

Synopsis

The Thematic Concerns in the Novels of Ruth Praver Jhabvala

Literature is the reflection of worldly life and the society that exists around us. Almost in all literary genres, various writers attempt to delineate the human lives through a variety of get list wet depiction of character. The history of Indian English Literature in India can be traced back to the origination and establishment of East India Company. Mughal Emperor Jahangir allowed the British Naval commander William Hawkins in 1608 to open a permanent port. English Language was accorded importance as the East India Company expanded into the southern peninsula.

Mostly, the Indian English Fiction by women writers have its focus on the themes related to women's issues like gender issues, female exploitation and oppression, the concept of being 'other' in a patriarchal society, the theme of growing up from childhood to womanhood, liberation through self-quest, sexual autonomy, human relationships, realism, magic realism, fantasy, the image of 'new-women', Indian culture, urbanization, Indianness, migration, East-West encounter, conflict between tradition and modernity, struggle for independence and partition.

Through the versatile narrative techniques and unique themes, Indian women novelists in English have created a position for themselves which becomes clear from the distinguished critical awards they have received in recent times. They have been conferred with the prestigious awards like Booker Prize, Commonwealth Writers' Prize for Best First Book (Eurasian section) and the esteemed Sahitya Academy Award which unquestionably establishes that women novelists are no longer 'others' in Indian English literary scenario.

Among the first-generation women novelists, Kamala Markandaya is a remarkable novelist in India. Her achievement lies both in respect of her sensible handling of cross-cultural issues and her authentic portrayal of the Indian cultural background. Her works revolve around themes like East-West encounter, disagreement between tradition and modernity as well as clash of values. Her only novel to have been published after 1980 is *Pleasure City* (1982) which is also much akin to some of her earlier works.

She attends on issues like East-West contact through the characters of Tully and Rikki. Her concerns about the disturbing impact of the Western influence on the economic, social and cultural life of India are evident in this novel. Her strong dedication towards upholding the human values and moral strength is achieved by her in the novel, *Pleasure City*.

The next women novelist to be analysed is Nayantara Sahgal who is a blood relative of Jawaharlal Nehru. Nayantara Sahgal's achievement as a novelist is quite impressive. She has published four novels after 1980, *Rich Like Us* (1985), *Plans for Departure* (1986), *Mistaken Identity* (1988) and *Lesser Breeds* (2003). Her present works along with her earlier novels places her among the top-ranking craftsmen like Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand.

Nayantara Sahgal has become a significant writer in the realm of Indian English Fiction. Her association with Nehru family gave the awareness about the social and political situations that prevailed in the country. Her corpus of work provides us the insight into her preoccupation with politics along with constant examination of marital problems.

Anita Desai is one of the significant novelists among the twentieth century Indian English novelists. Her works like *Clear Light of Day* (1980), *Custody* (1984), *Baumgartner's Bombay* (1988), *Journey to Ithaca* (1995), *Fasting Feasting* (1999) and *The Zig Zag Way* (2004), which appeared after 1980, give a clear understanding of her broadened composition. In her earlier

novels, her themes varied from domestic disharmony in traditional Indian families to the image of suffering women in the patriarchal society, where as in her later novels one can find a distinct shift in her themes. She is equally successful in writing about male psyche, portrayal of the trauma and suffering of Indians settled abroad, self-exile and spirituality, gender discrimination etc.,

Shashi Deshpande is a typical and keen woman novelist who has the skill and potential to delve deep into the women characters and study them in order to give a realistic, torching and unforgettable series of woman characters in her novels. She has published nine novels along with the glorious Sahitya Academy Award to her credit, which establishes her as one of the prolific writers of Indian English Fiction. Her novels are included in the literary curriculum in foreign universities too. Her novels are mainly introspective about individual's quest for a personal meaning in life and this becomes the crux of her works.

Arundati Roy has won the fame and reputation as a novelist through her novel *God of Small Things*. She received the prestigious Booker Prize for this novel in 1977. The novel has claimed immense critical acclaim from readers and critics throughout the world. The novel received praise for various aspects like the shifting of past and present with extraordinary finesse, her flair for description and its narrative style which includes magic, mystery and sadness.

Manju Kapur is one of the famous Indian English novelists of twentieth century. She lives in New Delhi and is currently enjoying her retirement from Miranda House Women's College, New Delhi. She is the winner of the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for *Best First Book* (Eurasian section). She has earned critical acclaim and commercial success both in India and abroad. She has five published novels to her credit which emphasises her consistent effort.

Githa Hariharan is a talented and prolific woman novelist who has won fame in the international level. She received special recognition by winning the Commonwealth Writers' Prize in 1992 for the best first novel, *The Thousand Faces of Night*. The magnitude of versatility in theme is clearly visible in her colossal output. Her first novel, *The Thousand Faces of Night* is about the progress of the protagonist Devi towards independence and search for identity through her relations.

K.R. Usha is a twentieth century novelist from Bangalore. Her novel, *Monkey Man* was shortlisted for the Man Asian Literary Prize for the year 2010. Her works include *Monkey Man* (2010), *A Girl and A River* (2007), *The Chosen* (2003) and *Sojourn* (1998). Her novel, *Monkey Man* portrays the lives of the fastest growing cosmopolitan IT city, Bangalore. Through her profound understanding of human nature, she delves deep into the lives of her characters and brings out their linked destinies with the city. She examines how the lives of the citizens change along with the rapid changes and development of this modest city. The theme of her novel, *A Girl and A River* is about the changing relations, moving between past and the present in search of family history through a couple of books and letters. Her novel, *The Chosen* and *Sojourn* are based on the theme of change.

Anita Nair is a significant Indian woman novelist who is known for her consistency in writing fiction. She has five published novels to her credit and the composition of her work consists of understanding of men and women psyche as well as her strong and in-depth knowledge of mythology which she uses in her novels with expertise.

Kaveri Nambisan is a service minded woman by nature. Though she is a doctor and surgeon by profession, she has also written and published six novels. Her novels are mostly filled with her rich medical experiences as a surgeon. Her novel, *The Hills of Angheri* is said to have an

autobiographical touch. Nalli, the protagonist, aspires to become a doctor and dreams of building a hospital in her village. But as the story develops Nalli's emotional dream remains a dream and her life become a tale of few satisfactions as against much dissatisfaction. Her other important novels comprise *The Story That Must Not be Told*, *The Truth About Bharat*, *Almost*, *The Scent of Pepper*, *Mango-coloured Fish* and *On Wings of Butterflies*.

Namita Gokhale has her own position and place in the list of Indian women novelist. She is famous for her novels like *Paro: Dreams of Passion* (1984), *Gods, Graves and Grandmother* (1994), *The Book of Shadows* and *The Mahabharata* (2009) in which she has explored myriad themes from status of women to the reinterpretation of age old mythology. In her first novel, *Paro: Dreams of Passion* she projects and gives voice to woman's vision and her idea of independence.

Nina Sibal is also a novelist who is from a sophisticated family. She is highly intellectual and has occupied a dignified position a civil servant. She has got married to India's top most lawyer and Cabinet minister Kapil Sibal. She has explored her writing capabilities through her three novels. Her first novel, *Yatra* (1987) narrates the poignant account of a woman's journey towards self-realization. Her other novels, *The Secret of Gujjar Mall* and *The Dogs of Justice* (1998) are based on the traumas of gender bias and identity crisis, encountered by the Kashmir Valley during its political turmoil. Shobha De is one of the most popular women novelists of recent times.

Another interesting novelist is Anuradha Roy whose popular novel is *An Atlas of Impossible Longings*. This novel describes the story of three generations of an Indian family where an innocent love story between an orphan boy Mukunda and Bakul, the granddaughter of an illustrious family takes its root. Unfortunately, the lovers are separated by the family and after 20 years Mukunda returns to the village in search of his lost destiny and tries to settle the matter. Roy

beautifully narrates innocent feelings as well as handles different aspects of Indian culture. Apart from the above discussed Indian women novelists; there are few aspiring modern novelists who have contributed towards enriching this genre through their commendable works.

In the present research, the works of Ruth Prayer Jhabrala are taken for study. Ruth Praver Jhabvala is one of the renowned women novelists of India. She belongs to a group of fiction-writers who could neither accept the country and its ways as her own nor get over her complicated, complex relationship with it. She visited and revisited India nostalgically in her fiction but written in America.

Ruth Praver Jhabvala was born on May 7, 1927 in Cologne, Germany to Jewish/Polish parents. Jhabvala and her family moved for England in 1939, where they survived the constant bombing of the city by German war planes. Their lives soon darkened with sorrow when her father, saddened by the death of many of his relatives in the concentration camps, committed suicide in 1948.

Jhabvala's literary career can be divided into three phases. In the first phase of her writing career, she has written some five novels and short story collections in the USA, *To Whom She Will* was published in 1955. It was the debut novel by Jhabvala. Jhabvala's satirical glance at the mores of middle-class Indians was very much appreciated by the critics and the readers. The success of *Amrita* paved the way for other discriminating novels and short stories with an Indian theme.

The Nature of Prison was a novel written with a model based on the style of Jane Austen who was an eighteenth-century Novelist. In this novel Jhabvala writes from an insider's perspective, about joint-family system, about arranged marriages and the conflicts which arise between a modern Westernized youth and a much orthodox and older generation.

But, after a trip back to Europe in 1960, she began to lose her enthusiasm for India. Following two more skilful domestic novels, *Esmond in India* (1958) and *The Householder* (1960), Jhabvala's vision of India took a different and a darker turn in *Get Ready for Get Ready for Battle* (1962) where, is the last of her novels to deal chiefly with Indian characters, she confronts India's overwhelming social problems. This novel, and the collection of stories which followed it, *Like Birds, Like Fishes* (1963), marks the end of the first phase of Jhabvala's fiction writing.

In the second phase, she has written three novels. They are *A Backward Place* (1965), *A New Dominion* (1972; published in the United States as *Travelers*) and *Heat and Dust* (1975) and two collections of short stories, *An Experience of India* (1971) and *How I Became a Holy Mother and Other Stories* (1976), Jhabvala moves away from writing about India and Indians writing about the effect India has on Western travellers who come in contact with her. This is a theme Jhabvala has employed in *Esmond in India*. Now, though, her interest is more constant. In the next three novels and two collections of stories, Jhabvala consistently interrogates the way India, and frequently India's more dubious guru figures, acts on Westerners, particularly women.

Jhabvala published *Heat and Dust* which remains till date her best known work. This work was adapted by the author for film. Not only a popular success, the book has also received a high critical acclaim too and won the *Booker Prize* for fiction. In twenty years of her life in India, Jhabvala began to feel suffocated and alienated in India.

Jhabvala moved to a New York City apartment in 1975. Her husband remained in India but frequently visited her in New York: "She felt at home there, she said - more at home than anywhere else she had ever lived, finding many people like herself: "refugees, outsiders, interesting American discontents" (Ivory, entertainment. time. com).

In the United States, Jhabvala did not lack challenging work opportunities. As a collaborator with the producers Ismail Merchant and Director James Ivory, she produced scripts on an average of almost one per year till 1990s. The Merchant-Ivory Productions achieved fame as a producer of period dramas based on India as scripted by Jhabvala during this time. She also continued to produce novels and short story volumes till the end of her life. *In Search of Love and Beauty* (1983), *Three Continents* (1987), *Shards of Memory* (1995) and *East into Upper East: Plain Tales From New York and New Delhi* (1998) portray the lives of immigrants from post-Nazi and Post-World War Europe. *My Nine Lives: Chapters of a Possible Past* (2005) is described by Jhabvala as her most autobiographical fiction to date. In every story she imagines the different paths her life might have taken but the end of all is a sense of loneliness desolation and exile.

Her *A Love song for India* published in 2011, is a collection of stories where she returns to her literary source, India. The stories in this volume and all that came before identified Jhabvala as one of the greatest “chronicler of the cultural divide” (Hussein, telegraph.co.uk. web). *The Judge’s Will* is the last story of Jhabvala and was published in the collection *The New Yorker* (2013).

Merchant-Ivory pictures presented to the world, Jhabvala’s vision of the East through their movies-*Shakespeare Wallah*, *Bombay Talkie*, *Autobiography of a Princess*, *Heat and Dust*, and *A Passage to India*. Though these films were successful, the trio gained their largest audiences with the Western-themed productions like *A Room with a View*. This tale of an innocent and pragmatic young English woman caught between her hot-blooded true love and her dull, sensible fiancée touched the hearts of the audiences and critics, whose acclaim helped to thrust the film forward to win three Academy Awards, including one for Jhabvala.

The release of *Howard's End* (1992) brought admiration for the three artists and the theatricality of their style. It was said that because of the tight script Jhabvala wrote for *Howard's End*, one could get the sense of an entire novel, its characters in 140 minutes. Another well received Merchant-Ivory film is "Remains of the Day" written by Kazuo Ishiguro in 1988. It is the story of a butler whose lifetime of selfless dedication to the denizens of Darlington Hall is tested when Lord Darlington allies with the Nazi Party during World War II. In adapting this story for the silver screen, the filmmakers discarded a screenplay by Harold Pinter in favour of one by Ruth Praver Jhabvala. The change did a world of good to the film for Jhabvala was able to objectify and bring alive what in the novel is mostly internalized.

Jhabvala is credited and meritorious to have a vision and thought as an Indian. For it allows her to be ruthlessly critical of both traditional and modern India without incurring the wrath of the natives attached to a hostile and uninformed outsider. To use a worn out 'cliché' she may be European by birth, but at the end of the day, she was an Indian 'bahu'. Her European irony along with an insider's knowledge of detail and nuances are seen at playing in her fiction. This unique combination makes her fiction a delight to read.

As a writer, she is not highly critical in exposing her opinions about India and Indians. Rather she deals effectively with the Europeans and their pretensions. The English man or woman trying to settle down in India is a standard figure in modern Indian fiction. The process of adjusting to a foreign rhythm of life, of living through estrangement, alienation and misunderstanding is painful because of the pretensions and misconceptions they harbour. Jhabvala looks at these peculiarities with amused ironic tolerance to add another dimension to her social comedy of manners.

K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar and H.M. Williams are two eminent critics who have made a critical study on many Indian women novelists of which Ruth Jhabvala holds a significant place. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar in his *Indian Writing in English* has opined that Jhabvala has written her novels in the manner of Jane Austen. Both critics deal with the themes of her different novels and show how Jhabvala exposes the follies and foibles of her characters with a satiric glance. Yet they feel that Jhabvala is human enough to feel the pain of her characters and this is what makes her engaging.

Yasmine Gooneratne's *Silence, Exile and Cunning: The Fiction of Ruth Praver Jhabvala* is a landmark critical work on Ruth Praver Jhabvala. In the eighth chapter, she discusses the novel *A Backward Place* and she has made comparison between the characters of Sudhir and Etta, Judy and Clarissa. She has also analysed the characters and their struggle for survival at various phases of life. She has also clearly sketched the self-deception of each and every one.

Vasant A. Sahane, a critic has analysed and observed that "Heat and dust" is a novel that has focused on the reaction of different European characters towards the heat and dust in India. The heat and dust may be interpreted physically or symbolically. According to the necessity the narrator comes to India to unravel the 'dust' that has gathered around Olivia's notorious affair with the Nawab. Mr. Sahane rightly argues that the India that Jhabvala recreates in *Heat and Dust* is a strange, exotic land of European imagination with sati, dacoity, riots and sexual fears. The novel is a dexterously drawn picture of princely India and modern India from a European point of view and the only flaw of Jhabvala, the artist, Mr. Sahane points out, is her failure to explore the 'inner life' of her characters.

The present research is a theoretical one and so depends on library studies, articles from the internet and contact with specialists in the field. The novels and short stories selected for this purpose were read and re-read from three distinct perspectives: a) the literary-critical, b) the Feminist and c) the post-colonial. The final approach in this dissertation is a combination of these three perspectives.

Marginalization has been associated with migration since times immemorial. The migrant communities are usually vulnerable groups and their rights are routinely violated, not only as workers, but also as human beings. They commonly face discrimination and xenophobic hostility. A sense of alienation is part of being a migrant and this is true of the lives of the British in India.

Women in India are never allowed to enjoy freedom even from the era of imperialism till the post - colonial period. Women are always considered as weaker sex and they do not have significant roles to play in the male defined works. Women are always looked down upon as hindrances and unnecessary burdens. The virginity of women is considered as the most important quality in the patriarchal society. Woman is fated to experience alienation and isolation even in the hands of her husband as well as her children and forced to lead a life of marginalization and sacrifice without any personal aspirations.

In this research, all the major works of Jhabvala are included for critical study and an analysis is done right from the first novel *To Whom She Will* to *The Three Continents*. Thus, the following chapter in the research is based on the question of the spiritual quests. The third chapter is the thematic study based on the social life of love and sex for lovers and the fourth chapter deals the emergence of Western women in India. The fifth chapter deals with the marital life. It is a study based on qualitative analysis of all the major novels of Jhabvala right from *To Whom She Will* to

The Three Continents. Jhabvala's *Poet and Dancer* and *Shards of Memory* are not included for analysis as they fall out of the purview of research.

Jhabvala's later novels, *A Backward Place*, *A New Dominion*, *Heat and Dust* portray the Westerner's interaction with India. *Esmond in India* and *A Backward Place* present the experiences of Indian woman married to a European and a European woman married to an Indian. Some of them like *Esmond in India* and Judy in *A Backward Place* fall in love with Indian culture. It is their initial attraction. However, Esmond's attraction end in aversion but it is not so in Judy's case, but at times she feels repelled by her husband's move. In *A Backward Place*, Judy, Clarissa and Etta represent Western culture. They have different experiences in love, marriage and sex. Margaret and Lee have come to India with a view to altering their personality and identity and seek spirituality in India. *Heat and Dust* reveals the responses of Olivia to the Nawab.

Western women come to India out of love and naturally they show a compromising and adaptive outlook on India. In *Head and Dust*, except Olivia, all the other women characters like Mrs. Crawford, Mrs. Minnies, and Mrs. Saunders are typically prejudiced, callous, arrogant, and supercilious. The spiritual seekers in Jhabvala's fiction comprise mainly women like Clarissa in *A Backward Place*, Lee, Evie and Margaret in *A New Dominion*.

In her novels, Jhabvala has revealed how the western women came to India with a hope to attain spiritual peace and inwards solace and contentment, after having become tired and weary of their marital life and prosperity. But at the end, their search and hunt has turned out to be a dream or mirage and they leave them all in disappointment and depression.

Thus, disillusionment, disappointment, distress and death are inevitable to Jhabvala's characters. One can see that the novels of Jhabvala, *To Whom She Will to Get Ready for Get Ready for Battle* and from *A Backward Place* to *Heat and Dust* present the picture of Western women.

Jhabvala has delineated the characters in her novels and presents the problems of love, marriage and sex besides dealing with the problems of India's attraction and aversion.

The present research on Jhabvala under the title *The Thematic Concerns in the Novels of Ruth Praver Jhabvala* is based on Jhabvala's portrayal of women characters, Indian custom and society which threaten and lacerate the Western men and women and love, marriage and sex and along with food habits of Indians and Westerners.

The first chapter, "Introduction" offers an elaborate survey of Indian English Literature and details some of the major women novelists in English in India. It also gives a biographical study of Jhabvala along with her major novels.

The Second chapter, *Spiritual Quests* is an autopsy of both Indian and Western cultures and examines how those two cultures come into contact with each other and oscillate or collide with one another and how Western men and women are exploited physically and spiritually in India. In Jhabvala's *Heat and Dust* and *A Backward Place* Esmond, Etta, Judy and Clarissa are poised between different points to undergo different emotional experiences resulting out of their initial attraction to India which results in aversion. In *A New Dominion* and *Heat and Dust* Lee, Margaret and Evie are on the spiritual quest; whereas Olivia in *Heat and Dust* is on sexual quest. When the Westerners in India undergo spiritual and sexual quest, they remain frustrated and disappointed as they remain aliens to the strange land.

The third chapter, *Love and Sex* is an analytical and critical study of *To Whom She Will* (Amrita's love), *Esmond in India* (Esmond's love with Gulab and his married life with her), *The Householder* (Prem's marital relation with Indu), *Get Ready for get Ready for Battle* (Gulzari Lal's marital life with Sarla Devi and Vishnu and Mala's life), *A Backward Place* (Judy's marriage to Bal), *A New Dominion* (the three Western women's life with Swamiji), and *Heat and Dust*

(Olivia's love for the Nawab). It also examines *In Search of Love and Beauty* and *The Three Continents*, where most of the actions take place not in India but outside India. It shows love and sex as total failure and marriage becomes a strained one. In some cases, women and men see sex outside the marital life.

The fourth chapter *Western women in India* examines Women's role and image in a Western and Indian society and how they are treated by men as mere sexual things and denied of basic human rights and values.

The fifth chapter *Marital Life* examines social life and patriarchal values of married women in India. This chapter analyses marriage as a social institution and offers a critique of patriarchal attitudes on marriage.

The last chapter, *Summation* sums up the findings of the study. It proves that Jhabvala is not only interested in presenting the themes of love, marriage and sex in Indian societal and domestic set up and Western women in India or East-West encounter in her novels but also Image of Western women and the quest for spirituality and sexuality to the clash between Western and Indian cultures and habits. Hers is mostly autobiographical in nature. It is proved that her novels are mostly nostalgic remembrance of what and how she felt as an outsider in India after her marriage to an Indian.

Jhabvala has an interest in describing the spiritual and sexual quests, social life: love and sex, and Western women in India, and marital life. She presents all these in her novels in a realistic approach. It is her realism that makes her contemplate over these issues and criticize them all through her novels as a social realist. Ruth Praver Jhabvala's personal experience of displacement and exile has had a deep effect on the fiction she has produced. Further, the wide scope of this research encompassing European Diaspora, Post-Colonial India, gender and family relationship

will stimulate further study of her novels and offer ample scope for prospective researchers on Ruth Praver Jhabvala or on Indian studies. Researchers can endeavor their hands in a number of areas. Future scholars can also take up for research her novels written after she migrated to the United States of America, and the screenplays she wrote which won many Academy awards plus two Oscars.