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## **R.P. Jhabvala: An American-British-German turned Indian ‘rootless intellectual’**

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### **Abstract**

R P Jhabvala an American-British-German turned Indian authoress born in Poland, educated in England, came to India as a bride and picked up the threads of Anglo-Indian fiction, with an entirely new perspective. She came to India when British Raj was no more. India’s struggle for freedom was over, but was faced with many other problems, which came with freedom. She never mentions Britishers or the problem of the ruler and the ruled. Her canvas is purely social. Only we can see the glimpse of British Raj in his writings not even before and after.

**Keywords:** Indian authoress, new perspective, British Raj, Anglo-Indian-fiction

### **Introduction**

In a 1979 lecture, Jhabvala spoke about her ‘rootlessness’. She shared her admiration for writing that emerged from a sense of tradition and landscape, but she herself felt rootless: “I stand before you as a writer without any ground of being out of which to write: really blown about from country to country, culture to culture, till I feel-till I am-nothing”<sup>[1]</sup>. And yet, she said, this was one of her strengths. Many of her stories are about a kind of inner travel: feeling rootless, her protagonists find new ways to feel at home in the world they happen to inhabit it.

Jhabvala wrote the minutest details about India which makes her novel occasionally dull for the Indian but enchants her European readers. She basically wrote for Westerners and not for Indians. Her western readers naturally are not familiar with Indian landscape, life and culture and hence Jhabvala is obliged to paint a large and comprehensive canvas. This often leads to exaggerated portrayals in her novels and perhaps this is the basic reason of her novels being more popular in the West than in India<sup>[2]</sup>.

### **Research-Hypothesis**

R P Jhabvala is called an American-British-German turned Indian rootless intellectual in this study.

### **Analysis & Interpretation**

During the stay of three decades in this country, Jhabvala, wrote about India as a European and for the Europeans, yet, she has a place of her own. This shows the rootless-intellect of the authoress about India. Her contribution to Anglo-Indian fiction will always remain incomparable and unique. The Indian image that she projected in her novel will always be remembered by her readers.

### **Analysis**

R P Jhabvala is a well-known Indo-Anglican novelists whose depiction of different facets of love and marriage is very much convincing as a social document of modern life. In her eight novels, she has created patterns of human relationships and while reading them we feel like watching the blue prints of lives as being lived today in the metropolitan cities. She is unfailingly perceptive when she describes the patterns of emotional relationships between the old and the new, the alien and the native. However, her portrayal, though ironic and satirical, is tempered with human passion.

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Jhabvala when started her literary career in India the country was still getting used to its newly acquired freedom and facing the problems it inherited. In this period of transition the clash between the Indian culture and the western influence left by the British was becoming more and more apparent. The older generation was trying to cling to tradition while the young were revolting against them. India was also faced with the problem of millions of refugees, who came in large numbers and settled down mainly in Delhi.

Mrs. Jhabvala observed it all from a western viewpoint. Gradually she felt depressed, though many a time she tried to come out of her gloom, become at least a neutral, somewhat sympathetic observer and at times taking delight in portraying some situations. Later on she appeared to be unable to cope up with this society and she herself said, she was never able to forget the Indian poverty and hence drifted into a dark mood never to come out of it again. Naturally, the Indian image in her novels changes along with her changing moods and attitudes.

In "Heat and Dust" the novelist says in the beginning of the novel, "India always changes people, and I have been no exception". Nor was Jhabvala, as is obvious from her novels, India did change her, but for the worse. She was one of those foreigners who could not merge herself in this society which proved too strong for her European nerves. Those very things, which had enchanted her initially, depressed her later on. So it is true that Jhabvala's novels do not project the Indian society as a whole.

As per Jhabvala's point of view Delhi is India. Her society is the middle-class-society, neither the rich nor the poor have any place in her novels. Jhabvala never ever presented the whole of India in her novels. She herself admitted this and V.A. Shahane analyzes this aspect of Jhabvala's novel and wrote<sup>[3]</sup>.

'Jhabvala's merit as a creative Writer lies in her being intensely aware of her limitations. She writes about possibly the only social segment of urban India, that she knows at first hand.'

Perhaps it was this limitation that Jhabvala imposed on herself that gave her an opportunity to describe everything with accuracy. Though we see a marked change in Jhabvala's attitudes and mood, there are certain common elements in her novels. Jhabvala wrote as an observer writing about things which enchanted her and later on about things she knew too well and found them to be beyond her tolerance and naturally she became bitter and critical<sup>[4]</sup>.

### Interpretation

Now, the question is –'was Jhabvala ever sympathetic towards Indian society or only wrote as a 'rootless' Indian intellectual. The answer has to be in the negative.

At times we are tempted to interpret her initial enchantment as sympathy. But how can a person be sympathetic unless he or she involves himself or herself completely with any society, and this involvement is missing in Jhabvala, so much so that she never even criticizes Indian society directly. Her criticism always comes through one of her Indian characters.

Jhabvala excels in presenting incongruities of human characters and situation. The incongruities have social, familial and cultural implications, and consequently in all the novels they become the main source of humor. She uses the techniques of comparison and contrast and also juxtaposes the old and the new. East-West encounter is important in all her novels, emphasizing the fact that the two worlds are entirely different<sup>[5]</sup>.

Perhaps it is because of this that all her European characters in her novels are unable to adjust in this society and want to go back. We find Jhabvala also in the same situation. She never loved this country in her last years as is obvious from her last novels "A New Dominion" and "Heat and Dust". She just hated everything Indian. She was herself one of those European who could not accept this society and finally left India in 1984.

### Conclusion

R.P. Jhabvala's approach for India is more satirical and critical than sympathetic and intimate. Her detailed descriptions of custom and manners in Indian life show her power of keen observation, her exposition of disharmony and conflict in conjugal life and family are no doubt realistic, but what she lacks in her novels is a comprehensive vision of 'holistic view' that transcends boredom into glory, fractions into wholeness and protests into acquiescence.

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