

## **East- West Encounter in the Fictions of Ruth Praver Jhabvala**

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The word encounter refers to casual or unexpected convergence. It's occurrence must bring change or transformation in some or many ways.

East can be west

West can be East

Just need Encounter.

It is humans nature to spread themselves around their surrounding. As soon as they get chance they begin to involve themselves in other's matter while involving others in their own matter. World history witnesses this view as we peep back. Western country England's impact on eastern country India is best suited example of this view.

Time to time research article explores the cross- cultural relationship or interaction and sheds light on the encounter between the orient and the occident. It traces out the multicultural perspectives and tries to maintain a compromise between the east and the west.

The proximity of the two opposing cultures is bound to give rise to a clash of two values. The encounter and the resultant clash find a natural reflection in many novels, stories or poetries of almost of writers. Ruth Praver Jhabvala is one of such very writers who have a close acquaintance with the life in the east and the west.

Jhabvala, though German born came to India at the age of 24 as the wife of Cyrus Jhabvala, a young parsi architect of India. Her marriage with easterner one brought her in touch of cultural variation which enforced her to write on theme so me how related to encounter between the easterner and the westerner. After her marriage only she wrote a dozen novels, twenty three screen plays, eight and short stories which show India in her preoccupation.

Jhabvala is variously described as inside outsider and outside insider. Her fictional world is pervaded by domestic atmosphere and deals with familiar theme. She mainly concerns herself with the problem of racial interaction. Jhabvala states:

The central theme of all my work, as I see it, is that I am European living permanently in India. I have lived here for most of my adult life and have an Indian family. This makes me not quite an insider but it does not leave me entirely an outsider either. I feel my position to be at a point in space when I have quite a good view of both sides but I am myself left stranded in the middle.

Jhabvala's novels are rooted in the clash between orthodox tradition of the Indian society and moderning, between materialism and idealism and finally the east-west encounter. Automatically, these things led to marital discord. Jhabvala portrays the theme of marital dissonance between wife and husband caused by clash between traditions and modernism and idealism respectively. She would be counted as a modern writer of contemporary India; contemporary not in the context of time but in the context of ideas.

For ten years, Jhabvala seems to be in love with India and she found everything there that we could see sensuous beauty in her early works. She expressed her deep feelings about India and gave it a name *Paradise on earth*. This love of India is also reflected in her early novels, particularly the first two, *To Whom She Will* and *The Nature of Passion* on her returning to Europe in 1960. Jhabvala found that she was strapped to a wheel that carried her through the stages she believes all Europeans who visit India inevitably pass through her essay *Myself in India* which she introduced in her third collection of stories, *An Experience of India*:

There is a cycle that the Europeans by European ; I mean all westerners including Americans-tend to pass through. It goes like this: First stage, tremendous enthusiasm-everything of Indian is marvelous; second stage, everything of Indian is not so marvelous; third stage, everything of Indian is abominable. For some people it ends there, for others the cycle renews itself and goes on. I have been through it so many times that now I think of myself as strapped to a wheel that goes round and round and sometimes I'm up and sometimes I'm down.

Eventually, she felt the need to escape from that wheel and in 1975, soon after the publication of her *Heat and Dust*, Jhabvala moved to Newyork.

East-West encounter and the difference they present in ways of living, cultural patterns and values are skillfully projected by Jhabvala climaxing in marital dissonance and break up of human bonds.

Cultural gulf between east and west appears to be endless and does not find any bridge in her fictions. It is also the ground reality of her fictions.

Relationship of Gulab and Esmond in her *Esmond in India* is fully bold to throw light on the impact of east-west encounter. Gulab is so charmed by Esmond's personality that she marries him against the wish of her mother Uma. Though neither Gulab is a true

representative of Indian culture nor is Esmond a true representative of the British in India despite neither Gulab get free herself from the shackles of her traditions nor Esmond could leave his pseudo modernity and self-centeredness. Gulab follows modernity only on the surface level in marrying Esmond. She just tries to confirm to Esmond's household rules and reverts to her own way of doing things at the moment she is out of the sight of Esmond either in the way she eats or in the way she nurture their child. This marriage ultimately proves Rudyard Kipling's:

East is east and west is west and the twain shall never meet.

Cathy in *The Couple Young Stranger Climate* reacts sharply to her bedroom and dressing room in her Indian husband's family:

She had a vision of the room that was being got ready for them, the same heavy shiny furniture as the rest of house a carpet, ample stain bed-spreads, matching the curtains.

Cultural difference of the young couple here lead to indifference, boredom and bickering and they behave like two ruffled birds in a cage.

The difference between the attitudes of east and west is prominently brought out in her novel *A New Dominion* through an injured dog near the ashram; western sensibilities for whom were quite different from Indian sensibility. Lee wanted to have the dog put out of its misery while Swami Ji would not allow it and bluntly rejects her plea and explains:

Everything must be experienced to the end. This is true for a dog as a man as for a bud on a tree. Everything must unfold and ripen. There are sunshine and gentle breezes and there is rain and bitter storms. We must accept and enjoy or accept and endure, as the case may be because we need both enjoyment and endurance, both sun and storm so that we may ripen into our fullest possibility. Is not it wonderful that even a dog should be allowed to grow into such ripeness and if for a dog, then how much more a human being.

Western attitude towards India is full of bitterness and meanness. For them India is dirty and everyone here is dishonest. An English girl comments in *Heat and Dust* on Indians:

They were all dirty and dishonest in India.

Hospitality being culture of India makes Indians able to bear their their annoyance on such type of comment though they hate to hear anybody talking in such as commented by European in Jhabvala's *The Man with the Dog*:

India is dirty and everyone is dishonest.

Encounter enables one to learn other's tradition and culture bit by bit as we find in Jhabvala's *The Householder* where Hans Lowe, the westerner one, inspite of being highly

materialistic, makes one astonished to see his behavior in spiritual context and his interest in Indian philosophy and yoga:

Everything is so spiritual – we can wash off our dirty materialism when we come here to your India. Off with it.

Beyond the Indian context Jhabvala builds coherent perfectly real characters and through them she explores human nature. Her writing is a lush in detail about all aspects of Indian life, class system including its culture and civilization.

The east is east and the west is west. Neither is better nor worse than the other. The philosophies and beliefs are not really absolute in these days and the age of cosmopolitan living but if truth be told, variations do exist even though in unproportionate proportions. It's the way of looking at life that by and large differs. For the purpose of clarity it has been assumed that Asia, including middle east depicts the eastern world while Europe and North America from the western world.

It is really surprising how Jhabvala who has devoted herself totally to the Indian scene, has received so little recognition from the press and the public in India. She is neither brutally frank like Nirad C. Chaudhary nor traditional in her themes like Mulk Raj Anand or R.K. Narayan. She has chosen for her subject matter the most vitally modern aspect of contemporary Indian life which moves around east-west encounter. She, very accurately, portrays the people and the situations peculiar to this theme. One of the main reasons of this could be her foreign origin as she has once said in an interview:

I feel myself an outsider-insider.

Jhabvala's feeling quoted above means one who does not belong to India by birth but by living long enough here, is able to comprehend and depict Indian culture realistically.

Jhabvala would be counted as a modern writer of contemporary India, Contemporary not in the sense of time only but in also in the context of ideas. She has been writing for the past twenty five years about India. It sounds almost impossible but we can find an explanation in the fact that social changes are planted easily but it takes a considerable time for them to reach maturity. Each step towards maturity brings its share of trials and tribulations.

Western civilization, no doubt, is suited for the westerners but it will mean ruin for eastern countries like India if easterners endeavour to copy it. This is not to say that we may not adopt assimilation whatever may be good and capable of assimilation by us, as it does not also mean that even the Europeans will not have to part with whatever evil might have crept into it.

When a westerner meets an easterner one relationship based on wariness is built. A very delicate balance has to be maintained throughout. One is merely sensitive and aware of his shortcomings while the other is too aware of such feelings and tries hard to ignore

these and yet behaves in a way which will slowly finish these. Jhabvala's use of this problem as one of the main themes in her fiction is perfectly understandable, since she is herself a foreigner, settled in India.

It frequently happens that half baked knowledge of one another leads to a hasty marriage but just observing a society is quite different from being a part of it. Social norms, family demands, one's own personal expectations, all lead to a lot of difficulties in a personal relationship like marriage. The Young couple find that it is not a question of only understanding each other, but also of living together in surroundings which are familiar to one and alien to the other. Thus, the conflict is two fold, one being personal and the other being social. Frequently, the economic aspect also steps in. The political side is very perfect one for controversy but Jhabvala prefers to leave it to the politicians and touches upon it in passing.

Impact of west can be noted in every aspect of eastern life either socially, politically, economically or industrially if we read India either during or after the British rule herein. Mainly big cities were naturally more affected by this air of change. This is the reason why Jhabvala opted Delhi to portray these changes of impact of east-west encounter.

Being one of the few very sensitive and prominent Indo Anglian writers, Jhabvala has presented not only the personal relationship of the westerner and the easterner but also one's sticking impact on another through her strong feminist vision.

Jhabvala describes the cultural clash between east and west skillfully and in detail while concentrating upon family life, social problems and personal relationships between easterner and westerner with all its opportunities for intrigue, clash between generations and marital feuding. Almost all her novels move around the same theme while tracing numerous permutations on family conflicts. She confines her attention to the middle class and the expatriates while presenting different varieties of experiences traced in India.

The east west encounter in its divergence is the juice of Ruth Praver Jhabvala's writing as she has used her ink to draw her mixture experience of cultural diversity which she faced while spending her life in eastern and western both places, former as adopted and next as paternal touch. Spending her time in her adopted country, She experiences the difficulties and impossibilities of a complete absorption which has exposed her to the Indian community and the expatriates living in India. It has brought her into contact with people of another culture. Her interaction with eastern culture has been transformed into art of her writing as she has derived the base of almost all her fictional works from this very transformation of culture of different- different places.

Through her Inan autobiographical essay published in the London magazine, Jhabvala writes:

I have lived in India for most of my adult life. My Husband is Indian. I am not and less so every year.... However, I must admit that I am no longer interested in India what I am interested in now is my self in India.

While learning Jhabvala's fictions it is clearly observed that very skillfully, She has dealt the universal theme of east- west encounter without having any biased attitude as her writing depicts the various strengths and weaknesses both of the east and the west. The theme of east-west encounter in Jhabvala's fictions runs through social, cultural and spiritual figures. Jhabvala does not seem ready to criticise easterners only who are terribly conditioned by the social, economic and religious traditions but also to criticise westreners who abandon their mother place for their interest towards the east. She has proved this by presenting a group of men and women both of the east and the west in her fictions where she, very boldly, emphasizes the reality that westerners are no longer as the conquerors in east but as the conquered ones. Truly, east-west encounter form an integral part in Jhabvala's fictions.

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