and live with Narayan in a village to do good to the poor?'

The novelist's ironic thrust becomes even more chiseled as the conversation proceeds.

The irony that Shakuntala is in the habit of directing against her mother and brother is turned against herself. Father and daughter are revealed as the hollow philistines that they actually are. Madhuri wins all her battles hands down, and the dissidents having their pretension cheerfully abandoned are drawn into their own predictable and comfortable world.

Assimilation, then, is seen by the materialists of Esmond in India in terms of an identification with an inherited way of life and an acceptance of code in which the making and enjoying of money is given top priority. Idealists like Ram Nath and his sister Uma, though born to a similar inheritance, reject its code and seek their assimilation within the mainstream of Indian life. Twenty years ago, Ram Nath and Uma had found a compatible
world and a corresponding freedom of spirit when, banded together with others like themselves, they were fighting to free India from a foreign yoke. Seeing them joyfully cresting the tide of national events Har Dayal, though secure on his own mercenary path, had felt lost and alienated:

*He had felt then that somehow the main stream of life was passing him by and he was washed up on a ledge like some almost inanimate jellyfish. And though he had assured himself that he too was doing important work in upholding, as he put it to himself, standards of culture and refinement, yet he had never been able to stifle that feeling of missing something great, something vital.*

*(Ibid., pp. 181-82)*

But after Independence the tide had turned. History had been made and now stood still. Gone was the world of Gandhian ideals and idealists. A crass materialistic world had taken its place in which Ram Nath, Uma and thousands of selfless freedom fighters had lost their moorings. Events had proved the materialists right, for it is now the Har Dayals who are caught up in the mainstream and in touch with the affairs of India. Uma and Ram Nath now belong to the “disinherited class.”

They have lost not only their world of commitment and action but their compatriots as well. Barring a few who have adapted themselves to the
changed circumstances and who hold high positions in consequence, that bright believing band has disintegrated and disappeared: "... after '47, people just seemed to no longer be there even those who had been there always through all those years. Some had died and some had got very old and some had gone to Pakistan ....And some had faded away" (Ibid., p. 176).

Uma’s husband has been saved by his death in prison; Uma’s religion and fierce mother love have helped to sustain her identity but Ram Nath, who had once infected everyone around him with his sense of urgency and feverish energy, has faded away like so many of his companions. With no illusions to sustain him and nothing but the rational to fall back upon, Ram Nath disdains to seek a fresh channel of self-expression. Driven by his inner compulsions, he withdraws completely from public and private life. The only person with whom he is spiritually even faintly in touch is Uma, but even she with her mindless upholding of sacred texts and her cloudy sentimental talk has moved away from him. Ironically, the man of true worth in the novel experiences the same sensation of anonymity in Independent India that Har Dayal-self-interested status-seeker-had experienced during the years of the freedom struggle:
He walked as in a daze, lost even he did not know in that thoughts of his own, and then he did not remember other lives and what he owed to them...

When he thought of ... [Narayan], he thought of him with love and tenderness and perhaps also some pride; but, he had to admit it, he no longer felt very close to him (Ibid., p. 194).

He who had once “darted about like a bright sharp little flame” (Ibid., p. 176) has grown so dull and obtuse that he fails to see through Shahuntala’s pseudo-idealism and believes that Har Dayal will react favourably to a proposal of marriage between his daughter and an impecunious if brilliant idealist. Along with the loss of his knowledge “of the values of the world....all the different values belonging to different classes and different people” (Ibid., p. 130), Ram Nath sustains a greater loss. He experiences a shriveling of the soul that cuts him off from surrounding life. He, who had always kept himself in the centre of events and who had always identified with larger causes, finds that with retirement and old age “he had narrowed and could see only himself and his own path” (Ibid., p. 130). Ram Nath has lost his capacity for “expanding and taking in all the world” (Ibid., p. 130) because he has lost his preoccupation. He is almost envious of his materialistic wife’s whole-hearted absorption in her
domestic arrangements and asks himself if any "great preoccupation, whatever it might be with, [could] be though ridiculous? It meant, after all, participating wholeheartedly in the affairs of life" (Ibid., p. 193). This then, in the author's assessment, is the fate of the idealist in Independent India—that along with the loss of all material things he comes so perilously close to losing his ideals.

Following his father's example of selfless service, Narayan has surrendered present comfort, prospects of wealth and position, and even the satisfaction of pleasing his deprived and frustrated mother, to work among the rural masses of India. The reason why Ruth Jhabvala keeps him in an absentee state in the novel is revealed in her interview with Ram Lal Agarwal. To the question "There are Indians who are working quietly and unpretentiously... Why don't they figure in your work?" Ruth Jhabvala had replied, "Yes, I know Indians who are working quietly and unpretentiously...but would you say they are the most representative of India and Indian life today? And doesn't writer always take the most representative aspect of his subject, that which will bring out its principal, most striking feature."\(^{10}\) Ruth Jhabvala's silence on the subject of Narayan, then proceeds from her conviction that his type is not representative of Indian life. The future of this worthy young man is left open to speculation. Will
Narayan have a life of fulfillment or grow increasingly embittered and frustrated? Will the marriage he is looking forward to be compatible or a sequel to the one of his parents? Will he too suffer a loss of ideal and a corresponding shrinking of the soul like Ram Nath? These are some of the questions that haunt the reader at the conclusion of the novel.

The loss of identity that threatens the idealist is seen in yet another context in *Esmond in India*, in Uma's daughter Gulab's marriage with Esmond Stillwood, an Englishman who has set himself up as an authority on India. Gulab brings her personal ideal of Indian womanhood (distinct from her mother's which is mostly sham) to her cross-cultural marriage, providing her creator with an essential framework as well as a central theme for depicting the incongruities of character and situation resulting from East-West interactions—a phenomenon that was gradually entering the novelist's consciousness. This first East-West encounter is represented, as Meena Belliappa observes, with absolute impartiality.

But Ruth Jhabvala's analysis of the cross-cultural clash goes deeper than the depiction of incongruities of food habits and life styles. It reaches down to the gulf that separates Western materialism from Oriental idealism. Gulab is the idealistic passive female of Indian tradition
who refuses to leave a tyrannical husband because her thinking is conditioned by the ancient ideal of marriage being a sacred state and her husband a woman's God. The modern European materialist Esmond dismisses all ideals as a matter of course. Marriage for him holds no inescapable conditions and can only be based on a combination of sophisticated living and an elegant, intelligent companion. In marriage "Esmond seeks an equal-Gulab a God."\(^{12}\) The two, naturally, cannot be reconciled.

Except in a spirit of total sensuousness in which, to use Vasant A. Shahane's words, "the rationality of the West and the spirituality of the East are given a complete holiday,"\(^{13}\) Esmond and Gulab could never have come together. In the first phase of his response to India, Esmond had been rapt in her sensuous delights and had sought assimilation with her through marriage with a traditional Indian girl. Gulab, just ripening into womanhood, had lavished her awakening responses on this fair English youth who must have seemed to her to have stepped out of some ancient myth or legend. They had been happy in the birth of their dark-haired child. Esmond "had wanted an Indian son, a real piece of India, as he had wanted an Indian wife" (Ell, p. 34). But in a few years, the West had claimed its own. In the second phase—that of
disenchantment and withdrawal-Esmond thinks wistfully of Betty-“so light, modern and airy. Being with her was almost as good as being in England-“ (Ibid., p. 39) and of “fair sturdy little boys with blue eyes and pink cheeks” (Ibid., p. 34). Yet Esmond’s yearnings do not stem from a sense of being cut off from his own country and people. The superficiality of his alienation is revealed with startling clarity in the scene in which he is invited to tea by Madhuri and India. On the rebound from crude oriental Gulab who, to his overwrought senses, becomes an embodiment of India, Esmond recovers his identity in the spurious English elegance and refinement of Madhuri’s drawing-room.

Esmond’s affinity with the materialists of the novel is complete in his speculations of the happiness that would have been his if he had married a girl like Indira: “With such a wife, he was sure, he could have lived happily. Moreover, she probably came from a rich and influential family who would have helped him, so that he would not have had to sit and teach Culture to silly girls” (Ibid., p. 186).

Gulab’s identification with the idealists of the novel is based on the blood link, and operates on the level of the physical alone. She needs her mother for the pampering of her senses-a powerful compulsion with her but not an all-consuming one, as there is another, distinct side to her personality. Physically she yearns for her mother’s way of
living—for the large airy rooms, the abundance of good food and the relaxed life style that were part of her childhood. Ideologically, however, she draws sustenance neither from her fiery, energetic cousin. Through the course of the novel, she is seen as engaged in a silent battle to preserve an ideal of womanhood derived from the chaste women of Hindu myth and legend. Turning a deaf ear to her mother’s pleas to leave her cruel husband and rigidly resisting the lure of her old happy life, she clings stubbornly to her badge of sufferance. Her rejection of her husband, when it comes, seems to be on a par with that of Savitri’s in R. K. Narayan’s The Dark Room and Gauri’s in Mulk Raj Anand’s The Old Woman and the Cow. But the revelation of the subordinate status of their sex that shakes Savitri and Gauri out of their passivity and makes them assert their rights as human beings eludes Gulab altogether. Savitri’s passionate protest: “I’m a human being. . . You men will never grant that. For you we are playthings .... And slaves” finds not the faintest echo in Gulab.

Withdrawal, then, is for Gulab the obvious sequel to a sense of defilement. She holds Esmond responsible for her fate, but, like her archetype Sita, expresses no resentment and demands no sympathy. Consequently, she remains what she was—with not a flash of the intuitive understanding that transfigures Gauri’s face from “the
gentle cow’s acquiescent visage\textsuperscript{16}...to that of a woman-with a will of her own\textsuperscript{17} Gauri finds the strength to dismiss the echoes “from the memory of her race”\textsuperscript{18} –a strength denied to Gulab-and leaves her brute husband with the confident assertion that he is redundant in her life: “‘I shall go and work in Daktar Mahindra’s haspatal and have my child there. And I will not come back again... And if you strike me again, I will hit you back’”\textsuperscript{19} Her rejection of the Sita in herself is total, as she says to Hoor Banu: “‘they are telling him that Ram Turned out Sita because everyone doubted her chastity during her stay with Ravana!... I am not Sita that the earth will open up and swallow me. I shall just go out and be forgotten of him’.”\textsuperscript{20}

Esmond’s indifference to Gulab’s deepest instincts and his ruthless clamping of the most limited tenets of his own culture on her sensibilities have steadily worn away whatever edges she may have possessed. Continually thwarted in the lifestyle she has known from childhood, and having been denied the expression of her mother love and her woman’s instinct for nurturing those around her—Gulab is overwhelmed by harsh reality. She sinks under the pressures of her husband’s intolerance and an alien life style and the whole burden of an alien culture to the level of a dumb animal that eats, sleeps and licks its wounds. Against this image of Gulab, reinforced by her uncle’s
vision of her as “a great amorphous mass of sensuous life” (Ibid., p. 131), is juxtaposed the final one of a woman passionately haunted by a sense of defilement. The last is inexplicable except in terms of a fundamentalist ideal of female chastity deeply embedded in a dormant consciousness.

Ruth Jhabvala seems to have had no direct experience of the brand of morality she assigns to Gulab. Indeed, one suspects that she had no model at all before her for the Gulab-Esmond relationship but had to fall back on literary sources. Allen J. Greenberger has defined the British perception of Indian womanhood, as it emerged in the literature of the Raj, as that of “a particularly passionate being, who is single-mindedly devoted to whomever she loves particularly if her loved one is an Englishman.”22 That her counterpart can never respond with the same ardour and actually recoils from it is illustrated by a short story which could easily be the source of the Gulab-Esmond plot. In this story, “A Tale told by Moonlight”, an Englishman falls in love with a beautiful Eastern woman from a Colombo brothel and makes her his mistress. It takes very little time for the relationship to disintegrate for the gap that separates them is impossible to span. He was “a civilized, cultivated, intelligent, nervous little man and she-she was an animal, dumb, stupid and beautiful.” Hers
was “the love of gods and women—at any rate of those slow big-eyed women of the East.... It exasperated him, made him unkind, cruel...”

Ruth Jhabvala conceives the Esmond-Gulab relationship precisely within these parameters, but goes a step further than her predecessor by relating Gulab’s passionate allegiance to her husband with the traditional ideal of passively suffering womanhood, which, more than anything, else stifles Esmond’s materialistic soul and threatens his rationality. The lack of a causal sequence leading to Gulab’s walking out on her husband indicates that in this novel Ruth Jhabvala is less interested in depicting the nature of marital discord and more in establishing the impossibility of the merging of two modes of thinking—the idealistic and the materialistic. Which is why she eschews R. K. Narayan’s technique in The Dark Room. Narayan prepares the ground for Savitri’s final rebellion by making her express her resentment from time to time. No such pattern is assigned to Gulab whose rebellion comes as a surprise. By denying conflict, growth and self-discovery to Gulab, the novelist is deliberately sacrificing verisimilitude in order to establish an abstraction. Gulab, in the end, in neither asserting her elementary rights like Savitri nor revealing her transformation from a passive and acquiescent women to
one with a will of her own like Gauri. Her final stance is a forceful vindication of the Sita myth as actually operating in life—a myth introduced by both Narayan and Anand only to be exploded at the climactic point.

Gulab goes back “to her own people” (Ell, p. 200)—not in the spirit of joyous belonging that had been hers when she was wearing her badge of sufferance, but in a spirit of defeat. Far from slipping back into her old comfortable world, she will, in the reader’s anticipation, carry her bewilderment and isolation over to her new life in the same spirit of resignation as when she was tapped in the meshes of Western norms: “She was going to her mother’s house and she would be staying there always—she knew it but did not feel about it. It was her fate, and she accepted it without emotional comment, in the way one should accept one’s fate” (Ibid., 201). With her self-imposed stigma of desecration weighing her down, she will continue to suffer the pangs of alienation even when surrounded by loving faces in a dear familiar world.

For the Westerners of *Esmond in India* with whom Shakuntala identifies, there can be no question of assimilation with India and therefore no problem of identity lost or recovered. Connection with India for this community extends only to the point of making a comfortable short term living out of her for all its members,
barring Esmond, are birds of passage. Ruth Jhabvala’s introduction of this expatriate class for the first time in her novels\textsuperscript{24} may have stemmed from a greater awareness of Europeans in India during this phase of her life. This awareness, again, must have had its source in a gradual shift of her artistic interest from the intra-India context to that of the Westerner vis-a-vis India.

The values of this expatriate class, through updated, are not radically different from those of the ruling class of India’s colonial past. The updating is limited to perfunctory gestures in the direction of Indian literature, art and architecture and to a preference for Indian textiles and folk art as furnishings. The veneer, however, is so thin that an under-lying irritation and resentment that India is not longer subject creeps through continually in their conversation and is particularly highlighted in Betty’s vulgar gibes at the glories of India on the road to Agra: “‘Ladies and Gentleman, you are now approaching the historic spot where four pimps of three successive Moghul emperors met with an honourable burial. On the left you will see a pee-house for jackals’” (Ibid., p. 119). But if Betty’s approach to India is a survival of that of her memsahib forebears, Esmond’s is that of the pukka sahib for whom India is “the white man’s burden.” Esmond’s treatment of his servant is an example in point:
'Bearer!' Esmond called....so thunderously, at the same time crashing his fist down on the table, that the servant jumped with shock and came rushing out of the kitchen to see what had happened....'In my house,' Esmond explained to the servant in his very bad but very careful Hindustani, 'I expect absolute and immediate obedience....' (Ibid., p. 33)

These outdated colonial attitudes keep the class tightly knit together and effectively segregate them from their surroundings. The flimsiness of their ties with the land and people of their expatriation is exemplified in the completely amoral stance that Betty takes with regard to Esmond's escape from India. She has no compunctions and not a twinge of guilt when she persuades Esmond to abandon his wife and child and just pack up and leave the country. Betty's lack of empathy with Indians and India stems from a dimly recognized conviction, shared by the rest of her community, of the impossibility of the European's finding a permanent place in India. This conviction is induced, among other things, by the climate-India's that heat and dust-which appears for the first time in this novel, to be developed, in the novelist's later work, into a powerful symbol of alienation. Already in Esmond in India, the heat is not so much a physical presence as a spiritual oppression mirroring the psychic condition of the
character who encounters it. Revolted by Gulab and his poverty-stricken existence, Esmond sees India as a persistent and monotonous presence “drenched in eternal white sunlight” (Ibid., p. 202); yet mere thought of Betty and escape to England lifts this cloud of oppression—“The bus and the heat and the shabbiness meant nothing to him any more because soon he would be free of them. Free of everything. He threw back his fine golden head and felt happiness welling up inside him” (Ibid., p. 203).

Keeping company with the Europeans of the novel are several Indians, on whom the West has made such a strong impact that their identification with its culture has stretched to a point of complete dissociation with their own. The two scenes in which the Billimoria sisters decry Indian music—‘Oh! Please’... ‘You need not think that we enjoy that caterwauling anymore than you do!’ (Ibid., p. 82)—and squash Shakuntala’s boast of the antiquity of Indian culture, “these days, everybody must be modern, how else are we to make progress!” (Ibid., p. 63), are loaded with ironical overtones suggesting the violation inherent in allowing one’s thought processes to be swamped by the modes of an alien culture. However, these women, who like Eurasians reject the East to be rejected by the West, are Parsees who have lived in India for thirteen centuries but successfully resisted assimilation with her.
A slackening of the structural tautness and an absence of the neat resolutions that had characterized *To Whom She Will* and *The Nature of Passion* provide the key to the fragmented nature of the world Ruth Jhabvala is depicting in *Esmond in India*. The negative tone of the conclusion indicates disruptive influences in the layered and static world of her earlier depiction. In a world such as this, assimilation can at best be partial, and reserved for the most part for the materialist and opportunist who can imbibe protective colouring, chameleon-like, from his changing locale. At the book’s conclusion Esmond will flee India to be absorbed by his own kind; Shakuntala will marry a young man from her own background and, in time, will evolve into a replica, with some physical variations, of her mother. Har Dayal will overcome all threats to his continuing prosperity from within and without. But each new day will add its weight to Ram Nath’s alienation till he loses touch with reality altogether. Uma’s joy at having her daughter back will change to bitterness at the sight of her going through the motions of life with her mainspring gone, and it is doubtful if Narayan will find a wife who will match his ideals. One visualizes a bleak and lonely future for this worthy son of India and a growing disenchantment with his life and work. A strain of pessimism has crept into Ruth Jhabvala’s voice. India, she implies, is generous to
her shallow, manipulative and greedily selfish people, and cruel to her idealists who are stripped by her not only of all their material possessions but also of the spiritual freedom and bliss that always accompanies an unwavering pursuit of the idealistic in life.\textsuperscript{25}
REFERENCES


3. Madhuri actually uses this adjective to describe her husband. *Esmond in India*, p. 73


5. Respect to elders being an integral part of the upbringing of children in India, Amrit’s remarks, addressed as they are to Ram Nath, are more in keeping with the freedom of speech common in the West.

6. Har Dayal quotes from the English masters in his private conversations but displays a nationalistic chauvinism in his public utterances: “His mind hovered around a quotation from Matthew Arnold which he decided after all to leave out; whatever quotation he might use would have to come from the Indian classics, preferably from Sanskrit.” *Esmond in India*, p. 126.
7. Har, p. 73 Dayal is unconsciously echoing Indira’s words. See Esmond in India, p. 37.

8. C. P. Verghese uses this term to describe Ram Nath and Uma in “A note on Esmond in India,” Journal of Indian Writing in English, 4 No. 2 (July 1976), p. 36.

9. Mr and Mrs Sen Gupta of To Whom She Will share Ram Nath’s fate.


the novel was reprinted under the title Gauri (New Delhi: Orient Paperback, 1976).

15. The Dark Room, p. 73.

16. Gulab’s “return to her own people” seems inspired by Sita’s return to the womb of her Mother Earth after doubts had been cast on her chastity by the people of Ayodhya.


18. Ibid.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid., p. 283.


24. Professor Hohc of To Whom She Will, though he seems to be a half-baked model for Esmond Stillwood, is the only European among Indians and is seen from the Indian point of view.

25. Developed in her later fiction, this idea is embodied in the character of Sarla Devi of Get Ready for Battle.