

INTRODUCTION

A) Ruth Praver Jhabvala : Biographical Details -

Ruth Praver Jhabvala was born on 7th May, 1927 in the German city of Cologne. Her father was a lawyer who emigrated with his family to England in 1939 during the dangerous days of the Nazi threat, as they were German Jews. Ruth was introduced to English language in her German primary school.

From 1939 to 1951, she lived in England and took a degree in English at the University of London. She also wrote a thesis on 'The Short Story in England 1700-1750' for her M.A. Degree. When in England She married an Indian architect, Cyrus Jhabvala, who came from an old Parsi family from India and after her marriage came to India and set up her house in the city of Delhi. After spending twenty-four years in India, Ruth Jhabvala migrated to America in the year 1975.¹.

B) Her Works :

Jhabvala has been writing stories and contributing to various magazines since her school days. When she was in Germany, she wrote stories in the German language and after migrating to England, she started writing them in English. She has eight published novels and four short story collections to her credit besides some scripts for the cinema.

HER NOVELS :

- 1) To Whom She Will - 1955.
- 2) The Nature of Passion - 1957.
- 3) Esmond In India - 1958.

- 4) The Householder - 1960.
- 5) Get Ready For Battle - 1962.
- 6) A Backward place - 1965.
- 7) A New Dominion - 1972.
- 8) Heat And Dust - 1975.

SHORT-STORY COLLECTIONS :

- 1) Like Birds, Like Fishes - 1963.
- 2) An Experience of India - 1966.
- 3) A Stronger Climate - 1968.
- 4) How I Became A Holy Mother - 1976.

C) An Anglo - Indian or Indo Anglian ?

Jhabvala's is an interesting case of cultural synthesis. Born of German Jewish refugee parents with German as her mother-tongue, educated in England and having studied the English language, she became by her marriage an adopted daughter of India. The material for her fictional works was supplied by India and her expression accepted the English language, which is not her mother-tongue. Thus her foreignness attracts our attention as soon as we take up her books for close study.

There are two sharp camps of critics who place Jhabvala in the groups opposed to each other. For Geetanjali Singh, the most crucial question is :

"Can Ruth Praver Jhabvala, a Polish Jew, born in Germany, married to an Indian, shuttling between New York and Delhi be counted as an Indian author ?"²

M.K.Naik discusses her case at length and concludes that she probably belongs to the no man's land. One may

Compare Jhabvala's case with that of Anand Coomarswami, who was born of a Sri Lankan father and English mother and was neither an Indian Citizen nor had any experience of life in India. Yet the entire orientation of his thought is so unmistakably Indian that it is impossible to reject him the title of an Indian English Writer.³ In the same way Ruth Jhabvala, according to K.R.S. Iyengar,

"Shows such close familiarity and deep understanding of Indian social life (especially in her earlier work) that she has rightly found a place in the history of Indian English literature"⁴

V.A. Shahane admires her sure grasp of her Indian material but says that :

"Jhabvala should not be linked with other creative Indian writers in English such as Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao or R.K. Narayan, nor with women novelists such as Kamala Markandaya or Nayantara Sahgal. She is in a way unique."⁵

Paul C. Verghese admits that Jhabvala

"has competently dealt with urban life in India"

but he excludes her from the list of Indian writers in English because she is "not of Indian stock."⁶

Meenakshi Mukherjee also, explaining her views about Jhabvala says :

" I have, however, restricted my use of the term, Indo - Anglian to include only the writings of those who are Indian and who have written in English. Thus I left out writers like R.P. Jhabvala and V.S. Naipaul."⁷

The problem is 'should a writer be called Indian simply because his or her material deals with India ? Labels such as 'Insider' , 'outsider' seem to lose meaning when applied to a writer, like Ruth Jhabvala. In spite her inclusion, by some critics, among the Indian writers, it is to be noted that Jhabvala decided to leave India and settle down in America after 1975. As she confesses in an autobiographical essay :

"I must admit that I am no longer interested in India. What I am interested in now, is myself in India."⁸

On being asked by R.G. Agarwal if she could be considered an Indian writer, Jhabvala gave this explanation asking another question herself :

"No, how could I be ? I'm not, am I, there's no getting away from the fact. I write differently from Indian writers because my birth, background, ancestry, and traditions are different. If I must be considered anything, then let it be as one of those European writers who have written about India."⁹

Thus it would be proper to place Jhabvala in the well-known tradition of Anglo-Indian writers.

This dissertation proposes to study the four collections of Jhabvala's short stories with a view to gauging her success or otherwise in projecting an authentic image of India. So far, there have been very few studies of her short stories as her achievement as a novelist has overshadowed her signal efforts in the genre of the short story. Most of her critics concentrate on and analyse only her novels, the short stories being relegated to a cursory treatment of a small chapter even in a book-length study.

Haydn Moore Williams, as early as 1973, wrote a monograph on Jhabvala in which he analysed her novels only even though she had at least two collections of stories to her credit on that date.¹⁰ Williams has nothing to say about her stories.

V.A. Shahane's book on her fiction, after studying the Comic and Ironic modes in her novels, turns to her short stories which he calls 'Mode in Miniature'. Shahane analyses some of her stories in a perceptive manner and concludes :

"A few of Jhabvala's stories can challenge Comparison with the best in this genre written by Indian or European writers on India."¹¹

Shahane's generic approach has its own place, valuable as it is to appreciate her achievement. But it is too brief to cover her entire corpus of stories.

Yasmine Gooneratne is the only critic of Jhabvala's who has considered her entire achievement. In her study of Jhabvala's fiction she analyses only a few of the stories from the point of view of studying her technique. Admirably documented and cogently argued, her book does not do full justice to the short stories.¹²

Ramlal Agarwal's Ruth Praver Jhabvala : A study of Her Fiction, (1990)¹³ has some valuable and new material in the form of the interviews that Jhabvala gave to him and others. But Agarwal also gives very brief comments on the stories as his attention is engaged by her formidable achievement in the field of the novel.

Apart from these books, I must mention a couple of articles on Jhabvala's fiction : David Rubin's "Ruth Jhabvala in India"¹⁴ comes nearer to my attempt in this dissertation to present a detailed study of her stories. Seminal as his approach is, it is limited to the study of the novels only.

Another article, Brijraj Singh's "The post-colonial East-West Encounter in Jhabvala's 'A stronger climate'" has some perceptive analyses but deals with only one of her collections!¹⁵

This quick survey of the available criticism of Jhabvala's works makes it clear that her stories are hurriedly treated by all her critics and none has studied them for the image of India.

I propose to study here the four collections of her stories in detail for their projection of India's image. The

design of my study will be as follows :

I study the collections in the chronological order keeping in mind her portrayal of India in them.

Chapter I of my dissertation focuses attention on her first collection, Like Birds, Like fishes (1963). Here I try to give analyses of her early stories.

Chapter II makes a scrutiny of the second collection, An Experience of India (1966) and compares it with her first collection.

Chapter III gives an in-depth Analyses of the stories in A stronger climate (1968), her best collection

Chapter IV gives a brief study of her last collection How I Became a Holy Mother (1976).

Chapter V winds up the discussion with the Conclusions I have arrived at after undertaking this interesting odyssey in the Jhabvala land.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES.

- 1) The best source for the biographical information is :
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- 2) Geetanjali Singh, 'Images of Migration', Times of India Review of Books, 28 June, 1991, P-6.
- 3) See M.K. Naik, A History Of Indian English Literature, New Delhi : Sahitya Akademi, 1989, P.3.
- 4) K.R.S.Iyengar, Indian Writing in English, Bombay : Asia Publishing House, 1962, P-461.
- 5) V.A. Shahane, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, New Delhi, Heinemann, 1971, P-13.
- 6) Paul C. Verghese, Problems of the Indian Creative Writer in English, Bombay : Somaiya, 1971, P. ix.
- 7) Meenakshi Mukherjee, The Twice Born Fiction, New Delhi : Heinemann, 1971, PP. 15-16.
- 8) Ruth P. Jhabvala, An Experience of India, London : John Murray, 1971, P. 8.
- 9) See "An Interview with Ruth P. Jhabvala" in Ramlal Agarwal, Ruth Praver Jhabvala - A Study of Her Fiction, New Delhi : Sterling, 1990, PP. 111-124.
- 10) Haydn M. Williams, The Fiction of Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Calcutta : Writers Workshop, 1973.
- 11) V.A. Shahane, 1971, P. 175.
- 12) Yasmine Gooneratne, 1990, PP. 234-260.
- 13) Ramlal Agarwal, 1990.

- 14) David Rubin, "Ruth Jhabvala in India", Modern Fiction Studies, Winter, 1984, Vol. 30, No. 4, P. 672.
- 15) Brijraj Singh, "The Post-Colonial East West Encounter in Jhabvala's 'A Stronger Climate' see in G. S. Amur and S.K. Desai, Colonia Consciousness in Commonwealth Literature, Bombay : Somaiya, 1984.
