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EAST-WEST CONFLUENCE IN THE NOVELS OF R.P.J.

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ABSTRACT

A prominent Jewel among the Indo – Anglian writers, Ruth Praver Jhabvala shines as a satirist and ironist . In this research work Jhabvala’s two novels are focused. Main theme of both the novels is the dilemma of the westerner for whom the initial delight of India turns into a trap. Another theme is materialistic and idealistic life style of the characters. The writer projects conflict between cultures and civilizations also. She satirises those Indians who leave the reality of life for the craze of modernity. She deals with the various reasons for which westerners come out to India and how their attitude towards India are conditioned by the nature of their stay in the country.

Key words :East west encounter, marriage, conflict, modernity, Westerner, backward.

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A novel must have a social purpose. So this research work is seeking the purpose of two novels of Ruth Praver Jhabvala in which she juxtaposed east and west, different cultures, manners and attitudes. In her third and fourth novel the canvas is Indian but she broadens her enthusiasm and scope to include some social and political development of the second decade of Indian Independence.

Mrs Jhabvala was born in Germany. She emigrated to England under the pressure of Nazism. Her father was a Polish-Jewish lawyer and her mother Leonara Cohn Praver was a homely woman. Jhabvala came to India in 1951 after her marriage and the description of the characters in her novels reflected the post-independence Urban life of Delhi where she lived. She keeps her attention to that segment of her Indian experience in following novel Esmond In India. The main theme in the novel is the dilemma of the westerner for whom the initial delight of India turns into a trap. Another theme is materialistic and Idealistic life style of the characters. Twin themes move together.

The writer projects conflict not merely between individuals but between cultures and civilizations. Esmond, a European marries an Indian girl Gulab. They do not succeed in their marital life. Domestic conflict arises between the husband and the wife because of their different attitude of life and also because of different cultures. After many fret and fever of life they leave each other.

The novel highlights the clash between Gandhian and Nehruian thoughts; one believing in simple living and the other bending towards modern thoughts and living. One has the craze for orderliness, smart and sophisticated society and up to date furnitures and the other characterized by her oriental taste for carrot

halwa, spices and hot red curries, her typical Indian bashfulness in high society and difference towards modern furniture.

Esmond is both overbearing and egoistic though these characteristics are concealed below his handsome face, his attractive looks and capacity for being in harmony with other women. He acts as a tutor to European women. He teaches Hindi to foreigners, specially the wives of ambassador, he treats his servant in an imperious manner. His zest of life is so modern :

“Esmond takes his lunch of cheese salad sitting alone at his beautiful little dining table which at once tells about his hollow romantic identity. Esmond lives life in colourful and sophisticated western manner. Everything on the table was colourful and modern, bright tablemats, painted glasses, very luxurious plates. It looked rather like a beautifully photographed full page advertisement in an American magazine. it was very different from Gulab’s spicy meal eaten on the floor out of a brass bowl”

Infact the manner exposes not only the difference in their life style but also the gulf in their attitudes that divides them, so how can they assimilate each other easily? Esmond owns a modern, comfortable cosmopolitan styled flat. Analysis of the cross cultural clash goes deeper because of incongruities of food habits and life-styles. Western materialism conflicts with oriental idealism and simplicity these are the frame work of novel. Jhabvala articulates about her way of living –

“The flat was it’s own neat modern cosmopolitan self again ;
it smelt D.D.T which Gulab had sprayed to get rid off the
smell of the food which Bachani had cooked for them”

Esmond becomes crude in conversation, and even offensive. His sarcasm, his sneer, his contempt is all lost in Gulab, inspite of her pretty looks she is very languorous and placid. He tries to evoke some response, some protest in her but she remains very passive and indifferent. He thinks that he is trapped in her stupidity, in her dull heavy alien mind, very offensive towards her :

“You have got what I can only call a wonderful propensity to squalor,
Tell me now, if pressed on the point would you call yourself a slut.”

A slut would mean either a dirty, slovenly women careless of her appearance as Gulab was then, or a woman of loose character. But this irony is totally lost on Gulab. When Esmond feels oppressed by Gulab’s dull life style, he goes to Betty, his mistress. Betty is so light, modern and sophisticated, Just as her small flat is Esmond feels satisfied when he is with her, feels homely of England. The shallow, superficial, vain, unintellectual and pompous Esmond stillwood is no representative of European culture in India. On this platform the cause of friction is not confined or spiritual difference but emanates from aesthetics and mannerism that these differences reach such a zenith that conjugal life if pushed to a breaking point. Eating habits, dressing modes, furnishing of the drawing room and the manner of bringing up Ravi, their son, constitute and unveil the test of solemnity of Gulab’s marriage to Esmond.

Gulab lost her patience and dull Indian woman turned into a sharp, active and full of conscience, decision making lady when Esmond’s servant tries to molest her, He is unsuccessful but brutal and inhumane. These deeds compel to leave that smart beautiful flat because beauty is no more in the marital relation. One husband could not protect her respect, felt under no any social or spiritual obligation to him.

It reaches down to the gulf that saperates western materialism from oriental idealism. In the later part we see Gulab in two forms-first she devotes herself to her husband whole heartedly, considering that good or bad, he is her husband after all and second she leaves within the minutes when feels that husband is not able to provide her even security anymore.

Ruth Praver Jhabvala’s novels characteristically focus on the world in which she finds herself at the time of the writing and Esmond in India is no exception. It depicts an urban upper class India in which , ten years after independence, life has adjusted itself to the reality of swaraj. The principal theme of the novel is the dilemma of the westerners for whom the initial delight in India turns into measure trap.

Jhabvala unduly highlights Gulab's weakness for Indian food and Bachani's activities, or Uma's solicitations for Gulab's comfort. It is difficult to reconcile, Gulab's passivity to Esmond's assaults upon her individuality and self respect to the strength of her will and determination which impelled her to defy her family and marry him. Was Gulab indeed a rebel and non – conformist? or is she merely a foil in the world of temptation of the senses and flesh opened before her by alluring personality of Esmond? How is this rebel to be handled by her tyrannical husband? The birth of a baby (Ravi) is not enough to change a flaming rebel into a much too subservient wife.

Shakuntala is fascinated by Esmond's Shelleyan aspect of tragic melancholy. The romantic Shakuntala offers him her love and devotion in a quite unexpected reversion on her part to the traditional outlook that holds Gulab captive. Her enthusiastic resolve to 'adore you and to serve you and to be your slave' is yet another trap, from which Esmond finally flees to England for safety. Shakuntala's ideas of personal freedom are comically limited and superficial. Infatuated with Esmond, never guessing that his picturesque melancholy goes deeper than mere disappointment in a dull wife. Once fearlessly holding his hand in a crowded Indian shopping street, and still undecieved by reality Shakuntala tells herself that she knows-

"life to be more – wonderful, a hundred times more wonderful,
than even she had suspected"

These lines show the fascination of Indians for westerners. These dialogues are loaded with ironical overtones suggesting the violation inherent in allowing one's thought, be in enthusiasm of life or thought of reality.

How can any intelligent reader reconcile this cowardly adherence to a conservative Hindu tradition with Gulab's initial enterprise in marrying the man who is not a Hindu, not even an Indian? However we can conclude that basically Gulab is a typical conservative Indian woman who marries Esmond in spite of all his weaknesses but ultimately leaves him when she finds her security and womanhood at stake in her husband's home. But according to a self-respecting women this step of Gulab (to leave husband's home) is very laudatory. At least Jhabvala with her keen insight, understood the emotion of self-respect, and the evolution of the plot of the novel portrays a growing understanding of Indian society i.e. a woman is bound to traditions but the traditions do not stand in the way when a woman's self respect is affected. It can be evidenced from the foregoing appraisal that Ruth Praver Jhabvala has portrayed socio-economic structure of Indian society in varied perspectives in **Esmond In India** in which the main protagonist is a European who responds to the older situation while the natives also react to him negatively. Jhabvala shows a rare insight into the world of sensuousness in which some of her characters have sensitive temptation.

Similarly **A Backward place** enacts the struggle and suffering, compromises and sacrifices of an English girl-Judy, married to an Indian actor Bal who, struggles for success. Though she tries in to adapt to the Indian way of living, her husband's immaturity, lack of planning and day dreaming of being a great actor perplexes her so much that the poor girl has to reconcile herself to the fatalism of Bhuaji.

Among other interesting western characters in the novel are Etta, a middle aged Hungarian beauty who has had a number of Indian husbands and lovers. Clarissa, another English lady and a great devotee of Indian spiritualism. Hochstads, an anglicized German man who came for an educational exchange programme who survives very well because India never really touches them in fact, Hochstads never really sees India.

Clarissa and Etta live in varying degree of unease : one is laughed at for being exploited, the other tries to resist the influence of India but is trapped there, so much so that her home becomes a cage for her. Etta is only a meek and passive British girl, who is shown to enjoy the openness of Indian life. In the delineation of Mrs. Kaul, Sudhir and Bal the novelist satirizes and holds to ridicule those Indian who, with a craze for modernity, have broken away from their traditions. At last they find themselves helpless in sustaining their modernity. The message is obvious- the Europeans are unhappy because they are unable to adapt themselves to India and have nowhere else to go. And Indians are unhappy because of their blind craze for modernism, hollow exhibition, false display and schizoprenia.

It is true for this context. East is east and west is west twain shall never meet together. Judy met Bal in London where he came as an Indian delegate to a conference of international youth. She fell in love with his

handsome face and his gay manner, she marries him and settles in a low middle class joint family in Delhi. She becomes the mother of two children and deeply involved with them. But Bal is highly ambitious person. Consequently he is deeply concerned with his so called film starts.

Once Prithvi, Judy's little son has fever and he wants his father to stay with him, while Bal wishes to attend to Kishan kumar, a Bombay film star on a visit to Delhi, while Judy is furiously concerned with Prithvi's rising temperature. Bal constantly talked about films while Judy demanding ice. Judy's motherly instinct get aroused and she asks Bal to produce ice.

"Get the ice, she said

'It is very important for me to keep up my contacts'

'are you getting it or not' " ?

She pursues him in the street, catching him by the sleeve and asking for to do his duty as a father. He yields but she is not happy with her victory. Judy is both a dreamer and a realist. She feels fascination for his whimsical manners. Judy loves him immensely and in this aspect she transcends the barriers of a strictly rational society into that of a traditional Indian home. Although Judy is English by birth and alien by upbringing but she adopts easily to Bal's Joint family and heterogeneous household. Her relation with every member of family like Bhuaji, Shanti her sister in law are very pious and affectionate. Being an English woman she represents the sensible side of Englishness, someone who is liberal, practical, even phlegmatic, she tries to become a good Indian wife with many troubles and is able to survive on her own personal and family problems by a firm reliance on stoic English identity. Etta speaks to Hochstads about Judy in satirical manner:

"She does not understand civilized language, she is busy proving that it's possible for a nice healthy English girl to be an Indian wife in an Indian slum"

She protested that it was not a slum. But there are three versions of "Englishness" in this novel. Judy is the first, second Etta – a middle class Hungarian beauty married and divorced three times, she is bitter towards Indian and tells Judy:

"That's of course the best way of ruining one's complexion. Don't you know that the Indian sun has been put specially into the sky to ruin our complexion"

It is very clear from the above that this is partly Jhabvala's own experience. In **Myself in India** she also expressed that 'Heat oppressed me'. **A Backward Place** articulates very subtly and skillfully, the author's conflicting emotional and intellectual responses to India during this phase of her life. Through the four expatriates in the novel R. P. Jhabvala brings Indian experience and attitudes inherited from their colonial predecessors. Hochstads, Introduction at beginning justifies his presence in India by pretending to advance the cause of east-west encounter.

The novelist is not critical of Indians alone, who are terribly conditioned by the social, economic and religious traditions but also of the English and the Americans who abandon their homes for the charm of the east. She projects this by a group of men and women of both cultures.

In these novels Jhabvala deals with the various reasons for which westerners come out to India and how their attitude towards India are conditioned by the nature of their stay in the country and by their native sensibilities, In her novels about westerners in India Ruth Praver Jhabvala emphasizes the fact that westerners are no longer here as conquerors but as the conquered ones.

As I think, clash between the two societies, two life styles and mode of living is totally based on self understanding, if one is coming to India to hear any goodness of India, in that situation the person is solely responsible for any trouble because any country and society has its own culture, Just different from one another. How Esmond's inability to adopt Indian culture and Judy's ability to adopt that same culture gave gradually bitterness and happiness of life.

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