

Cross-Cultural Conflicts in The Novels of Ruth Parwer Jhabhavalala

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ABSTRACT

This paper deals with the theme of East-West conflict in the fictional plots of Ruth Parwer Jhabhavalala. In this paper she explored how cultural conflicts are arising in the society. Her novels describe a catastrophe marital relationship between Indian wife's and foreign husband. She depicted family life, social problems and personal relationship. Cross-cultural issues are revealed through inter racial marriage.

Keywords: *cross-cultural conflict, Inferiority, superiority, marriage etc.*

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Introduction

Ruth parwer jhabhavalala confined her attention to the Indian middle classes and the expatriates and her novels deftly ring the chimes on the same name theme, tracing numerous permutations on family conflicts 'Esmond in India' present a new dimension in her creativity. The novels delineates a disaster in marital relationship between an Indian wife and European husband, life partners from different cultural background obviously feel the tensions conflict and marital misgiving. As a westerner who has close ties with the Indian family norms. A backward place is a novel in which Ruth prawer jhabvala for the first time is more concerned with the foreigner's who happen to come to India. Jabhvala concentrates on their

reaction and different attitude towards the country. The western wife Judy puts with all hardships and prepares for a battle against a backward place like India. The novel deals with the different kinds of expatriates who feel differently about India, which is a “backward place” in the eyes of Europeans.

In her novel *Esmond in India*, the cross-cultural interaction is deftly projected through an inter-racial marriage between a lazy and stupid but beautiful Indian girl and a snobbish Indian expatriate. In such marriage, the thin veneer of superficial modernity is of no avail. The world of *Esmond in India* is ideologically confused and confusing in its complex fabric; modern western modes of life and thought are seen closely woven with traditional Indian living patterns.

In *Esmond in India* Gulab is so charmed by Esmond's speech and marries him against the wishes of her mother, as she is not a true representative of Indian culture, neither is Esmond a true representative of the British in India. He cannot leave his pseudo modernity and self-centeredness and Gulab cannot free herself from the shackles of her tradition. She has followed modernity only on the surface level of marrying Esmond. She tries to conform to Esmond's household rules and she reverts to her way of doing things, the moment he is out of sight, both in the food she eats and in her affectionate and deeply physical way of nurturing their child. Gulab likes the comfortable way of living without any formality. Gulab loves eating sweets and oily food and Esmond loves salads and boiled European food. The couple not only differ in their food habits but also in the way they eat. The Indian way of dressing is also different from the European. Gulab may imitate the European style, but she feels comfortable only in her own style. The married life of Esmond and Gulab deteriorates after the birth of their son, Ravi. Esmond wants to bring up the child in the European way and keep him away from Indian food. The other small problems like giving a massage to the child and the shaving ceremony that highlight two extreme modes of living and thinking. According to traditional belief, shaving is compulsory, but to Esmond it is a barbaric custom. Gulab is neither mentally satisfied nor comfortable in her husband's house.

Jhabvala describes the cultural clash between east and west in detail. Esmond and Gulab are brought into very close association with a view to highlighting the difference between them. Although a lover of Indian culture and life, he is unable to understand it completely and cope with its oddities. Esmond likes parties and socializing, whereas Gulab feels happy and contented at home and dislikes attending formal parties. The root cause of

their dissonance is the racial and cultural gap which leads to the severing of their marital ties. Esmond is selfish and Gulab is a traditional women. The contrast between the two ways of living and thinking cause awkward situation in their married life. Their relation is not peaceful. The differences in the life styles of east and west lead to misunderstanding and discord, consequently their relations are strained and they drift apart. This marriage ultimately proves that “East is West and West is West”. Esmond like any other European who “create a little Europe at home” is unhappy.

A backward place portrays a number of European trapped in India unable to adapt to its way and consequently, lead lives of misery and frustration. Judy the central female figure is married to an Indian actor Bal. she was born in a British society, but did not really belong to it. Her husband Bal is the embodiment of undue and Himry optimism. He is so involved in the world of stage, that he does not realize the daily needs of his family. Judy is fully aware of his failings, but she is passionately love with him, it is not due to her love that she is able to transcend the barriers of English culture, as she learns to live in a Hindu joint family, with her quick adaptability, Judy succeed in claiming, the affection of her in-laws. Judy is wire, where as Bal is an irresponsible young man of romantic temperament. The real cause of their dissonance is not racial but temperament. Judy always tries to shoulder her responsibilities, where as Bal evades them as for possible. Judy has genuine attachments and affection for her children. Bal merely seems to be acting his part without genuine involvement. This contrast between the two ways of living causes awkward and unseemly situations in their married life. Bal’s immaturity, lack of planning and foolish dream perplexes her. She gets integrated within the Indian culture. She even wants to lock like an Indian, so she starts wearing a sari, and has grown her hair which she wears in a plain bun. When Bal presses her to go to Bombay. She refuses, not because of her arrogance, but because she does not want to lose the security of her home and job. Mrs. Kual becomes a society lady devoted to social work and cultural activities primarily, because her husband is too busy traversing the road to self glory and the advancement of social status she is a ‘Bird in a gilded cage’, who seems to be willing victim of self delusion.

The novel A backward place presents the problems of three expatriate women who settle down in India after independence. They came to India their own accord as permanent residents, but they consider modern India a backward place. India’s backwardness is constantly assailed by Etta a Hungarian, who after failure of her marriage to an Indian student

develops a love affair with an Indian business man deserted by her lover Gupta, she unsuccessfully attempted commit suicide.

Cultural gulf between the east and west appears to be endless and does not find any bridge in her fiction in fact this is also the ground reality Jhabvala employs environment to reveal her character and choice of taste.

Cathy of *The Young Couple* reacts sharply to her bedroom and dressing room in her Indian husband's family:

“She had a vision of the room that was being got ready The same heavy shiny furniture as the rest of house a carpet, ample satin bed-spreads, matching the curtains.”(Jhabvala, *The Young Couple A Stranger climate*.)

Cultural differences of the young couple here lead to indifference, boredom and bickering and they behave like “two-rued birds in a cage.” As in the words of Kipling 'East is east and west is West, and the twain shall never meet. 'The difference between the attitude East and West is prominently brought out by Ruth Jhabvala in her novel *A New Dominion* through an injured dog near the ashram: western sensibilities for whom were quite different from Indian sensibility. Lee wanted to have the dog put out of its misery while Swamiji would not allow it and bluntly rejects her plea and explains:

“Everything must be experienced to the end. This is true for a dog as for a man as for a Bud on a tree. Everything must unfold and ripen. There are sunshine and Gentle breezes and there is a rain and bitter storm. We must accept and enjoy or accept and endure, as the case may be. Because we need both enjoyment and endurance, both sun and storm, so that we may ripen into our fullest possibility. Is not it wonderful that even a dog should be allowed to grow into such ripeness. And if for a dog, then how much more for a human being”. (Jhabvala *A New Dominion*)

Likewise Lee is anxious about the ailing Margaret whereas Raymond wishes to take her to hospital for treatment. Swamiji is quite indifferent to Raymond's desperate plea for Margaret's recovery. And at last like dog Margaret dies of jaundice practically without having any treatment throughout her illness except under coma while dying in pathetic circumstances in a dark store room of a hospital, “the doctor said her liver was completely destroyed and that this progress must have been going on for a long time”. Western attitude

towards India is full of bitterness and meanness for them India is dirty and everyone here is dishonest. An English girl comments in Heat and Dust:

“She said they all were dirty and dishonest. She had a very pretty, English face, but when she said that it becomes mean and clenched.”

Heat and Dust is a novel of two women Olivia, the heroine and the narrator, whose name has not been mentioned anywhere in the novel. The story is about the two English women and their life in India 25 years before and after independence. Mrs. Beth Crawford, the Collector's wife at Satipur is the young narrator's auntie, and Miss Tessie, Beth's sister, is the narrator's grandmother. Tessie married Douglas after he got a divorce from Olivia. The narrator is Tessie's granddaughter who comes to India with a bunch of Olivia's letters to unravel the mystery of Olivia's existence and the dismal oddities of her life. The narrator wants to know about Olivia, her way of life, her friends, her parties, her escapades which finally culminate in her elopement with the young Muslim Nawab. The narrator visited India in the Seventies, that is, after half a century, to investigate-the details related to Olivia. The title of the novel, Heat and Dust, symbolizes the psychological state of the characters involved. The first reference to the title occurs in Olivia's way of life, in fact, the first phase of it when, as the wife of Douglas, she lives in a large and dull house. She feels bored and lonely in that spacious house:

“The rest of the time Olivia was alone in her big house with all doors and windows shut to keep out the heat and dust.” (Heat and Dust,)

Heat and Dust thus stands for an aspect of India. Olivia finds time only in the evenings or on Sundays when she happens to meet a handful of stereotype Anglo- Indian families in town. They are Mrs. Minnie's, the wife of Major Minnie's, the political agent to advise the Nawab, Mrs. Beth Crawford, the wife of Mr. Crawford, the Collector of Satipur town, and Mrs. Saunders, the wife of Dr. Saunders, the British Medical Superintendent of Khatm town. In order to spend her time, Olivia reads books and plays the piano but she feels that the days are long. Douglas is extremely busy with his work in the district.

Douglas is always busy with his official duties. He has little time to spare for his wife who is all the time waiting for him. He is a workaholic. The fortitude with which Englishmen bear the heat while on duty in the plains is related to the strength, tenacity and moral uprightness of their character. This, in fact, is one aspect of the general image of

an Anglo- Indian. Douglas is the prime example of such an image in the novel. His wife loves him very much "for his imperturbability, his English solidness and strength, his manliness" A Douglas is worried very much about Olivia as he finds her bored and out of mood. He feels that the effect of the heat and dust on Anglo-Indian women is such they often become irritable and quarrelsome. Douglas for instance, blames the Indian heat and dust for increasing tension building up between Olivia and him. The young Nawab of Khatm invites all the Anglo- Indian officials along with their wives for a dinner party. Mr. Harry is a close house guest to the Nawab Sahib. Douglas and Olivia also attend the dinner party. Surprisingly, the host, Nawab's eyes rest on Olivia. She allows his gaze to study her while she pretends not to notice. She likes the behavior of the Nawab, the style of his conversation, the way he receives the guests, the arrangement of the dinner with long tables decorated with flowers, candle bars, the variety of the dishes, pomegranates, pineapples, crystallized fruits, little golden bowls, etc. Olivia likes the way the Nawab looks at her when she first comes in. After the party Olivia's behavior changed significantly. Jhabvala very scrupulously observes the behavior of the Anglo- Indians and the effect of heat and dust on them. They often become irritable and quarrelsome. The only escape for them is to go to some hill-station like Simla. But the men posted at far-off places would not avail of such easy options. Douglas decides to send his wife to Simla with the other European ladies but Olivia refuses to go to Simla. This conversation between Douglas and Olivia makes it clear that marital dissonance in them is at peak level. Douglas plans something for Olivia but she has different ideas. He wants to provide her a comfortable stay at Simla but she is not ready and reacts in a negative way. This lack of mutual understanding and settlement strikes a chord of dissonance between them. Olivia's tragedy is due to her marriage with Douglas without love and her love with the Nawab of Khatm without marriage. Her delusion of dissatisfaction and emotional behavior leads her towards a destructive sexual passion for which she is responsible. Her obsession with the romantic Eastern view makes her a tragic victim. Olivia's story, thus, sets an extreme example of marital dissonance resulting from cross-cultural contact.

The theme of east-west encounter in Jhabvala's fiction has social, cultural and spiritual dimensions. In the social context Indians and Europeans meet, fall in love, get married and face either mutual dissonance or familial friction. In the cultural context they face the problems of adjustment of diverse backgrounds. Jhabvala is, of course, very much

concerned with the problems of European men and women trying to get adjusted to Indian society and its mores.

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