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Techniques in Ruth Praver Jhabvala's Fictions

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Abstract

This research article focuses on an in-depth textual analysis of Jhabvala's novels and helps to bring out the use of social reality as an integral part of a narrative technique. Jhabvala is a silent listener of different aspects and shades of multi-cultural Indian reality. In her *Ivory Tower*, she shows her intention towards India along with her experience of India. Her early writings are fascinating but later she is bored with India's poverty and corruption and the social issues of India in her age and she describes tradition and modern, the East and the West. Her thought is comic but gradually her focus on Indian society and hypocrisy takes her to the realm of irony, later full of bitter. In her narration, she uses the perfectly suitable Indian images and vocabulary. Themes and techniques of her novels show the journey of Jhabvala.

Keywords

Ruth Praver Jhabvala; Narrative Techniques; and Literary Techniques.

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Ruth Praver Jhabvala is a unique post-colonial English writer and she is eccentric because of her birth, parentage and culture. Though the ancient writers could write class stories and caste tussle, Jhabvala writes about hotchpotch world of insidencies of the Indian society. She knows her boundary, so she bound to the domestic frictions and hypocrisies of the Indian middle class life. Themes do not make a great writer in India, because it has diverse culture, but proper presentation of themes in an effective way makes a great writer. Thus literature is in a way of saying it. It is very simple for the English writers to present their themes to the readers in English but for the Indo-English writers, have to face number of artistic problems, because they have to handle their native themes in English. Only to simplify the linguistic problem, the novelists have chosen themes from cosmopolitan and urban atmosphere and language is not a hurdle there. A special kind of English is common means of communication in New Delhi. But Jhabvala's language is very artistic. It's not Queen's English, nor the English of highly educated people of India. The selection of language is Jhabvala's own invention and that is absolutely suits her characters. She picks up themes from the urban life and aristocratic people of Delhi, so she has no language problems. Meenakshi Mukherji remarks:

Urban culture, especially the more affluent levels of it, where English is often the language of daily living does represent a real slice of Indian life, and although narrow, it is varied enough for the novelists to find fictional raw material as Praver Jhabvala has done in some of her novels. (10)

Jhabvala has not used any new and original themes, but they have been exploited for long by her predecessors. All the other Indo-English writers focus on woman's emancipation or in describing cultural clashes and concern for India's poor and downtrodden. But Jhabvala uses satire or irony to complete her writings. Even though she was aware of India's poverty and in her essay *Myself in India* she explains: "The most salient fact about India is that it is very poor and very backward" (17).

Despite this statement, she does not write about India's poor condition and poverty because she has never lives with them. But as a writer must know how poverty infects the high class people in India and how it changes the attitude and life style of them. Like Jane Austen, Jhabvala's novels are comedies, she always gives details about dress, style, life, houses and appearance rather than individuality. Irony and satire is the hallmark of her writings. The comedies of Jhabvala always unite the lovers together at the end as in the 18th century's fiction. A letter in *To Whom She Will* that solves all problems and clears up all uncertainties, Krishna writes to Amrita from Calcutta, to tell her that he loves her. The reader is not permitted to see the text of this letter but feels its content when Amrita reads it in Delhi, rapture makes her pace the lawn with the letter in her hand and circle between the hedge and plantain tree, distressing her mother's cook by forgetting to eat her dinner. *To Whom She Will* is instance of the way Jhabvala regards literary modes.

There are different classes of society have their different life styles in her writings. In *To Whom She will*, Pt. Raj Bahadur centres his entire existence with his protective shell. The house is full of antique pieces and of heavy furniture that show his past glory. Jhabvala is not bad at drawing the poor refugee but she depicted the upper class society effectively. The newly- rich are purchasing costly thing to show their wealth. In her *The Nature of Passion*, every character has his own taste and hobby, the family is united everywhere

with the power of money. Jhabvala uses the 18th century models for the last time. Likewise, in Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*, she uses selfishness and enthusiasm for social climbing. Many of Jhabvala's novels reflect Austen's settings, background and theme. Her novels are written in Indian setting, particularly Indian joint family system. The Indian joint family system has given the enough of fictional material because of its relationships and complexity.

The next fictional technique that Jhabvala uses in her novels is the description of interior settings to expose, and sometimes dissect hidden truths about individual character. Though the Europeans love the Indian culture, they have different look in their home, they always live in their style. Jhabvala depicts the ironic scene of Esmond's house and Esmond sitting in his dinning corner for meal. Jhabvala's description of that scene is marvelous in its kind.

Because of the impact of the British people on India's culture, a new subject matter came in the hands of the novelists that was the encounter between East and West. Raja Rao in his *Serpent and the Rope*, go through the philosophical and mythological interpretations, whereas Jhabvala used this theme in man-woman relationship context. Jhabvala uses this theme of cultural clash in an effective manner because of being a foreigner; she faced these kinds of problems in India. This theme is beautifully developed in her *To Whom She Will* and *Heat and Dust*. *To Whom She Will* is an uneasy blending of two worlds, not only of the conservative and the modern in changing society, but of materials and methods drawn from the West and the Orient. The picture of the homes of Pt. Rai Bahadur and Tara on the one hand and the Sahnis and the Anands on the other present a striking contrast. The latter's home resembles an Indian slum where men and cattle live in the same area and Hari's younger sister milking the cow and shouting at her children shows the slice of real India. Esmond in India is a full length study of a European who in the initial stage of his life in India is deeply touched by her depth and

philosophy and falls in love with beautiful Gulab whom he thinks the embodiment of the Orient beauty. But soon he is disillusioned with the country and his wife as well. Esmond longs for England “where there were solid gray houses and solid gray people, and the sky was kept within decent proportion” (73). Meenakshi Mukherji, in her *The Twice Born Fiction* studies how the theme is handled by individual writers and comes to the conclusion that “The Indo-Anglian novelists more often than not is trying to reconcile within himself two conflicting systems of value” (45).

Jhabvala sets herself to treat India as her subject, some elements are selected and presented by her permanently. The most essential and valuable elements of Indian civilization in her writings are Indian classical music and literature, devotional songs, dance, art and architecture.

This theme takes place in *A Backward Place* with her own images. Now the Hungarian Etta longing for home because Indian will bring only germs and diseases. To seek spirituality in India Charissa came to India but that is now disillusioned, these women are being caught and cannot escape. One European Judy who passed her life worse with her father’s death of cancer and mother’s suicide. Jhabvala is somewhat similar to Rudyard Kipling in her art and vision. But Kipling is attracted by mystic, the occult, the supernatural and the spiritual; Jhabvala’s handling of seemingly trivial dialogue and seemingly commonplace incident to expose the inner landscape of her character’s minds and souls is one of the features of her characteristic technique that is well advanced in *Get Ready For Battle*, she has come a very long way from the arguments that took place among the daughters of Pt. Rai Bahadur Saxena in *To Whom She Will* which were lively, entertaining and illustrative aspects of conflict in Indian upper class society in the 1980s, but of limited significance in relation to the psychology of the characters involved. The language is common and earthly one but the characters are flat and weak. Jhabvala does not develop the character but put them in series of situations. So the events

develop the social picture and set the characters in different relations. Most of the incidents are party, meeting, quarrel or discussion. There is an action in the conclusion. H. Moore Williams recognizes the truth about Jhabvala's characters and says: "The tragedy of modern India as depicted in Jhabvala's novels is the total failure of communication between the Babbitt and the Yogi" (53).

That is the keen observation. The epigraph and the title of the novel borrowed from Gita. The Yogi and the Babbitt are treated as perverted fellows in the novel *Get Ready for Battle*. In *The Nature of Passion*, Lalaji is represented as a selfish and greedy man. He gives bribes and thinks that corruption is an important one to lead a business. To show his wealth to the society, he believes in vulgar display. He regrets about the way he is going.

Consistency is the key feature of characters that shows their manners clearly. In his review of *Heat and Dust*, published in *The Times of India*, Nissim Ezekiel talks about Jhabvala's static characters, monstrous distortions, etc. He seemed to have overlooked the fact that in a novel of character, the characters are bound to be static and larger than life.

Jhabvala's characters are suitable to the comedy of manners. Her ambition is not to give any moral and philosophical ideas through writing but to satirize and ridicule the society. So she merged irony with satire in all her writings. The ironic portrait of Esmond Stillwood strikes our mind, "who has come specially to India to teach you people all about your own country" (72) says the red English man. His head is full of polysyllabic Sanskrit titles, he can reel off dates (circa, and all that), and he is supposed to make a living by teaching Indian and world culture to young society ladies.

India, being a land of spiritualism, the Sadhu as ascetic becomes a commonplace figure in the fictional narratives who reincarnates himself time to time for the salvation of humanity. The old belief of Avatar has got slightly modified in the incarnation of swamis.

The people like swamis, commercials, professionals and service class people are all represented at superficial level. Nissim Ezekiel criticizes Jhabvala not because she offers no insights into Indian life but because he thinks that her fiction is flawed by her inability to fully realize her characters. In a review of *Heat and Dust*, Ezekiel says: “Jhabvala’s major weakness as a novelist is her inability to create any genuinely complex or even simple inner life for her characters” (88).

But the other Indo-Anglo novelists write about the exploration of the human consciousness; for Jhabvala remained confined to the depiction of manners, traditions and the domestic details. She depicts the picture of drawing room, the interiors and also the kitchen and dining table. Amrita’s mother cooks breakfast for Krishna, Tara arranged fancy parties and the preparation for Amrita’s arrival and plates full of ladoos, burfies and gulabjamuns are perfectly described. The rich businessmen, their sons and daughters were like tamarind, parathas, puris and potatoes. They always keep apples, oranges, nuts, pineapples and buttermilk in their home. Thus the eatables and eating habits are beautifully depicted.

Jhabvala gave perfect picture of the dress worn by different sections of the society. In her *To Whom She Will*, she explains how to wear Indian saree. Always the Punjabi likes to wear Salwar-Kameej for special occasions. But the other people wore sarees. In *Esmond in India*, the newly rich, wore London suits and started wearing Indian sarees. The swamis used to wear spiritual dresses, the orange colour long gown as in *The Householder* and *A New Dominion*. Though describe food and dressing, she never forgets to present the middle class people’s living conditions and quarrels of the neighbours. In *To Whom She Will* the dispute in the neighbourhood of Anands ruins the well-arranged betrothal day of Sushila and Hari. The same sort of quarrel takes place in Ram Nath’s neighbourhood in *Esmond in India* which drives Lakshmi mad with rage to enable her to blame her husband for providing her this

miserable life. It seems from the presentation of such scenes that Jhabvala repeats herself very often and turns her fiction into a formula.

Customs and traditions of India also presented with a rich fiction by the novelist. The marriages were arranged by the elders of the families but rebellion against families is looked down with contempt. Amrita wanted to marry her lover but that idea was not accepted by their family members and finally tradition was established. Then Amrita decided to marry Krishna. People who are living in and around Delhi had their reunions at a wedding, a betrothal, a name giving and a funeral. In *The Nature of Passion*, a clear picture of Indian culture is established. Likewise the habits of the people are marvelously described. Men generally cough before entering the women's quarter and the women automatically pulled their sarees over their heads. Traditional ways of worshipping the gods on religious occasions are also vividly depicted. In every field of life, traditional and cultural heritage is appreciated and untraditional ideas are supposed to be anti-social and evil. In most of Jhabvala's novels, she does not describe much about religion. But Hindu religion is dominated. There is no description about mosques and churches. Delhi is presented in a beautiful way by Jhabvala. Delhi railway station, shopping centers, The Palace, radio station, all these are fascinating. She also described about cultural organizations and social institutions.

Jhabvala is somewhat similar to R.K. Narayan in using ironic, traditional English and standard prose. As a novelist, problems of Jhabvala are to narrate an event, the choice of idioms and the mode of describing a scene.

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