
DISCREPANCY BETWEEN THE OCCIDENT AND THE ORIENT IN RUTH PRAWER JHABVALA'S ESMOND IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Ruth Praver Jhabvala was the author of several novels, including novels, short tales, and two screenplays that won Academy Awards. She authored novels and short stories about Indian subjects and elaborated on her experiences there. Cross-cultural conflicts occur when two people who have different ethnic backgrounds in terms of inheritance, customs, and a way of life interact. Both a social and an individual level of conflict may be present. The “clash of cultures” has indeed been a prominent theme in Indian writing in English. The struggle between two lifestyles-Western and Oriental is explored in Ruth Praver Jhabvala’s fiction. In Jhabvala’s fiction, East-West interaction and encounter are explored and expressed in all of their diverse and multifaceted forms, including familial, social, cultural, and spiritual. Ruth Jhabvala’s specific areas of concern in the East-West relationships are the Western response and assessment to Indian spirituality, alien anger and pain during cross-cultural encounters, Western attitude versus Eastern attitude, value judgement in East-West relationships, feelings of passion and suppression, Western women's sensibility, marital dissonance, marital harmony, and separation pains. In the article, cultural conflicts are discussed in relation to the novel *Esmond in India*. In Jhabvala’s novel *Esmond in India*, mixed marriage is a significant issue. Esmond, a foreigner who wed an Indian beauty named Gulab, experienced cultural clashes with Gulab after their

marriage was consummated. We can observe both cultures coexisting under one roof because Gulab, who was born and raised in Indian culture, and Esmond, who was born and raised in a Western society. This article explores how the culture affected their lives of Esmond and Gulab.

The title of Ruth Praver Jhabvala's third novel, *Esmond in India*, which she wrote in 1958, immediately reveals the novel's theme—the experience of foreigner Esmond Stillwood in India. Jhabvala illustrates the East-West interaction and cross-cultural conflict here. Every human society has its own sociocultural system, or culture, which has some overlap with other systems. Physical environments and resources are responsible for the variation in sociocultural systems.

The culture in which an individual lives has a significant impact on his attitudes, values, ideals, and beliefs. As a result, culture is defined as the entirety of a man's behaviour that he has absorbed from birth through his surroundings, education, relationships with other men, etc. This indicates that a man's culture, or the cultures of a group of men who had similar upbringing, will differ from a group of men who experienced completely dissimilar upbringing. As a result, Eastern and Western cultures are diametrically opposed. East-West conflict is a frequent issue that many novelists have artistically depicted. Both sides of the writers have always been interested in the potential of Indian culture when it comes into contact with other Western institutions.

The authors of Indian fiction frequently take notice of an Indian returning from England or an English person attempting to settle in India. “The process of adjusting to a foreign rhythm of life, of living through estrangement, alienation and misunderstanding is painful enough and is carried to its logical deeper levels of intensity by novelists like Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao. The woman in such a context is on a quest of her identity of her validity as a human being. Jhabvala skits the issue of such patterns of identity. What she chooses to deal with is collisions of behaviour, series of cross talk interplay and interaction, looking down upon her character with an amused, ironic tolerance” (286).

Her primary artistic goal is to show the discrepancy between human desires, available means, and eventual fulfillment. Because of this, the frustrations, faults, and absurdities of middle-class existence serve as the foundation for her writing. The conflict between the commonplace and the mystical, the existential and the spiritual preoccupations, as well as the real and the romantic, is the source of the irony.

Additionally, Mrs. Jhabvala has researched the distinctive characteristics of India from the perspective of an outsider and knowledgeable observer. In Jhabvala's fiction, East-West connection and encounter are explored and expressed in all of their diverse and multifaceted forms, including familial, social, cultural, and spiritual. Ruth Jhabvala's specific areas of concern in the East-West relationships are the Western response and assessment to Indian spirituality, alien anger and pain during cross-cultural encounters, Western attitude versus Eastern attitude, value judgement in East-West relationships, marital incongruence, and marital unity.

The investigation of issues that impede harmonious connections between different races and cultures appears to be a prominent focus. This endeavor to create the best possible point of interaction between various cultures and races appears to have had only unfavorable outcomes.

R.F. Issar, a distinguished journalist, makes a valid attack on Jhabvala's contentions:

These formulations may have been all right for her personally but seem to me all wrong as generalizations. India does not force a white woman to become either memsahib or crank, it may well bring out either if the potential was there on arrival..... It is only some foreigners who think they have to undergo a kind of bilious sea-change mostly by awkward compliance with externals (5).

Esmond in India by Jhabvala is essentially Gulab and Esmond's narrative. The two people who are married and share a home, although having totally different hearts, centre the rest of the story. Living in the same home as strangers, they come from various cultural, social, and psychological backgrounds. They function like two separate magnet poles that are attracted to and repel each other. After independence, the novel imagines a future of metropolitan upper middle class. After India gained its freedom, the British who were still residing there were individuals who had neglected to leave India and instead remained there as tourists.

Esmond is one such individual who is overstaying his welcome while serving as a tour guide for foreign tourists. He marries Gulab, a stunning Indian woman, whom he fell in love with. He seeks her support as he pursues a career as an authority on Indian culture. The homely Gulab, however, prefers to stay at home and finds it awkward to be around foreigners. She believes she cannot adapt to their customs, mannerisms, etc. Esmond and Gulab tie the knot after falling in love at first sight, but when the initial excitement is over, they struggle to adapt to each other's customs, traditions, and social mores. Their love, marriage, and departure serve as allegorical representations of the interaction between East and West. The novel explores the social and political ramifications of the fortunes of the families of two dissimilar groups of characters.

Har Dayal's family is the first one, consisting of his wife Madhuri, his daughter Shakuntala, his son Amrit, and his daughter-in-law Indira. The other family consists of Ramnath, his wife Uma, their sister and Gulab, their daughter. Between these two families, Esmond serves as a sort of bridge. India serves as the backdrop for Esmond. The British who still reside in India are no longer the country's rulers but rather guests, some of whom have lingered too long and blended with the locals. Englishman Esmond supports himself by offering private lessons in Hindi, Indian history, and Indian literature to English Memsahibs, tourists, and affluent Indians. The wealthy class of Indians is so enthralled by western culture that they have lost their own rich culture and dress and act in a European-like manner.

Esmond is the only Westerner in the novel who at first finds enjoyment in what he observes around him. Indian Culture comes first, followed by Gulab, the woman he marries. When the wonderful period of his life ended and he had to face reality, he discovered Gulab to be a very lazy and untidy woman. He was drawn to her for her eyes and was head over heels in love with her. Gulab is sloppy and indolent, and he wants his home to be neat and organised. Gulab refuses to adopt Western lifestyles despite his requests for her to do so. Both of them behave in an extreme manner, and neither one wants to compromise with the other. They desire to lead independent lives in the same home. In the words of R.G. Agarwal,

The relationship between Esmond and Gulab is a conflict between two cultures: Jhabvala deals with the clash between two cultures in its simplest aspects. Putting oil in the hair, eating fried food or the smell coming from the kitchen is a trivial thing, but perhaps she means to suggest that life is made of trivialities and much depends on them in our day-to-day life. Because, she also shows the basic difference between the English and the Indian characters that keep them apart. According to her, the English are rational and the Indians emotional. Thus the clash between the two is also a clash between two conceptions of culture (35).

Esmond finds Gulab's eating habits repulsive. However, Gulab only enjoys eating in her own unique Indian style when her maid servant Bachani brings food from her mother's home. At eleven o'clock, she sat down to eat. She used her fingers to eat while sitting on the ground. Every time Esmond went out, she always did the same thing since she preferred to eat that way.

Esmond's eating habits provide a contrasting picture: He sat alone at his smart little dining-table in his smart little dining corner and ate his cheese salad? Everything on the table was colorful and modern - the bright table.... mats, the painted drinking glass, the earthenware plates of a rich dark green - so that 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 brass bowls (33).

Regarding their behaviour, Esmond and Gulab are both extremists. Despite being a foreigner, Esmond lacks the western culture. He acts in a pretended amorous manner. Gulab submits to him quietly despite being brutally treated by him. Esmond and Gulab each wish to raise their only child, Ravi, differently. Esmond requests that he be given boiled English cuisine to eat and that he sleep in a different bed. Gulab, however, wants to feed him hot Indian food when Esmond isn't home. As a result, both of them have spoiled the boy. Gulab views her husband as her God and clings to him like a typical Indian lady would. She doesn't mind Esmond mistreating her and bows to her husband as her Lord.

Esmond and Gulab's marriage deteriorates because they are unable to communicate with one another. Esmond, who is getting tired of Gulab, joins the European women for a picnic to Agra. There, he begins a relationship with Shakuntala, the only spoiled daughter of Har Dayal and a recent college graduate. She regularly attends the cultural gatherings, where she meets Esmond. Esmond's good looks entice Shakuntala, who falls for him. Esmond's marital status, which includes a wife and son, is unimportant to her.

Shakuntala, an immature teenager who succumbs to the lust of the flesh, exposes her emotions to Esmond without holding back. Esmond tries to convince Shakuntala that her parents placed her with him so that he could safeguard her because he is somewhat dubious about her ardour. However, Shakuntala gives the call of desire and the flesh when Shakuntala doesn't give his words any consideration. In an ironic manner, Jhabvala describes how a young woman who has recently graduated from college and is full of romantic ideas can succumb to physical temptation.

Esmond discovers Shakuntala in a highly happy mood when he walks out to see her in a market. Esmond, however, is reminded of Gulab's eyes when he first married Gulab as he gazes into her eyes. This implies that Shakuntala will eventually become another Gulab to him. Gulab is alone at home on the same day that Esmond had left to see Shakuntala in the market, and their new servant breaks into her chamber and makes advances toward her.

Gulab struggles to escape the servant's grasp and feels betrayed by her husband for failing to uphold his marriage vows by failing to defend her. She is unable to coexist with a husband who is incapable of taking care of his wife. She makes the decision to depart from him and return to her own people. Even if Gulab departs from him, Esmond senses Gulab's presence everywhere around him. She loved meat, spices, and strong perfumes, and he is constantly reminded of this. With her around, Esmond feels almost suffocated. In Betty's presence, he wishes to erase the memories of her.

He is reminded of England by Betty. When he was tired of Gulab, he used to always go to Betty's house, but right now he needs to make hasty plans to return to England. Esmond enjoys being

around his fellow citizens despite his love and admiration for India's art and culture. He considers tutoring to be his actual calling and loves what he does. But he desires to escape from Shakuntala's and Gulab's grasp. As he claims, he wants to be free, "And no wife. At least, no wife like Gulab. It always came back to that same thing. She, even more than lack of money, strangled his life and his personality. If it were not for her, he could always be gay and carefree and charming" (202).

His only wish is to return to England, where he missed the solid grey buildings and people, and where the sky was kept in reasonable proportions. At the conclusion of the novel, Esmond understands how homesick he is and how much he wants to return to his own country, and it is abundantly evident that he yearns for freedom from both Shakuntala and Gulab. He gets a good feeling just thinking about England. In comparison to his quest for freedom, his interest in Indian literature and art is minimal and shallow. He feels youthful again when he considers returning to England.

The primary characters of the novel all yearn for freedom, according to an analysis of the novel. The novel is set in an India that is largely free. At the start of the novel, Shakuntala yearns for freedom. After college, she had time to herself at home. She had mentally prepared herself for this life of freedom and was hoping for these times: "She had no regrets about her finished college life; because now a new life was starting for her, her real life, her grown-up life, for which up to now she had been only preparing. That was why she felt so excited and happy all day long" (7).

The novel's opening alludes to Shakuntala's desire for independence—the ability to fall in love before marriage. Shakuntala's actions do not in any way represent the conduct of the typical Indian woman. She views herself as a modern young woman with fresh ideas, but because she has been exposed to romantic poetry and is influenced by these beliefs about love, she loses her composure and behaves quite badly. Shakuntala's freedom and amorous aspirations are dashed when a marriage arrangement is made with the son of a friend of her father. Her dreams all come to an end.

She now has a romantic memory of her relationship with Esmond and plans to have a traditional married life as young Mrs. Bhatnagar. Esmond likewise yearned for independence; he yearned to be free of the knots of his tight marriage ties. He is unrestricted in his relationships; he is not bound by marriage. While Indians view marriage as a partnership that lasts a lifetime, modern westerners see it as a business deal. He visits his English friend Betty whenever he gets tired with Gulab, pretending that they are both in England. He longed to be in England more than anywhere else, but being with her was almost as good as being there.

When Esmond travels to Betty's house at the end of the novel because he is annoyed by Gulab's "animal presence," he imagines that she will give him a cold drink and they will discuss travelling to

England. To be near her quick, lively mind and her quick, lively body, which was spare, cool, and dry and reeked of hay like an English field in June, was at least in part an escape.

Gulab, on the other hand, yearns for separation from her husband to a lesser extent. She enjoys having her husband away because she can do as she pleases and eat whatever she likes. However, having Esmond around changed her mood. Not even her own son Ravi could she cuddle. She was really annoyed that the child slept in a different room.

Gulab, however, longs for freedom, as the verse below suggests: “when Esmond was not at home, she would stay on her bed for hours and hours; for there was really no reason for getting up. The only thoughts she allowed to come to her were - one, when would Esmond be away from home during the day and for how long” (13). Because Esmond would be away from home on Wednesdays and Fridays, Gulab enjoyed having the entire day to herself on those days. She was aware that on certain days, her mother would send her food. Despite the fact that she like spicy cuisine, she had to feed her kid cheese and salad or Esmond would become irate. Even though Ravi was only three and a half years old, he was intelligent and never mentioned to his father what he ate with his mother. Esmond was mockingly referred to by her mother's housekeeper Bachani as someone who subsists solely on grass.

Before Esmond arrived, Gulab would ask Bachani to make everything clear. Gulab was thus happy and unrestricted when Esmond was away from his house. Gulab's secret longing is let loose when the servant tries to assault her and when her husband fails to uphold his duties to her. She finally divorces her husband in a fit of wrath and returns to her family and her own people.

Har Dayal and Ramnath are the novel's other supporting cast members. They are close friends who studied and fought for India's independence together.

Har Dayal lived a comfortable and content life. His wife Madhuri takes great satisfaction in how well she gets along with English women. One could say that Madhuri's home is a fusion of the best elements of eastern and western cultures. Both cultures mix together in this home. In Shakuntala's room, we can hear the melody from "Swan of Tuonela," and the kitchen is filled with the aroma of Indian food. Even their dining habits deserve special note because they always offered English food for lunch and Indian food for evening.

Madhuri prides herself that both her sons have had education in foreign countries. But she loves India as well. In her own words: “She was a great believer in going abroad. Though she did not believe in staying there for good. Europe, England, even America, were all right for education or sightseeing but one always had to come back to one’s own dear India..... It was safe here, comfortable” (22).

Ramnath, a close friend of Har Dayal, donated all of his riches for the sake of the nation. He and his wife Laxmi live a life of poverty and isolation. Their lone child, Dr Narayan, serves the underprivileged in rural areas. For the good of the nation, both the father and the son gave their lives.

Jhabvala treats both her Indian and European characters with a great deal of irony. The two styles of living are contrasted in this book. Jhabvala demonstrates how neither Europeans nor Indians can adapt to Western lifestyles. Jhabvala has harsh words for both foreigners and Indians living in India. The contrast between the two lifestyles, habits, and likes and dislikes creates conflict in the mixed marriage, ultimately resulting in Esmond and Gulab's separation.

Esmond and Gulab's lives end tragically on the surface of reality, but they retain optimism in their dreams. After the split, Gulab goes back to live with her mother, while Esmond starts having dreams about playing tennis with Betty in England. He contemplates a second marriage in England as well.

Cultural confrontation is a common and an important scenario of the present time. Due to globalization human activities have spread across the world. People confront each other from different cultures. This confrontation has led to a number of issues that need our attention. The best way to express this problem is through literature, and R.P. Jhabvala may have done so through her writings. In this context, a study of cultural clash in *Esmond in India* is made.

The two styles of living are contrasted in this novel. Jhabvala demonstrates how neither Europeans nor Indians can adapt to Western lifestyles. Jhabvala has harsh words for both foreigners and Indians living in India. The contrast between the two lifestyles, habits, and likes and dislikes creates conflict in the mixed marriage, ultimately resulting in Esmond and Gulab's separation. Esmond and Gulab's lives end tragically on the surface of reality, but they retain optimism in their dreams.

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