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## India and Indianness in the works of Ruth Praver Jhabvala

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### Abstract

Ruth Praver Jhabvala an American-British-German, Polish, by birth (1927), educated in England, came to India as a bride in 1951 and picked up the threads of Anglo-Indian fiction, with an entirely new perspective. She has a unique place among the Anglo-Indian novelists of post-independence era being an outsider. She viewed this unknown Indian society with awe and wonder and that there is tremendous enthusiasm and everything Indian is marvelous. She described in detail the Indian railways stations, Indian bazaars and many social customs like 'mundan', 'namkaran', 'annprashan' and most of all the arranged marriage system of India which is something entirely new and intriguing to Mrs. Jhabvala western mind.

**Keywords:** Anglo-Indian-fiction, mundan, namkaran, annprashan, Indian bazaars, Indian railways stations, marriage-system

### Introduction

Ruth Praver Jhabvala came to India after the marriage when British Raj was no more. Indian's struggle for freedom was over but was faced with many other problems, which came with freedom. Jhabvala naturally got involved with India and Indians problems and wrote about them. She never mentions Britishers or the problem of the ruler and the ruled. Her canvas is purely social. She touches politics only to ridicule and satirize it. Jhabvala's novel deals with post independence Indian society and it is the difference, which makes Jhabvala unique, among all the Anglo-Indian novelists of the country and perhaps she was the only European authoress who spent so many years (30 years from 1954 to 1984) at a stretch in India and so much concerned about Indianness.

### Research- Hypothesis

The question is why Ruth Praver Jhabvala is so different from other Anglo-Indian novelists and the answer is so obvious that Jhabvala naturally got involved with India and Indianness and equally wrote about them, humorously, ironically, critically and even bitterly.

### Objective of the Study

How and why Ruth Praver Jhabvala was concerned about India and Indianness when she came India after her marriage and equally after the end of the British Raj or post-Independence.

### Literature Review

Jhabvala was not born in India and didn't spend long years of her life with her family. She came to India at an age at which she could think and form her own opinions and views. She came to India as an 'outsider', became an insider, very quickly and ended up as 'an outsider', never to look back.

She is essentially a European writer who lived for sometime in India and expressed through her words the experiences of Indian life and society. Whether she writes as outsider or as an insider is not so important. The most important thing is her awareness of man, society, human and moral dilemmas and the aesthetic design that she projects in her novels.

R P Jhabvala wrote her first novel "To Whom She Will" being an outsider and viewed the Indian society with awe and wonder and that there is tremendous enthusiasm and everything

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Indianness is marvelous. In this novel she describes in detail the Indian railways, Indian bazaars and many social customs of India which is something entirely new and intriguing to Mrs. Jhabvala's western mind<sup>[1]</sup>.

The title of the novel is also based on the Indian belief that the boys and the girls should be married at a tender age. The central theme of the novel on the problem of free versus arranged marriages in modern urban society and the clash between the old and the young generation on this issue. She also wrote about other problems, which are connected with the issue of getting married in India. One of the main considerations in arranged marriages in India is the caste system. She has very subtly made it clear that whether it is the educated modern westernized society or the simple lower middle-class society, they prefer to get a girl from their own caste and community. Besides, Mrs. Jhabvala goes to the extent of writing that though the young generation likes to follow the West and believes in free love and marriage, ultimately they give in to the wishes of their parents and marry the girl or the boy their families choose for them.

In "To Whom She Will", Mrs. Jhabvala makes fun of the young Indian generation who while thinking themselves to be modern and westernized try to do things which the traditional Hindu society would not accept that is falling in love with a boy (or a girl) outside one's own caste, community and social status. They face a vehement opposition and the irony is that tradition wins over modernization. In this novel Mrs. Jhabvala has very successfully described these two types in the modern Indian society<sup>[2]</sup>.

"The Nature of Passion" (1956) is the second novel of R P Jhabvala. It can very safely be called a social comedy, which appears to be Jhabvala's forte, especially in the early phase of her career as a novelist. The novel appears to be obsessed by the nouveau-riche class of Punjabis in Delhi. She has again taken up a few aspects of their day-to-day life and has described it in detail, just as she had done in her first novel<sup>[3]</sup>.

Similarly, in "Esmond In India", the third novel of R P Jhabvala, presents a new dimension in her creativity. Mrs. Jhabvala, after following the same stream of thought and ideas in her previous novels, suddenly changes her entire approach. She leaves behind the Punjabi refugees, their customs, tradition and ways of life and focuses her attention on the rich Indian families living in post-independence India. In this novel she wrote only about the families residing in or around Delhi. This is quite interesting and of great importance as Mrs. Jhabvala makes it a point to write about only those characters whom she knows closely and whose ways she has observed minutely. She herself lived in Delhi with her Indian husband and was familiar with there. This novel is an Indian family chronicle and encompasses the lives of three families in its narrative structure.

Mrs. Jhabvala's canvas in this novel is primarily familial. The novel portrays several conflicts and cross-currents of their changing society. The clash between the old and young generations once again forms an important theme of the novel.

Further, in "A New Dominion" Mrs. Jhabvala has tried to assimilate the lives of all these characters in all their multifarious activities. Consequently, she had to adopt a new structural pattern of her novels. The novel does not have the earlier pattern of her novels, that of a neatly

developed comedy of manners. This novel is diffuse in structure and its characters appear to be more individualistic though a few of them do experience the merger into this society. On the whole, the theme of the novel demanded a new technique to be more in tune with its multiple motives. Again, structurally, "A New Dominion" has been divided into three parts-part one in Delhi, part two in Banaras and part three in the Rajasthani town of Maupur. The main characters move from one place to another and is doing so, show many aspects of their experiences, personality and destiny<sup>[4]</sup>.

"The Householder" is a story of a young man standing at the threshold of 'Grihashthram', that is, just entering the family life, leaving behind the carefree life of student and also the protection of her parents. In this novel R P Jhabvala wants to make it clear that in low-class Indian society marriage and child comes as burden, rather than as a pleasure. The other reason that the novelist gives for the prevailing discontent in married life in Indian society is the arranged marriage system<sup>[5]</sup>.

"Heat and Dust" is the last novel Jhabvala wrote in India. It is a sort of a declaration of her dislike, bitterness and abhorrence. However, beneath all these lies the naked truth about the family life of Indian society where love, relationships, widowhood have to suffer on account of poverty and superstition<sup>[6]</sup>.

### Conclusion

Ruth Praver Jhabvala's novels which she wrote in India or about Indianness during her stay of almost two decades, can aptly be described largely as an outsider's view of and about India. The authoress in the early years of her experiences of this country wrote as an observer. She saw everything from a European's point of view and marveled at the things she saw in this country. Jhabvala in her first two novels, "To Whom She Will" and "The Nature of Passion" wrote about a few social customs and other trivial aspects of Indian society. Her third novel, "Esmond in India" clearly indicates that Jhabvala's initial enchantment was wearing off. She displays a remarkable understanding of the middle-class Indians of the society, especially of the women that she saw in and around Delhi. Her five later novels displays her changing attitudes which colour her vision of Indian society and about Indianness.

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