



Cultural Crisis in Indian Society in Ruth Prawer Jhabvala's *Heat and Dust*

1. Anupriya

Research Scholar, Department of English,

Magadh University, Bodhgaya

2. Prof. Dr. Neeraj Kumar

Professor, Department of English,

Magadh University, Bodhgaya

Abstract

During the post-war period, literature in general, and the novel in specific have widened much in geographical and cultural spaces horizontally. During the British Raj, the British presence in India was a political reality and many of the authors were either directly or indirectly working from a kind of politically conditioned position in terms of the attitudes they reflected toward the British colonialism and India. Literature in general and novel in particular during the post war era have widened much in geographical and cultural spaces. It may not always be reasonable to put the Anglo Indians who have written about India during the British Raj, and the expatriate British or European authors who wrote about India during the post-independence era in the same category. *Heat and Dust* explores the Indian culture, myth, religion, life style through the perspectives of an European. The novel represents India as exotic land, barbaric, uncivilized and underdeveloped land. Through the presentation of the Indian characters in different manners, Jhabvala misrepresents Indian people and the culture. Jhabvala visibly portrays the Indians as illiterate and ignorant and hence suffering from poverty, hunger, evils of superstitions, devoid of human feelings and cleanliness. The picture presented by the writer in the novel is one of insensitivity and loss of values.

Keywords: Cultural Crisis, Acculturation, Colonialism, Cultural Space, Disgrace.



Ruth Pravar Jhabvala is a novelist whose outstanding fiction may be studied within different contexts. On the basis of her long length residence in India and her marriage with an Indian fellow she is Indian novelist in English, Western writing about India and contemporary female fiction. Jhabvala brought her vision of India as an outsider misrepresents the nation as mysterious, uncivilized and unscientific based on her own perspective. *Heat and Dust*, the title obviously connotes the theme of the novel as diseases, squalor, and poverty; the narrator during her journey to India repeatedly describes about Indian beggars, diseases, crowd and poverty. *Heat and Dust*, depicts the character from two different worlds India and England who are culturally different. Jhabvala, in her novel Heat and Dust, represents India as exotic land, barbaric, uncivilized and underdeveloped land. She depicts the picture of beggars, cripple children and poor beggar woman to justify the mission of representing the nation as poor and underdeveloped. Native characters are marginalized in comparison to European characters. The Europeans are the power holders and the native are shown to be longing to equalize themselves with those white colonizers in the story of 1920s. The story of the novel set in colonial and post-colonial India, depicts the pictures of Indian civilization and the people through the perspective of non-Indian character produce stereotype image to represent the nation.

The *Heat and Dust* title obviously connotes the theme of novel as disease, squalor and poverty of India; that are frequently repeated to explore worst part of India by the narrator throughout her journey to India. It aims to construct differences between Native and Anglo-Indian characters based on superiority which reflects occident mentality of westerners; native people are backward, uncivilized, superstitious and their culture as inferior then their culture. The title suggests and symbolizes the westerners' response to India. *Heat and Dust*, both give negative meaning and throughout the text there lies the thematic aspects too. The thematic aspect of the



novel is somehow embedded in the title. All English characters are not able to endure the India, its culture, its people and everything is compared to heat and dust. Heat and Dust, the title obviously connotes the theme of novel as disease, squalor, and poverty in India.

Caste system is another weapon of Jhabvala by which she wants to throw her spears on Indian culture. To highlight Englishness she has to keep Indian practice in shadow. Heat and Dust, shares the theme of cultural transformation, a process in which cultural jumbling and imitation of another culture is repeated. The story examines the impact of the West on Indian cultures. Because of the colonization people from NonWestern countries are directly affected by impact of European. Dislocation, hybridity, mimicry, ambivalence and many other problems were created throughout the contact of distinct culturally rooted people. In such issues, domination is prevailed everywhere. The colonization creates the contact zone which enforces on hybridization. People from one location, cultures get united with another and they sometimes feel very comfortable and sometimes very uncomfortable. Imitating Indian rituals and gesture about it, Jhabvala fulfils the hitherto existing stereotypes; creating hierarchy, she uplifts the so-called Englishness. By this approach Jhabvala's outstanding novel *Heat and Dust* heads negative representation of India as the country of mysticism, superstitions, heat, dust, squalor, diseases, frustration, boredom and so on.

The book is a beguiling story of two women from the different generations. Both of them come under the spell of India. The novel concerns a young English woman, the narrator. She arrives in Bombay intending to make it her home for a while. She wants to reconstruct the story of the doomed marriage of her grandfather, a law officer named. Douglas Rivers and his first wife Olivia. She sets information of Olivia from a collection of intriguing letters that Olivia has written to her sister Marica. She tries her best to relive Olivia's experiences in the same places



to attempt at a better understanding of Olivia and India. A profound and powerful novel set in colonial India during the 1920s. *Heat and Dust* tells the story of Olivia Rivers. Olivia comes to India in the traditional role of a wife to the sub-collector of Satipur. Her husband Douglas Rivers is an English ICS Officer. She is a beautiful, spoiled, and spirited young woman. She finds it difficult to adjust to life in the British colonial community of Satipur. Because of his official duty Douglas, spend very little time with his wife. Olivia loves her husband very much but she feels suffocated by inbred group. She longs for independence, intellectual stimulation and a more passionate life. She is suffocated by social constraints of her position as the wife of an important English civil servant. She hopes that a baby will solve her problems but finds it more difficult to become pregnant than she has thought. In this novel, the protagonist Olivia falls in love with an Indian man. He is a clerk named Inder Lal. He comes from the lower middle-class, and he is a representative specimen of the new India. In this role, he offers a contrast to the Rajas and Nawabs of British India. He is married, and Ritu is his wife, but he develops a relationship with the narrator. His relationship with Anne is an only a mechanical one. He makes her pregnant. Unconsciously, Anne falls the same path of her step grandmother. As Olivia did, she also has an Anglo-Indian love affair and picks up where Olivia left. She has a casual attitude to her pregnancy. Unlike Olivia, she decides to have a child of Inder Lal. The narrative gives insight into the psychology of the expatriate as both the women in the plots are dislocated from their original land and go through the romantic encounter in a foreign land. It also reveals the narrator's impression about India, as the narrator is also present in the narrative as a character. Thus, Jhabvala's *Heat and Dust* deals the story with enough romance, political, and history. We have encountered in almost every scene and character - the heat, dust, poverty, superstition, the rigidly emotional British postcolonial administrators, the catty British wives, the noble and rogue natives, the reaction of British men and women who are seduced by the



setting scandalizing the communities. All the characters were realistic. It is the presentation of Indian society.

Jhabvala's novel is oriented to English reader, so she tries to persuade her English reader but sometimes she seems as enchanted by Indian beauty, so her writing turns towards positive qualities having negative meaning beneath its surface. She vigorously praises Indian landscape, its natural beauty but call the country as of heat, dust, disease and so. This is the ambivalence attitude towards her adopted country and its people. *Heat and Dust* lies at the heart of supporting and rejection of Oriental practices, especially of Indian one. Story of mix-up of Indian culture with others abundant is typified in the novel by the story of Muslim shrine in which Hindus also go for worship and even the narrator and her step grand-mother go there though they are English women. Unity in diversity is the aspect of India but the writer hides this message from the novel. Instead of this, she creates tension of cultural and religious merging considering all the traffic in eastern mysticism. Jhabvala's treatments of the conversion of religion is interestingly complex which does not exist for long time as English man Chid who would be enlightened one but he is presented as faddy. His method is just imitative, and lastly he adopts Christianity.

Conclusion

Jhabvala does misrepresentation of the India as backward country and Indian people as uncivilized. The fiction is really the presentation of Indian society. The story of Olivia and the Nawab of Khatm or the story of the narrator is interesting one. This well-written book explores Anglo-Indian relations through the power of romance.

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