

## I. Introduction

Ruth Praver Jhabvala was born in Cologne, Germany, on May 7, 1927, the daughter of Marcus and Eleonora Praver. Her family's heritage was German, Polish, and Jewish. She emigrated to England in 1939, became a British citizen in 1948, and obtained 'Masters in English' from Queen Mary College, London, in 1951. She married C. H. S. Jhabvala, an Indian architect, and went to live in India. Jhabvala formed a profound, albeit conflicted relationship with the country. With her Indian husband and Indian-born children, Renana, Ava, and Feroza, she has had a unique opportunity of seeing the subcontinent from the privileged position of an insider but through the eyes of an alien. Thus, rootedness in a culture and people, an issue with which she is intimate, provides a wellspring for her screenplays, novels, and stories.

The author has returned to India, a place of ancient wisdom and spiritual equilibrium, time and again. Her exposure to the waves of young foreigners who descended upon India in the 1960s only to be taken advantage of unscrupulous 'mystics', influenced such books as *Three Continents*. Indeed, the theme of religious charlatans permeates much of Jhabvala's work. While Jhabvala would spend three months of each year in New Delhi, she settled in New York in 1975, living near her friends and film colleagues, the Merchant-Ivory duo. Her work on film scripts with the team, which began in the 1960s, enriched her technique as a writer of fiction and widened her vision. One may well view this move to New York as initiating the second major influence on the author's body of work, giving rise to her collection of short stories, *East into Upper East: Plain Tales from New York and New Delhi* (1998). Jhabvala would contribute regularly to *The New Yorker*.

In the 1970s, Jhabvala's short fiction became more pessimistic. Some of her characters seek to escape from the world by following spiritual leaders, as does the protagonist in the title story of *An Experience of India*; others, like the minister in

“Rose Petals,” from the same collection, have hopes of improving society; still others, such as the minister’s wife, dedicate their lives to amusing themselves. Whether they reside in New Delhi or New York, the characters in *East into Upper East* live with the same uncertainties. Although these later stories often end unresolved, one can find satisfaction in their artistic perfection.

Though Ruth Praver Jhabvala is known mainly as a novelist, she is also an accomplished writer of short stories, film scripts, and essays. Among her collections of short stories are *Like Birds, Like Fishes, and Other Stories* (1963), *A Stronger Climate: Nine Stories* (1968), *An Experience of India* (1971), and *How I Became a Holy Mother and Other Stories* (1976); *Out of India* (1986) is a selection of stories from these volumes. *Shakespeare Wallah* (1965; with James Ivory), *Heat and Dust* (1983), and *A Room with a View* (1986; based on E. M. Forster’s novel) are her best-known film scripts.

Jhabvala’s early stories reflect the delight that, in her story “Myself in India,” she describes as a Westerner’s initial reaction to India. Like Jane Austen, to whom she was compared by several critics, Jhabvala here emphasizes the comic elements in family life, though she does satirize self-deception, snobbery, or pretentiousness. Jhabvala’s characters emerge from their adventures relatively unscathed. For example, the narrator of “My First Marriage,” from *Like Birds, Like Fishes and Other Stories*, regards her seduction and abandonment as incidents that merely make her more interesting.

Jhabvala has achieved remarkable distinction, both as a novelist and as a short-story writer, among modern Indian writers. She has been compared to E. M. Forster, though the historical phases and settings of the India they portray are widely different. The award of the Booker Prize for *Heat and Dust* in 1975 made her internationally famous. Placing Jhabvala in a literary-cultural tradition is difficult: her

European parentage, British education, marriage to an Indian, and – after many years in her adopted country – change of residence from India to the United States perhaps reveal a lack of belonging, a recurring refugee consciousness. Consequently, she is not an Indian writing in English, nor a European writing on India, but perhaps a writer of the world of letters deeply conscious of being caught up in a bizarre world. She is sensitive, intense, ironic – a detached observer and recorder of the human world. Her almost clinical accuracy and her sense of the graphic, the comic, and the ironic make her one of the finest writers on the contemporary scene.

In 1984, Jhabvala won the British Award for Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) for Best Screenplay for the Ismail Merchant-James Ivory adaptation of *Heat and Dust*, and in 1986 she won an Academy Award for Best Adapted Screenplay for *A Room with a View*. In 1990, she was awarded Best Screenplay from the New York Film Critics Circle for *Mr. and Mrs. Bridge*, adapted from Evan S. Connell, Jr.'s novels. Jhabvala received an Academy Award for Best Adapted Screenplay in 1992 for Forster's *Howards End* and an Oscar nomination for her adaptation of Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* in 1993. In 1984, Jhabvala won a MacArthur Foundation Award, and in 1994 she received the Writers Guild of America's Laurel Award.

Jhabvala's distinctive qualities as a novelist grow from her sense of social comedy. She excels in portraying incongruities of human behavior, comic situations which are rich with familial, social, and cultural implications. Marital harmony or discord, the pursuit of wealth, family togetherness and feuds, the crisis of identity and homelessness – these are among the situations that she repeatedly explores in her fiction. She writes with sympathy, economy, and wit, with sharp irony and cool detachment.

Jhabvala's fiction has emerged out of her own experience of India. "The central fact of all my work," she once told an interviewer Ian Jack, "is that I am a European living permanently in India. I have lived here for most of my adult life. This makes me not quite an outsider either." Much later, however, in her another essay "Myself in India," she revealed a change in her attitude toward India: "However, I must admit I am no longer interested in India. What I am interested in now is myself in India [. . .] my survival in India" (19).

This shift in attitude has clearly affected Jhabvala's fiction. There is a distinct Indianness in the texture and spirit of her first five novels, which are sunny, bright, social comedies offering an affirmative view of India. The later novels, darkened by dissonance and despair, reveal a change in the novelist's perspective.

In almost all of her novels, Jhabvala assumes the role of an omniscient narrator. She stands slightly aloof from her creations, an approach which has advantages as well as disadvantages. On the one hand, she does not convey the passionate inner life of her characters, many of whom are essentially stereotypes. Even her more fully developed characters are seen largely from the outside. On the other hand, she is a consummate observer. She has a fine eye for naturalistic detail, a gift for believable dialogue, but she is also an observer at a deeper level, registering the malaise that is characteristic of the modern world: the collapse of traditional values, the incongruous blending of diverse cultures: sometimes energizing, sometimes destructive, often bizarre. Thus, her fiction, while steeped in the particular reality of India, speaks to readers throughout the world.

In her first novel *Amrita*, there is reconciliation between two individuals (symbolic as well of a larger, social integration) at the center of the action. Amrita, a young, romantic girl, has a love affair with Hari, her colleague in radio. Their affair is portrayed with a gentle comic touch: she tells Hari of her determination to marry him

at all costs; he calls her a goddess and moans that he is unworthy of her. Jhabvala skillfully catches the color and rhythm of the Indian phraseology of love.

*The Nature of Passion*, deals with one of the three kinds of passions which are distinguished in the *Bhagavad Gītā*: that which is worldly, sensuous, pleasure-seeking. This passion, or *rajas*, rules the world of Lalaji and his tribe, who represent the rising middle class and whose debased values become the object of Jhabvala's unsparing irony. She presents a series of vignettes of the life of the affluent – such as Lalaji and the Vermas – who migrated to India after the partition and continued to prosper. Here, Jhabvala's characters are not intended to be fully rounded individuals; rather, they play their parts as embodiments of various passions.

*Esmond in India*, as its title suggests, is concerned with the conflict between two cultures – Indian and English. Esmond is an Englishman, a shallow man with a handsome face who tutors European women in Hindi language and culture and serves as a guide to visitors. He is an egotistic, aggressive colonial, and Jhabvala is relentless in her irony in sketching him, especially in a scene at the 'Taj Mahal' where he loses his shoes. The pretentious Esmond is cut down to size and becomes a puny figure.

*The Householder*, her next novel is perhaps her most successful, least problematic, most organically conceived novel. A true social comedy, it is a direct, simple impression of life. It centers on the maturation of its likable central character, Prem, a Hindi instructor in Mr. Khanna's private college. Prem is a shy, unassuming young man, in no way exceptional, yet his growth to selfhood, presented with insight and humor, makes for a compelling fiction.

Jhabvala's one of the most widely praised work is *Heat and Dust*, which has the complex plot that traces parallels between the experiences of two Englishwomen in India: the unnamed narrator and her grandfather Douglas's first wife, Olivia. It has a strong current of positive feeling beneath its surface negativism. Olivia, though she

discards her baby, remains loyal to her heart's desire for the Nawab, and the narrator, while not accepting her lover, wishes to rear her baby as a symbol of their love. This note of affirmation heightens the quality of human response in *Heat and Dust*, which is also notable for its fully realized characterizations.

*Three Continents* is the lengthiest and broadest in scope of Jhabvala's novels. Like the later *Shards of Memory*, the tale revolves around an Indian mystic and his followers. Young narrator Harriet Wishwell, the daughter of a rich but troubled American family, and her gay twin brother, Michael, are raised by their grandfather after their parents' divorce. Educated in international schools, the twins go in search of a deeper meaning to life than what their American heritage provides. Their wishes are seemingly answered when they meet Rawul, whose movement, the Fourth World, is intended to transcend racial and political divisiveness and establish a state founded on peace and love. Michael believes he has found Nirvana in Rawul's son, Crishi, while Harriet also falls under his spell. The twins and Crishi form a sexual threesome, and eventually Harriet, besotted by Crishi, weds him, only to find herself continually frustrated by his lack of devotion to her. Rawul's, and by proxy Crishi's, charismatic hold on his devotees proves Harriet and her family's ultimate undoing.

Almost all Jhabvala's novels are set in India with the main focus on middle class people. And these writings show her exploring at her best the possibilities of the Indian people, life and places for her fictional focus. Jhabvala, through native language and portrayal of characters in a calculated way, manages to keep a balance between the Indian values and European ones. In this issue, Haydn Moore, with humorous and ironical touches, argues that "the dual personality of Jhabvala's nature enables her to treat Indian customs and traditions with tactful comedy" (10). She is positioned at a vantage point which gave her the committed involvement and also the necessary distance to bring in the expatriate experience into her fictional focus. She

found herself tossed between the worlds of her bringing and of her permanent stay.

Her greatest problem was whether she should merge with Indian soil or stay as a

European. Her inner conflict and personal dilemma is revealed in her autobiography:

Should one want to try and become something other than what one is?

I don't always say 'no' to this question. Sometimes it seems to me how

pleasant it would be to say 'yes' and give in and wear a sari and be

weak and accepting and see God in a cow. Other times it seems

worthwhile to be defiant and European and all right be crushed by

one's environment; but all the same have made sure attempt to remain

standing. Of course this can't go on indefinitely and in the end I'm

bound to lose – if only at the point where my ashes are immersed in the

Ganges to the accompaniment of Vedic hymns, and then who'll say

that I have truly merged with India. (qtd. in Ali 93–94)

Her European sensibility is delicate and refined to accept the literally squalid Indian

environment so tellingly captured in the title of the novel. Her ambiguity is expressed

in her confession that she needs to escape India because she is not the type of person

culturally who live there but she always gets bored with Europe and wants to come

back to India. In her introduction to "An Experience of India," Jhabvala comments on

the cycle through which Westerners pass in India, and says:

First stage, tremendous enthusiasm – everything Indian marvelous;

second stage, everything Indian not so marvelous; third stage,

everything Indian abominable. For some people it ends there, for

others the cycle renews itself and goes on. Westerners who are in India

for a short while usually pass through the first stage and, before they

reach the second stage, they return home. (qtd. in Agrawal 61)

These three stages are the most possible experiences that all outsiders go through when they decide to have their time spent in India. Some enjoy the first stage and return, some stay up to the second stage and start to suffer the ambivalent situation and some are bound to stay until they strain themselves in the third stage and start hating everything about it. Jhabvala, her remarks and her attitudes towards Indian cultural understanding are criticized by R.G. Agrawal, an Indian critic. As he remarks:

Many of Jhabvala's characters in her later fiction are in India to 'find themselves'. It is the *gurus*, the temples, the chanting if hymns talk about spiritual matters that attract a lot of Westerners. There are also quite a few who are in India because of a chance marriage. In most cases such marriages break up sooner or later but by the time this happens it is too late for them to return to their own countries. (61)

Finally, there are Westerners who come out to India to understand the country. It becomes really serious for those who, for one reason or the other, cannot get back to their own countries. Those, who have strong personalities put up a fight to preserve their identities, Jhabvala's novels illustrate the entire cycle.

### ***A Backward Place: A Synopsis***

*A Backward Place*, initiated the second phase of her career, marked by dark, despairing comedies disclosing a world out of joint. In this novel, too, Jhabvala began to focus more attention on encounters between East and West and the resulting tensions and ironies. The novel's title, which refers to a European character's condescending assessment of Delhi, suggests its pervasive irony; neither Indians nor Europeans are spared Jhabvala's scorn. While it features an appealing protagonist, the novel is too schematic, too much simply a vehicle for satire.

*A Backward Place* basically portrays three types of Western points of views towards India through its three major characters; Judy affirmates, Etta negates and

Clarissa seems ambivalent. Style in *A Backward Place* measures characters' or writer's standing in relation to bi-culturally tuned individual being. Language becomes a gauge of a society's intellectual development (as measured by rational Western standard) and simultaneously points back, in its creative variety and command.

The emergence of cultural perspective in critical theory has opened a new dimension in the study of imaginative literature which articulates cross-cultural relationship and its differences. *A Backward Place* too deals with the cross-cultural relationship between the East and the West especially between India and Britain. Here the conflict of cultures is presented at political and racial level with emphasis on the difference between the two different cultures. Jhabvala, in the novel, presents a cultural ground where English people and native Indians try to understand and try to become friends with each other. According to T. S. Anand, "Most of Jhabvala's novels revolve round Europeans in India. Their co-existences with Indians is ambivalent and mostly unpleasant" (114). The inability of the Europeans to create lasting ties with the Indians, their misreading of each other's motives inhibit a meaningful dialogue between them and the proverbial gulf between the East and the West yawns at them. And the same time the inner enthusiasm to merge with the counter culture, to escape from the past experiences and to honor humanly love the same West seems to be assimilating with the East. And in the mean time the unsureness of the situational challenges and in betweenness of the two cultures, the West and East stand as just shaking hands rather than becoming one.

Jhabvala intends to write India as a friend of India but she cannot do so because she – as the creation of Europe, as the product of Western education and as the representative of Western education and of Western rational intellectual preoccupation – belongs to European heritage; at least by blood and race if not by

inclination. While dealing with India and Indian culture, she cannot come out of discursive inbetweenness block as she, in course of representing India, creates images and stereotypes which designate an Indian as somehow inferior or subordinate, as the subject to imperial rule. But even though she is approaching India from the point of view of British incomer, she is overwhelmed when she encounters the mysterious landscapes, the mystic religious rituals and cultural practices of India. Her discovery of India, then, turns out to be the discovery of the otherness within herself, the realization that India is unrepresentable and that, the English view of life is limited. Jhabvala, thus, is forced to have ambiguity in her attempt to represent Indian reality. As a result, she, again has to take a side to come out of this ambiguity and thus with her language, comes to celebrate the Indianness; Indian sense of nature, Indian sense of life, Indian sense of value. What Jhabvala has represented, to say precisely, is neither an Indian India nor a European view of India.

The present study of *A Backward Place* therefore raises the problem about the experiences of expatriates in India and the mixed marriage of Indian and European, focuses attention on the strange love-hate relationship that exists between the East and the West and the emigrants' quest for their identity. At the same time, the novel can also be taken as different characters' experiences of the inner conflict between the traditional Indian values and the lure of the western materialistic prosperity.

Jhabvala's great merit as an artist is that she has eminently succeeded in giving artistic expression to this sense of mild alienation in her awareness of man and society in India. Man and society in India today are involved not merely in a change from tradition to modernity but in a process of cultural communication. She portrays this change with an acute awareness and sensitivity.

The first chapter sets the hypothesis of the thesis with a view to addressing the problem as found in the novel *A Backward Place*. The critical tools with which to

analyze the novel also are mentioned there. It also contains a general introduction to the author and the novel.

The second chapter elaborates on the working tool which will be employed to examine the text. The principal theoretical tool will be the theories of cultural studies like identity, acculturation, hybridity, diversity and dislocation etc. which show how the experience and attitudes of the same cultural people living in the same atmosphere and cultural location can be different as the result of two communicative cultures.

The third chapter presents a detailed textual analysis with textual citations so as to show how the novel documents diversity among the people living in a same place with same cultural heritages. Here, it will be proved that the location or contact zone India can be perceived with different perspectives even by the same people of same cultural history in detail.

The final chapter concludes the thesis with a brief reviewing observation of the work affirming that the hypothesis projected at the beginning of the paper remains consistent with and supported by the consequent chapters.

## **II. Communication of Cultures and Cultural Diversity**

This chapter discusses the theoretical modality on the basis of which this thesis will analyze the text. Cultural studies are generally utilized in the literary field too to understand and create diversity among contemporary writings.

### **Culture and Cultural Studies**

Culture, actually seems to be multi-accented term with a complex and still open history, which itself expresses the complexity of general human history. This term has been applied to any custom, art, social institution, literature, music etc. which is cultivated and practiced in society. Culture, therefore, has become the realm of broader human consciousness that is both developed and shaped by society, religion, history and geography. By now culture has become a controversial subject in socio-anthropological circles because of the multiplicity of its referents and with which it has too often been invoked.

Culture is the fabric of meaning in terms of which human beings interpret their expression and guide their actions; such actions are internally related with the structure of the society and the people. For E. B. Tylor, “Culture or civilization [. . .] is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (1).

The study of culture within society, anthropology and literature has different aspects. The idea of culture as ‘people’s whole way of life’ first arose in 19th century. Culture, for Matthew Arnold, was the best that has been ‘thought and known’ in the world. Arnold argues, “Culture is a pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know, on all the matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought and said” (1). Here, Arnold having stood in the conservative stance, separating high and low culture has deep reverence to the tradition. He opines to impair the sacredness; to dislocate the customs inherited from the tradition is to take a step

backwards into darkness and anarchy. In his opinion, culture has its roots in tradition. In anthropology culture means the very part of environment that is a creation of man. In ordinary speech a man of culture is a man who can speak language other than his own, who is familiar with history, literature, philosophy, fine art of whose actions and behaviours are controlled and guided by wisdom and judgment to anthropologist, however, to be human is to be cultured. There are different and numerous cultures in the world such as Russian, Indian, Nepali, American, British, Chinese and so on because they have different ways of life. Sir Edward Tylor defines culture as “belief, art and morals, law costumes and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (qtd. in Ramji Gautam 13).

Neo-Marxist Raymond Williams views that culture is not similar to that of Arnoldian line. According to him “Culture is constituted by the meaning and practices of ordinary men and women. Culture is a lived experience: the texts, practices and meaning of all people as they conduct their lives” (4). During nineteenth century, culture was accepted as a whole and distinctive way of life and as the form of human civilization reading, observing and thinking the means toward moral perfection and social good. Culture is the high point of civilization and the concern of an educated people. Culture also plays an important role in the field of ‘art and literature’. It is a matter of creativity and change. It shows the specific social relations of reproduction. It gives a moment of meaningful production in society. Culture gives us to engage with, in complete production of meaning and values and act of social survivals. As Hall rightly observes, “Culture depends on its participants interpreting meaningfully what is happening around them, and making sense, of the world” (2).

By the late twentieth century, the concept of culture has been totally changed. It has become an issue of literary writing basically in English literature, postcolonial criticism and the postcolonial theory of discourse, which has made culture the most

contested space. Culture by then borrowed the terminologies of other fields of criticism. Often cited terminologies, these days in the study of culture are Foucauldian notion of 'power' and 'discourse' and Gramsci's concept of 'hegemony'. Post-colonial perspectives emerge from the colonial testimony of 'Third World' countries and the discourses of 'minorities' within the geopolitical divisions of east and west, north and south. They focus their critical revisions around the issues of cultural difference, social authority, and political discrimination in order to reveal the antagonistic and ambivalent moments within the 'rationalization' of modernity.

Postcolonial criticism bears witness to these unequal and uneven forces cultural presentation involved in the contest for political and social authority within the modern world order. It gives us idea of culture as an uneven and incomplete production of meaning and value which is often composed of incommensurable demands and practices produced in the act of social survival. Culture reaches out to create a symbolic textuality to give the alienating everyday an aura of selfhood, a promise of pleasures. As Bhabha rightly observes:

Culture is a strategy of survival of both transnational and translational. It is transnational because contemporary postcolonial discourses are rooted in specific histories of cultural displacement. It is translational because such spatial histories of displacement make the question of how culture signifies, or what is signified by culture, a rather complex issue. (438)

To study the relationship between the east and west, which is governed by discourse, Edward W. Said, has shown the interest for the cultural dimension standing in a position of a cultural critic rather than showing a political interest. On the one hand, he sees the scope of orientation as matching with the scope of 'empire'; on the other, he focuses on culture representing as well as functioning as a form of

hegemony. Through these connections Said finds Matthew Arnold as the person to use culture as a powerful mean of differentiation. For Arnold culture is an ideal but for Said “culture with its superior position has the power to authorize, to dominate to legitimate, denote, interdict and validate: in short i.e. the power of culture to be an agent of and perhaps the main agency of powerful differentiation with its domain and beyond it too” (9). This argument has shown culture as two-faceted view; it has created a situation of domination and appropriation, and it has also shown one aspect of culture as more powerful than the other.

We find that conservative perspective regards culture as static and fixed but modern perspective emphasizes on it as an ongoing process of formation and reformation. From the theoretical perspective one cannot assume a single, central culture that renders individual experience coherent and meaningful, for it is inescapably different, diffusive and dissonant: culture, therefore, is a sort of theatre where various political ideological causes engage one another. It goes beyond the placid realm of ‘Apollonian quality’ and it can even be a battle ground where different causes expose themselves to the light of day and contend with each other. So, culture always keeps on changing. Formation and reformation always pave the way for making new and new culture. Therefore, Bhabha views culture in space of ‘indeterminacy’.

Cultural Studies is a multi or post disciplinary field of inquiry which blurs demarcation between itself and other subjects. As intellectuals have emphasized that the intellectual promise of cultural studies lies in its attempt to cut across diverse social and political interests and addresses many of the struggles within the current scene, Richard Johnson describes cultural studies as “a process, a kind of alchemy for producing useful knowledge and codify it” (qtd. in Grossberge et al. 8). Cultural Studies is difficult to define because it has no referent to which we can point. This

term is the product of the ensemble of new vocabularies and practices emerging on the site occupied by cultural criticism and theory. It is a set of practices constituted by the 'language game' of cultural studies. It is not a tightly coherent unified movement with a fixed agenda but a loosely connected group of tendencies, issues and questions. The study of culture has taken place in a variety of academic disciplines like sociology, anthropology, literature etc in a range of geographical and institutional spaces. In this context, Bennet defines, "[I]t is concerned with all those practices, institutions and system of classification through which they are inculcated in a population particular values, beliefs, competencies, routines of life and habitual forms of conduct" (28).

Arising from the social turmoil of the 1960s, cultural studies is composed of element of Marxism, post-structuralism and postmodernism, feminism and gender studies, anthropology, sociology, race and ethnic studies, film theory, urban studies, public policy, popular culture studies, and post-colonial studies; those fields that concentrate on social and cultural forces that either create community or cause division and alienation. As Hall writes: "By culture, here I mean that actual rounded terrain of practices, presentation, languages and customs of any specific society, I also mean the contradictory forms of common sense which have been taken root in and helped to shape popular life" (9). So, cultural studies would not warrant its name without a focus on culture.

Culture itself is ideological, ideology is the central concept in cultural studies because it means the mental framework – the language, the concepts, categories, imagery of the light, and the system of representation with different classes, social groups deploy in order to make sense, define, figure out and render intelligible way the society works. While looking at culture from this perspective, Karl Marx's opinion "We make culture and we are made by culture, there is agency and there is

structure” (qtd. in Storey xiv) is significant. And John Fiske maintains, “culture in cultural studies is neither aesthetic nor humanistic in emphasis but political” (115). What he means by this is that the object of study in cultural studies is not culture defined in a parochial sense, as the object of supposed aesthetic excellence, nor as a particular way of life, whether of people, a period or a group. Stuart Hall defines cultural studies as “a project that is always open to that which it does not yet know, to that which it cannot yet name” (278). Again he argues it can’t be just any old thing, which chooses to march under a particular banner. It is serious enterprise or project and that is inscribed in what is sometimes called the “political aspect of cultural studies” (278). And he treats culture as the actual grounded terrain of practices, presentations, languages and costumes of any specific historical society as well as the contradictory forms of ‘common sense’, what have taken root in and helped to shape popular life.

On the whole, cultural studies is favoured by qualitative methods with their focus on the cultural meaning. Guerin and others explain, “It is committed to examining the entire range of a society’s beliefs, institutions and communicative practices including arts” (241). Cultural studies are associated with a particular topic, social activity, society and with the related people. Cultural representation plays important role within cultural studies to show the representation of people and society. Thus, a good deal of cultural studies is centered on question of ‘representation’, that on how the world is socially constructed and represented to and by us, Chris Barker defines “Cultural studies in a body of theory generated by thinkers who regard the production of theoretical knowledge as political practices” (5). It means cultural studies are the representation of different intellectuals and their concepts in the present moment. In these sense cultural studies, is a ‘discursive

formation', which provides ways, or talking about the forms of knowledge and conduct association with a particular topic, social activities in the society.

Cultural Studies does not only focus on preserving, transmitting and interpreting culture or cultures but also it democratizes the space of discussion and brings the diversities together. As Graff and Bruce write, within cultural studies, "The aim of cultural criticism is something more than preserving, transmitting and interpreting culture or cultures, rather, the aim is to bring other in a common domestic space of discussion, diversities that had remained unequal largely because they had remained apart" (434-35).

Cultural Studies is a cross-disciplinary enterprise, which blurs the boundaries between itself and other subjects. It is generally seen as a route to bring the university back into contact with the public with a counter disciplinary breaking down of intellectual barriers. As Lawrence Grossberg and others emphasized that the intellectual promise of cultural studies lies in its attempt to "cut cross-diverse social and political interest and address many of the struggles within the current scene" (Grossberg et al. 1).

A good deal of cultural studies is centered on question of 'representation', that is how the world is socially constructed and represented to and by us. The central strand on cultural studies can be understood and the study of culture as signifying practices of representation, which requires us to look for the textual generation of meaning. It also demands investigation of the modes by which meaning is produced in a variety of contexts. Cultural representation and meaning have certain materiality since they are produced, enacted, used and understood in specific social context. Culture is articulated with moment's production but not determined necessarily by that moment. The meaning of a text (culture or set of practice) is produced in the interplay between text and reader so that the moment of consumption is also a

moment of meaningful production. And the meaning is same all the time because of dynamic situation of cultures. Hall writes:

There are many kinds of metaphors in which our thinking about cultural change takes place. These metaphor themselves change. Those which grip our imagination and, for a time, given our thinking about scenarios and possibilities of cultural transformation, give way to new metaphors, which makes us think about these difficult questions in new terms. (287)

Thus Cultural Studies refer to a multistrand intellectual movement that plans cultural analysis in the context of social formations, seeing society and culture as historical processes.

### **Cultural Identity**

The central area of concern in the historical process or cultural studies has come out as identity during 1990s. Yet identities do not exist in the domain of cultural studies as to be perceived. They have no essential or universal qualities. Rather they are discursive construction, the product of discourses or regulated ways of speaking about the world. In other words identities are constructed, made rather than found, by representations. In Balibar's words "Identity is never a peaceful acquisition; it is claimed as a guarantee against a threat of annihilation that can be figured by 'another identity' or by an 'erasing of identities'" (186).

Every identity that is proclaimed is elaborated as a function of the other. It would be more precise to say that identity is a discourse of tradition. It is a 'production' which is never complete, always in process and constituted within, not outside representation. Hall argues that there are at least two different ways of thinking about cultural identity. The first position defines 'cultural identity' in terms of one shared culture a sort of collective, 'one true self' which people with a shared

history and ancestry hold in common within the terms of this definition. Hall argues in this respect: “Cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as own people, with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning” (111). Cultural identity along with the points of similarity also has the critical points of deep and significant difference which constitute what we really are or rather what we have become. One can’t speak for a long time with any exactness about one experience one identity without acknowledging its other side. Such is the second notion of cultural identity for Hall. He argues:

Cultural identity in the second sense is a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being’. It belongs to the future as much as the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. (112)

Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, identities are subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in mere ‘recovery’ of the past, which is to be found, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within the narratives of the past. Indian experience, Indianness, Africanness, Carribeanness, and other such identities are constituted out of the traumatic character of the colonial experience. The way in which these identities are subjected and positioned in the dominant regimes of representatives were the effects of a critical exercise of cultural power and normalization. The dominant or superior culture has the power to influence or dominate the other.

Nevertheless this idea of otherness as inner compulsion changes our concept of 'cultural identity'. In this perspective Hall writes "cultural identity is not a fixed essence at all, lying unchanged outside history and culture" (114). Further it is not some universal and transcendental spirit inside on which history has made no fundamental mark. Thus, identity is not 'once and for all' nor is a fixed origin on which we can make some final and absolute return. Of course, identity is not a mere fanaticism either. It is something which has histories or past which continuously speaks to us. Identities are constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth. Cultural identities, thus, are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or future, which are made, within the discourse of history and culture. Not an essence but a 'positioning' where there is always a politics of identity, a politics of position which has no absolute guarantee in an unproblematic, transcendental 'law of origin'.

The birth of dissemination of democratic politics of modernity and with the rise of postcolonial theory, aggressive assertions of cultural identity along with wider international solidarities finally made these larger and more expansive solidarities more compelling than those of national culture. National consciousness paved the way for emergency of an ethnical and politically enlightened global community. "The consciousness of self", Fanon writes, "is not the closing of a door to a communication. [. . .] National consciousness, which is not nationalism, is the only thing that will give us an international dimension" (17-19).

After colonialism, there emerged a new transformation of social consciousness, which exceeded the rectified identities and rigid boundaries invoked by national consciousness. In other words, post colonialism, facilitate the emergence of what Said called an enlightened 'postcolonialism' where there is the possibility of a more generous and pluralistic vision of the world. Post nationalism pursues various

indeterminacies in the colonial encounter in order to bridge the world divided between westerner and native which is done through a considerably less embattled account of colonialism by depicting how the colonial encounter contributed to the mutual transformation of the colonizer and colonized. The phenomena is viewed as a transformation, as an interactive, dialogic, two-way process involving complex negotiation and exchange. Because of the globalization process set in motion by modern imperialism in this 'postnational' era, each society is carrying the 'melting-pot' syndromes. Though many marginalized writers have been trying to create their own independent identity preserving the past and assimilating the present through multiple ways.

### **Acculturation**

Acculturation is one of the prominent modes of cultural communication in the context of shifting global tendencies. It refers to that process where diverse cultural traits and complexities are modified because of the continuous contact of different cultures by making the cultures and cultural identities hybrid and the society multicultural. Acculturation comprehends those phenomena which results when groups of individuals having different culture come into contact for a long time, with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either one or both groups. The history of each society is characterized by a set of values, beliefs and practices and each culture has a codified exhaustive set of instructions concerning behavioural issues. Cultural interactions stem from the prolonged contact between two or more sets of values, norms which can be extremely different from one another and such contacts may extend "from domestic contacts to global interaction", and "between hegemonic western culture and developing non-western societies" (Dallmayr 14).

This can then result in cooperation or competition between cultures. In the first case exchange and mutual support can take place while in the second case hostility and conflict may arise. The second alternative is the most frequent one. Acculturation only seldom occurs as a bi-directional process. More often, cultural modification concerns the change a cultural group has to introduce in collective as well as individual behaviour, in order to coexist and interact with the norms and habits of a dominant social system. It usually applies to ethnic minority's immigrants, indigenous groups. Because of the involuntary character of the acculturation process minorities are mostly forced to adapt to the cultural system they live in, in order to cope with the dominant environment and become active part.

People belonging to the acculturating minority maintain strong relationship within their group. They keep their own traditions, behaviours, and values. They create a separate sub-culture, which is minimally influenced by the dominant group. In such situation the contacts between the social systems are subsequently very restricted. Individuals originating from the acculturating group are not accepted as member of the dominant culture. They are marginalized or segregated by the dominant group regardless of their wish to integrate and/or to assimilate.

Acculturating individuals manage to acquire values and behaviours characterizing the dominant culture in which they live, at the same time preserving their own traditions and habits. This kind of interaction with a dominant culture has also been labeled as 'biculturalism'.

A bicultural individual knows and understands two different cultures and he/she is able to show dual modes of social behaviour that can be alternatively used depending upon which culture the individual is interacting with. But it does not necessarily mean that a bicultural individual daily comes into contact with the dominant culture, nor that the two cultures share a common geographical area. But

bicultural competence is a laborious work. It requires the creation of effective interpersonal relationships without losing personal identity. It implies knowledge of the dominant language, sense of being grounded in both cultures. Not everyone is able to acquire this competence.

However, the effort an individual has to perform in the acculturation process is too often not rewarded. In several cases integration remains a remote goal or even an unrealistic ideal. It is very difficult to estimate the intrinsic absolute value of one cultural system as compared with others. As a matter of fact, depending on the historical period and the geographical locations, each model of social structure offers some advantages and imposes some constraints on individuals.

### **Dislocation**

Modern society has witnessed a number of international ruptures and fragmentation in cultures. Dislocation as a phenomenon is the consequence of willing or unwilling movement from known to unknown location. The very term dislocation is defined in *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies* in this way:

A term for both the occasion of displacement that occurs as a result of imperial occupation and the experiences associated with this event.

The phenomenon may be a result of transportation from one country to another by slavery or imprisonment, by invasion or settlement, a consequence of willing or unwilling from a known to unknown location. The term is used to describe the experiences of those who have willingly moved from the imperial 'Home' to the colonial margin, but it affects all those who, as a result of colonialism, have been placed in a location that, because of colonial hegemonic practices, needs, in a sense, to be 'reinvented' in language, in narrative and in myth. (73)

Diasporic communities formed by forced or voluntary migration may all be affected by this process of dislocation and regeneration. Dislocation in a different sense is also a feature of all invaded colonies where indigenous or original cultures are often dislocated, if not annihilated. At best, they are metaphorically placed into a hierarchy. This hierarchy ignores its institutions and values in favour of the values and practices of the colonizing culture.

Dislocation can also be extended further to include the psychological and personal dislocation resulting from cultural denigration as well as voluntarily chosen status. Dislocation is a structure which is characterized by never ending process as there is no single articulating or organizing principle; rather constantly being dislocated by force outside it.

### **Hybridity**

Hybridity, one of the most widely employed and most disputed term in post colonial theory, proposed by such prominent postcolonial critics as Homi K. Bhabha, Sara Suleri, Robert Young and Frantz Fanon, is the concept of 'hybridity'. Hybridity commonly refers to the creation of new transculturation forms within the contact zone produced by colonization. Hybridization takes many forms: linguistic, cultural, political, racial etc. About hybridity Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin write, "[. . .] hybridity has been seen as part of the tendency of discourse analysis to de-historicize and de-locate cultures from their temporal, spatial, geographical and linguistic contexts, and lead to an abstract, globalized concept of the textual that obscures the specificities of particular cultural situation" (120).

The term 'hybridity' has been most recently associated with the work of Homi K. Bhabha, who analyzes the colonizer/colonized relations stresses their interdependence and the mutual construction of their subjectivities. All cultural statements and systems are constructed in space and that space is the third space of

enunciation where cultural identity always emerges in contradictory and ambivalent space, which, for Bhabha makes the claim to a hierarchical ‘purity’ of cultures, untenable. The recognition of this ambivalent space of cultural identity may help to overcome the exploits of cultural diversity in favour of the recognition of an empowering hybridity within cultural difference may operate. As Bhabha further puts:

It is significant that the productive capacities of this third space have a colonial or postcolonial provenance for a willingness to descend into that alien territory may open the way to conceptualizing an inter-nation, culture, diversity of cultures but on the inscription of articulation of cultural hybridity. (38)

It is the ‘in-between’ space that carries the burden in meaning of culture, which makes the notion of hybridity so important. It is frequently used in postcolonial discourse to mean simply cross-cultural ‘exchange’ and the idea of equal exchange. Because of it, Bhabha opines, “there emerges a new culture that neither purely colonized nor purely of westerner, it is third space of enunciation” (34).

Hybridity can be understood by referring to Bhabha’s notion of ‘mimicry’ and ‘ambivalence’ and Thomas B. Macaulay’s description of ‘intermediate’ class of people. The ‘ambivalence’ in postcolonial discourse refers to cultural crossover of various sorts emanating from the encounter between colonizer and colonized, alien and native. It is mixture of both parties and in it the second one mimes the culture, language and values of the first one thinking that to be superior like them. But mimic men never become the white men or native and they never get superiority of the white or native. Bhabha asserts, “The menace of mimicry in its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse and disrupts its authority. Any of it is a double vision that is a result of the partial representation/recognition of the colonial object” (881).

For the hybridization of the societies the westerner's different missions are responsible. In the name of civilizing missions, colonizer or European imposed the education system to the colonized or non-western people and countries to create an indeterminate class of people by refining and training natives making them civilized or rich. Training certain elites in English or Western education, language and culture, British rulers would be able to create 'intermediate' class of people who would be distinguished from the general mass of people or native population by the help of their ability of mimicking colonizers.

As defined and designed by Macaulay, intermediate class means "[. . .] as class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect" (61). The intermediate classes of people are almost 'white' in terms of cultural training, manner, languages, mode of speech and accent and function as interpreter between British and the millions of native people they ruled. Bhabha's analysis which is largely based on the Lacanian conceptualization of mimicry as camouflage, focuses on colonial ambivalence. On the other hand, he sees the colonizer as a snake in the grass who speaks in 'a tongue that is forked' and produces a mimetic representation that "emerges as one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge" (85). Bhabha recognizes the colonial power carefully and establishes highly sophisticated strategies of control and dominance through the reformation of the category of people referred to by Frantz Fanon in the phrase, 'black skin/white masks' or as 'mimic men' by V.S. Naipaul.

On the other hand Bhabha immediately diverts his pertinent analysis by shifting the superlative certainty of the colonizer and the strategic effectiveness of his political intentions into an alarming uncertainty. Macaulay's Indian interpreters along with Naipaul's *Mimic Men*, he asserts "part object of metonymy of colonial desire, end of emerging as inappropriate colonial subjects, by now producing a partial vision

of the colonizer's presence" (88), de-stabilize the colonial subjectivity, unsettle its authoritative centrality, and corrupt its discursive purity. Actually he adds that mimicry repeats rather than represents, and in that very act of repetition, originality is lost, and centrality de-centered. What is left according to Bhabha, is the trace, the impure, the artificial, the second hand. Bhabha analyses the slippages in colonial political discourse, and reveals that the jaunts-faced attitudes towards the colonized lead to the production of a mimicry that presents itself more in the form of 'menace' than 'resemblance' more in the form of rapture than consolidation.

Hybridity, Bhabha argues, subverts the narratives of colonial power and dominant cultures. The series of inclusions and exclusions on which a dominant culture is premised are deconstructed by the very entry of the formally-excluded subjects into the mainstream discourse, the dominant culture is contaminated by the linguistic and racial differences of the native self. Hybridity thus can be seen, in Bhabha's interpretation as a counter narrative a critique of the canon and its exclusion of other narratives. In other words, the writer want to suggest first, that the colonialist discourse's ambivalence is conspicuous illustration of its uncertainty, and second, that is migration of yesterday's 'savages' from their peripheral spaces to the homes of their 'masters' underlies blessings invasion that by 'Third-worlding' the centre, creates 'fissures' within the very structures that sustain it.

Hybridity, thus, is an expression of everyday life in the post-imperial era. It continuously alters the national and international. Hybridity draws on local and transnational identifications and generates historically new mediations. Such 'mediations' are new because they are located outside the official practices of citizenship situated in the interstices of numerous legal and cultural borders, which under cut hegemony.

### **Hegemony**

Hegemony, initially a term referring to the dominance of one state within the confederation, is now generally understood to mean domination by consent.

Fundamentally, hegemony is a power of ruling class to convince other classes that their interests are the interests of all. Domination thus exerted not by force, nor even necessarily by active persuasion, but by a more subtle and inclusive power over the economy and over state apparatuses such as education and the media, by which the ruling class interest is presented as the common interest and thus comes to be taken for granted.

The term 'hegemony' is useful for describing the success of imperial power over colonized people who may far outnumber any occupying military force, but whose desire for self-determination has been suppressed by a hegemonic notion of the greater good, often couched in terms of social order, stability and advancement, all of which are defined by the colonized power. Hegemony is important because the capacity to influence the thought of the colonized is by far the most sustained and potent operation of imperial in colonized regions. Indeed, an 'empire' is distinct from a collection of subject status forcibly controlled by a central power by virtue of the effectiveness of its cultural hegemony. Consent is achieved by the interpellation of the colonized subject by imperial discourse so that Euro-centric values, assumptions, beliefs and attitudes accepted as a matter of course as the most natural or valuable. The inevitable consequences of such interpellation is that the colonized subject understands itself as peripheral to those Euro centric values while at the same time accepting their centrality.

Post-colonial cultures are inevitably hybridized, involving a dialectical relationship between European ontology and epistemology and the impulse to create or recreate independent local identity. Decolonization is a process, not arrival; it invokes an ongoing dialectic between hegemonic centralist systems and peripheral

subversion of them between European or British discourses and their post-colonial dismantling. Since it is not possible to create or recreate national or regional formations wholly independent of their historical implication in the European colonial enterprises, it has been the project of post colonial writing to interrogate European discourse and discursive strategies from a privileged position within two worlds to investigate the means by which Europe imposed and maintained its codes in the colonial domination of so much of the rest of the world.

Hegemony implies a situation where a 'historic bloc' of ruling class faction exercises social authority and leadership over the subordinate classes through a combination of force and, more importantly consents. Ideology is understood in terms of ideas, meanings and practices which while they purport to be universal truths, are maps of meaning which support the power of particular groups. Above all ideology is not separate from the particular activities of life but is a material phenomenon rooted in the day-to-day conditions. Ideologies provide people with rules of practical conduct and moral behaviour equivalent to "a religion understood in the secular sense of a unity of faith between a conception of the world and corresponding norms of conduct" (Gramsci 171). The representation of the formal education system as a meritocracy which offers all and equal chance in a fair society and the representation of people of colour as by 'nature' inferior and less capable than white people could be described as ideological. Hegemony involves those processes of meaning making by which a dominant for authoritative set of representations and practices is produced and maintained. Hegemony involves education and the winning of consent rather than the use of brute force and coercion. Though the state is not conceived as a crude arm of ruling class, it is nevertheless implicated in class hegemony. In such situation force remains an option for social control; during times of relative stability it takes a back seat to the unifying role of ideology.

A hegemonic bloc never consists of a single socio-economic category but is formed through a series of alliances in which one group takes on a position of leadership. Ideology plays a crucial part in allowing this alliance of groups to overcome narrow economic-corporate interest in favour of 'national-popular' dominance. Thus "a cultural-social unity is achieved through which a multiplicity of dispersed skills, with heterogeneous aims, was welded together with a single aim as the basis of an equal and common conception of the world" (Gramsci 349). The building, maintenance or subversion of a common conception of the world is an aspect of ideological struggle involving a transformation of understanding through criticism of the existing popular ideologies.

### III. Cultural Communication in *A Backward Place*

This chapter focuses on the instances of expressions and elaborations which help to support the view that India has been acting as a place where the two cultures, western and eastern meet and the impact of this cultural integrative communication result in diverse attitudes towards eastern especially Indian culture among the westerners themselves. Using the theories of cultural studies like identity, diversity, hybridity and as elaborated in the previous chapter; the text would be studied and analyzed. This chapter would make a detailed survey of the text on those aspects which bear relationship with the hypothesis of the thesis.

A cultural text – whether written in the colonial era or merely in the colonial tradition – bears all the possibilities of mixed representations of cultural interchange, in some texts we find notions of European superiority and universality and in some texts we find the opposite and there are some texts which choose the middle path and stand dislocated.

A typical cultural reading of *A Backward Place* would maintain that the novel is neither truly orientalist nor based only upon the eastern point of view rather it bears the quality of being in-between and is too selective in its specific details to represent the Indian culture as well as western culture equally. The complicity of the novel with cultural perspective is too apparent to require any further explanation.

#### **India: A Contact Zone**

The titles of Jhabvala's novels often receive little critical attentions. Yet how significant and suggestive these are, must be experienced even by a casual reader. Her titles have both their intentions and extensions and they add critically and symbolically to the plots and themes of her novels. Her earlier novel *A New Dominion* (1958) and the later, one which made her win the prestigious Booker prize, *Heat and Dust* (1975), too, suggest the same. On the same light, the novel *A Backward Place*

may appear so, but the difference it owns is not only the Westerners' response to India but also the Indians.

*A Backward Place* may sound like presenting India as it suggests but when we actually go through the novel we will find that it is not addressing India itself but the cultural playground where ideologies generate and play. The main action of the novel is very simple: Judy, the young wife of an Indian, Bal, comes to stay in India with her husband where she begets two children too. During her stay, she comes to meet the two other western ladies who have come to India for different purposes. Etta, one of them hates everything that is Indian and Clarissa, who just doesn't know herself whether she loves the place or hates. These three western characters have three different views and attitudes towards their common place of residing, India, which lets them to contact the 'other' cultural group, the Indian.

The novel doesn't have any first person narrator so the whole novel is a narration narrated by the writer herself. And though the different characters present their own views towards India in their self perspectives yet they this way or that relate notions the writer has.

For the central characters Judy, Etta and Clarissa, India has been a place to contact with the Indian or Eastern culture. But their understandings seem different, as for Etta, who always tries to convince Judy to change her attitudes:

Just because we happen to have landed ourselves in this primitive society, that's no reason why we should submit to their primitive morality. [. . .] my dear Judy, you've made a mistake – it could happen as they say to anyone – but if you would only face up to it and get out before it's too late, too late, Judy. (1)

But for Judy India is a protective place to hide from her past and take a refuge. She had married Bal not by chance as Etta rather she did select him to continue her life,

which had become so monotonous that she herself did not know what her heart and mind wanted. She therefore compares India and England:

She couldn't ever remember having looked up at the sky in England. She must have done, but she couldn't remember. There had been nothing memorable: nothing had spoken. So one locked oneself up at home, all warm and cosy, and looked at the television and grew lonelier and lonelier till it was unbearable and then one found a hook in the lavatory. Judy could not imagine ever being that lonely here. In the end, there was always the sky. Who spoke from the sky here? Why did it seem to her that someone spoke? She must be going batty. (179)

Judy's mother had hanged herself by a hook in the lavatory of their home back in England and therefore it had become quite tentative for her to think that all the people in England will one day face the same fate. She just didn't want that and have found that India will never let anyone to do so for it will always occupy her in a kind of cultural tie which will keep her busy. At least India will not let her be alone. And for Clarissa it is something different. She could neither totally leave her westerners' attire nor she could accept the Indian way of life and the Indian attitude completely. She is always in search of an Indian identity for her own and to help her there is always lots of Indian people who'd tell her that she had to be an Indian not English:

I told them so. I told them so. I wrote and said I'm not coming back there. I've rejected all Western values; I belong here now. Not that they'd understand. Honestly, Etta, you can't have any idea what my family are like. I mean, looking at me, you just couldn't believe it. They're the most conventional, dull, bourgeois, English people you've ever met in your born days. God knows how I escaped being like that.

We're like creatures from a different planet, absolutely. I really think I must have been Indian in my previous birth – in all my previous births – well, lots of people have told me so and it's true. I know it is. (155)

Beside these western characters that are in a continuous process of experiencing India, India had been a place of contact for the Indians themselves to contact the other culture too. A place where they can come together with the Westerners and at the same time they can interact with their culture too. This is indicated through an Indian editor of a newspaper called *Second Thought*, Jaykar's expressions where he clearly shows:

Jaykar got up in disgust. He rapped on the table and called for the bill. When Sudhir tried to pay it, and Bal too fumbled money, he got angry with both of them; he was a poor but a very proud old man. He slammed the money on top of the bill and told the bearer in a furious voice: 'Don't look for any tips from me. I don't believe in such things. They are only for beggars and for slaves.' He thrust his angry face into the bearer's. 'Are you a beggar or a slave?' he shouted, so that the bearer drew back in fear. (101)

Here Jaykar is totally furious about the way westerners give tips to the waiters in the restaurants. It is their culture but for the Indians as Jaykar says only beggars or slaves receive such 'tips'. The only thing in the Indian culture allows to receive money from the others is just its worth. Nothing else is expected or given. So here we can see a development of cultural integration, western and eastern.

Jhabvala is concerned not only about such customary details which she can use for her Indian characters. She is equally concerned with some extra and vivid differences between both of the cultures. At some place she seems to impose upon the Indian characters about western values and at some place she is praising Indian

culture truly. The culture of hospitality upon which Bal is confirmed when he decide to go and live with them with his whole family. Sudhir anxiously raise a question about that but Jhabvala assures her readers through Bal:

‘Of course she will come too. All of us are going.’ He said this with a sort of quiet confidence, even matter-of-factness, which made it difficult to raise any protest.

Sudhir was silent for a while. Then he asked, ‘You have somewhere to live there?’

Bal was not in the least troubled. He smiled: ‘Oh, I have so many friends.’

‘Yes, but for your wife and children – two children – ‘

‘Of course, my friends will welcome them also,’ Bal said with dignity.

(160)

With such details one can now vividly realize that everybody can relate to some dilemmas in one way or another. However, the way in which we deal with these dilemmas vary, depending on our cultural background primarily by nation. Ignoring cultural differences creates frictions and barriers. Cultural frictions and barriers can exist in any society. The ambiguity is there in everyone’s mind the way they express it is different. And this difference is experienced when there is a common ground on which all these varieties of cultures contact and communicate with each other.

### **Etta: A Detached Character**

From the beginning of the novel Jhabvala tries to put the western view towards India through Etta, who always negates the country and its culture. The first paragraph of the novel delivers the very attitude she has.

Etta was propped up on pillows in her bed. She was having an elegant breakfast from a tray. She held a cream cracker between her thumb and forefinger and before taking a bite, said to Judy, 'You ought to leave him, really you ought. [. . .] Marriages, my dear, are made to be broken, that's one of the rules of modern civilization. (5)

Such a remark on someone else's happy married life can only be made by people like Etta. For Etta, as a westerner, it is quite obvious to get rid of the husbands and become divorced time and again. But for a girl married in India it would be the most unlikely happening of her entire life to leave the husband and be 'free'. Etta is always in the contrast of the Indian culture, Indian people and their way of life.

And she herself has lost the feel of nature that she quite often makes remarks on it. She doesn't like the landscape here, she doesn't like the trees here and she even hates the sun which has to be universal but for Etta, the sun in India is something different than the sun in Europe as she puts it promptly when she looks at Judy and finds her loosing her complexion, "Did you go out in the sun? she asked Judy. That's of course the best way of ruining one's complexion. Don't you know that the Indian sun has been put specially into the sky to ruin our complexions" (7)? She is unhappy because she tries to resist India instead of being absorbed by it. She despises the country, describes it as a primitive society with primitive morality.

She thinks herself above the Indians and whenever she gets chance she dominates them whether by her words or by her acts:

The other guest was Etta, who had not been included in the original scheme but whom Mrs. Hochstadt had met by chance a day or two before and, finding her in low spirits, had persuaded her to join them for the sake of a change of air. Etta – so she herself kept insisting – had been bullied into coming along and had no intention of enjoying

herself. She lay half inclined across the rug, making every effort to look languid and bored, and with her parasol propped up behind her to shield her from the irksome sun. (131)

Here, Etta is not actually bored but as the lines show that she is pretending to be bored and uninterested with her surroundings. Though it was for herself that Mrs. Hochstadt had asked her to join the picnic. Etta, with her superiority of manner, did not want to show any interest in what her host Mr. and Mrs. Hochstadt and their Indian students were discussing and enjoying. She here proves to be more authoritative than Mr. and Mrs. Hochstadts themselves who are also westerners living in India.

When it comes to insult the Indians she takes more pleasure in doing this. And she doesn't even spare her own friend's husband Bal. After all he is an Indian. Etta, enjoys to insult him in a comic way by which Bal would be most affected. She is not convinced though that it was Judy's decision to marry Bal. She thinks it was Bal who fished her and ruined her life. So she puts directly to Bal in a way that he would find himself insulted:

To bring a girl like Judy over here and then treat her as if she were one of your women – no, said Etta and shook her head slowly and as if in wonder, although I do, I must admit, rather pride myself on my sense of humour, somehow, in this particular case it absolutely fails me.

(138)

Etta shows her superiority not only on the Indians but also on the fellow westerners too. She is a person with the attitude to suppress others, this is why she, in a humorous style, slurs her European friend Mrs. Hochstadt, “‘Well Etta, even if you won't look after your complexion, we mustn't allow you to starve, I think.’ Etta turned her face away. ‘Please, Frieda, I haven't got a German digestion, you know’” (133). This

offence on Mrs. Hochstadt is calmly overcome by her as she tries to control the tone Etta has, in a pleasurable manner, "It's true," she said humourously as she munched, 'my stomach is a good strong German one' (133).

The reason behind Etta's rejection is the cultural background she inherits, which makes her think, act and behave superiorly. But the problem for her is that she had to live her life here in India where she by heart doesn't want to spend a minute. She shows her intentions to Judy and Clarissa, her European friends time and again,

Etta said wearily: 'I'll probably be going away soon.'

'Oh, Etta.'

That seemed to sting her. She sat up. Her blonde hair, which now looked very brittle and false, slipped down over her face and she pushed it back impatiently. 'You think I'm here for ever? You think I'm going to let myself rot in this – this –'

'Hole,' Judy tactfully suggested.

'Hell!' Etta emended with violence. 'No, thank you, I rather flatter myself I've been reserved for a better fate. I'm packing up. I'm getting out.' (173)

So time and again, Etta tries to escape India but the more Etta thinks to get out of the place, the more she thinks about situations later she will have to face when she is again in Europe. She recalls all the admiration she gets here and her self made personality or identity in India and then she imagines the situation of herself in Europe where she will be no more the centre of attraction because for her, time had run away long before and here she is in India, all spent and poured. The comparison of her situation in and out of India now is quite interesting. And this is the reason why she can't leave India though she hates it so much.

She lay on her bed and smoked and thought about Europe. It was infinitely distant and infinitely desirable. But she was afraid of it too. Here at least she had her personality: she was Etta, whom people knew and admired for being blonde and vivacious and smart. In Europe there were many blondes, and there they might more easily notice that she was not as young or as vivacious as she once had been; and they might not think her smart at all. (171)

Trapped and imprisoned in a country which she hates, Etta becomes depressed and even hysterical at the thought of isolation and loneliness awaiting her. So she cannot go back to Europe not because she doesn't have economical reach or she herself doesn't want to but because she will lose her persona she has built herself spending her long span of life in India. She fears to be left out and being unnoticed at all. She had to be noticed and admired, that's what she thinks she is for, whether in India or in Europe.

The more Etta hates the country the harder it becomes for her to live there. As Margaret Berry observes, "Etta is simply condemned to fade away after an attempted suicide – blaming as she disappears not her own unwise and fevered choices, but the backward place that is India" (52). Etta's attitudes towards India remain unchanged and she keeps on doing what she had been doing in the beginning of the novel. Her mental framework is stereotyped as a result of which she responds in such a way.

### **Adaptation of 'Other' Culture**

In *A Backward Place* Jhabvala considers whether or not it is possible for some Europeans to live in India and survive, and through the character of Judy she shows that it is possible if one is willing to adopt Indian values, to accept India on its own terms. Jhabvala shows that Westerners can remain in India and survive. They can be taken as outsider – insider by the Indians themselves.

Judy who comes from a home where mother and father believed in ‘shut the door and do not trust no one’ finds ‘love in marriage’ with Bal. Her own nature is an open and trusting one and India is ‘sanctuary’ for her. Quiet and sensible and very much in love with her husband, Judy has no cultural or other conflicts with Bal. In the Judy-Bal marriage where individuals don’t make compromises but let their mutual love for each other smooth all problems. In this case, it is Judy’s nature that makes her marriage a success. She fits quietly into the joint family of Bal and his brother Mukund. A joint family that is voluntarily so because the children ran up and down making both the separate houses one. There is a definite symbol there. A child-like innocence brought to things can resolve all differences. Judy and Bal have this child-like innocence. While the German couple Dr. and Mrs. Hochstadt talk about the honeymoon of the East and West, Judy and Bal, whose marriage Etta feels should be broken, celebrate it under a warm Indian sun.

There is something very young and vulnerable that even makes Judy protective towards Bal who is full of schemes and it is to Judy’s credit that she takes so much interest in his affairs. Bal’s hair-brained scheme of upping and leaving upsets her sense of security but “she wanted only to stay where and how she was. It wasn’t a very grand place, she knew – that broken old house behind the bazaar with its flaking damp-stained walls and its dangerous electric wiring – but she had grown used to it and fond of it” (166).

Although Bal shows immaturity and at times unreliability, his love for Judy is stable and happy. At first he does not like the idea of Judy working but later he rationalizes it as good for women to get out and work, “extolling the virtues of female independence” (31). The episode where their child is ill and he wants his father to stay and get him ice demonstrate Judy’s quiet authority. She quietly and promptly makes him comply with the child’s desire.

Judy is not only taken as an assimilated European in India by her family but by the other Indians as well as her European friends too. She has been successful to create her Indian personality and merge with Indian culture. Once Etta accuses her of becoming what she is now by telling the other Europeans like Mrs. Hochstadt, “Leave her alone,” Etta said wearily. “She doesn’t know what you’re talking about. She doesn’t understand civilized language. She’s busy proving that it’s possible for a nice healthy English girl to be an Indian wife in an Indian slum” (27). When Judy is accused and humiliated like this, she is always trying to prove that India and Indian culture is not like what her western friends usually think it is. And Jhabvala simply uses Judy to do this job in her favour. She is concerned to create a balance in her beliefs which can be justified by Judy’s remarks about India, “It’s not slum,” Judy mildly protested. It wasn’t: it was a middleclass district, where shopkeepers, income tax inspectors and unsuccessful advocates lived in crowded but respectable circumstances” (27). Judy here not only tries to show her respect to India but at the same time she is successful to create a kind of defensive argument by which her European friends like Etta and others would know how true she had been. And similarly she is open heartedly taken as an Indian cultured woman by the other Indians like Jaykar and Sudhir, her co-worked in her job, when she discusses a proposal of her husband in front of these well cultured and well educated fellows. She was presenting Bal’s idea of opening a theatre group which would perform different plays on the behalf of ‘Cultural Dias’ where she works, to these gentlemen but they both become totally uninterested and name this proposal unworthy. Now Judy, as a typical Indian wife who takes a lot of care of her husband’s tiniest move and hope, finds it unexpected, so she starts crying and then they both start to assure her as if she is a simple Indian wife who doesn’t know anything about the outer world:

Sudhir and Jaykar became terribly polite and concerned towards her. They dropped the subject of the professional theatre altogether, and now did all they knew to entertain her. [. . .] Before he left, Jaykar presented Judy with one of the peppermints which he always carried around with him to give to any children he might meet on his way. (57-58)

This way Jaykar and Sudhir entertain Judy to ease her pain. Jaykar hated the western values and tradition yet he is confirming Judy because he thinks Judy is not the one with that western culture rather she is now an Indian, by culture and by nature.

Judy has changed herself spiritually too to be acceptable in her home which later becomes her own way of relying upon the supremacy of God when one cannot rely upon anything else. Least we can say that she has become herself a believer of God. And this has happened because at home she is continuously inspired by Bhuaji, who is one of Bal's relation and she has nowhere to go, to change her religious beliefs. Judy's transformation as a theist from an atheist is clearly seen in these lines:

Judy had long since accepted these frequent mentions of the name of God, though in the beginning they had affected her unpleasantly. The word God on a sober person's lips had always made her want to either squirm or laugh. But these instinctive reaction had undergone some modification – mainly through her contact with Bhuaji. And sometimes it even seemed to Judy – for instance, when she went down to the river in the evenings – that perhaps Bhuaji was right and that what she spoke and sang about and prayed to, or something very like it, was really there. (64)

By getting such new view towards Indian spirituality she shifts her identity and also proves herself as a faithful Indian wife who is ready to give up anything if her

husband asserts her and she quietly makes up her mind to follow him. Bal insists to try his luck in Bombay and give up everything in Delhi but Judy is somehow suspicious about that. She wants to stay yet she at last gives up her job, gambles all her savings and gets ready to go with him without any proper destination. In her decision to go, the *Sita* image is recreated as she followed *Ram* “into exile, into jungle, and into whatever places and hardships fate might lead them? And all this without hesitation or demur, following with sweet devotion and of her own free assent the path of wifely duty” (175). No western woman would have this much faith on her husband and on his decision.

### **Clarissa’s Ambivalence: Personal Dilemma**

Clarissa is an artist manqué, unmarried and ever after idyllic beauty available in plenty in India, but unable to reach it. She expresses her yearning to be “Back to my beloved mountains – Nature, the simple life, that’s what I need desperately; [. . .] I quite desperately need a bit of that kind of simple life myself” (20). She represents Westerners who take the attitude of condescension. She belongs to the sort, in Sudhir’s words, who have come to India,

[F]irst, spurred on by Romain Rolland’s *Life of Vivekanda*, Edwin Arnold’s *Light of Asia* and Everyman’s edition of the *Bhagavad Gita*, and intent on a quest in which notions of soul and God played a prominent, if vague part; and how valiantly she had kept up this quest, or at least the pretence of it, though she was getting older year by year, and lonelier, and more ridiculous, and soul and God perhaps no nearer.  
(94)

This beautifully sums up the noble abstracts which had drawn Clarissa away from her locus into the placid world of the peasants of India where she had neither talent nor a common factor to fit in. She describes herself as a spiritual seeker and says that she is

in India out of conviction and idealism. In spite of her professed love for India and her sympathy for its poor, she is in perpetual quest for a comfortable life.

Clarissa's later reaction to Europe, the continent of her birth and upbringing, is not one of nostalgia but restlessness – a restlessness which impels her to stay in India the country of her voluntary residence, "I love these simple, earthy types, Clarissa said. 'Every line on their face tells a story. It's so inspiring for an artist.' [. . .] Only of course the Indian peasant has a sort of spiritual quality" (19). She continues to comment while showing Etta her sketch book: "the Indian peasant has a sort of spiritual quality about him, a divine yearning which raises him – above his own earthiness" (19). But these peasants are merely inspiring, lifeless sketches for her as an artist, though. They do not mean anything else to her, for her identification with the Indian peasant is abstract and false. Her idealism prevents her from identifying herself with others.

She is alone like Etta; though not as despaired on account of her idealism, she is as helpless as her cultural counterpart. Unlike Etta, she has made her journey through the mirror or crossed the barrier; yet she has found on the other side of the mirror a world in which the chessmen are not alive. There is no animation in it for her; she could talk with no tiny flowers; as Alice does in the fairy tale, for she does not proceed with tolerance and forgiveness. She is an accommodated individual; for her, the world on the other side of the mirror does not reveal its charm. They only have a grim or frozen vision of it.

Etta is, at least, definite about her dislike for India, but Clarissa is not sure of her reactions and responses. She professes love for India, wears 'sarees', praises Judy for attempting to be an Indian wife, appreciates her house because it has character, but hesitates to use their rather primitive bathroom. She pretends to be too busy chasing the eternal values to care for worldly matters. Yet she lives comfortably on the

hospitality of her rich friends. Though she claims to be as free as a bird, she is a prisoner to her own delusions about India. As such she is the unsuccessful visitor. She tells about Judy that “She had the good sense to realize that the only way to live here was to turn herself into a real Indian wife” (20).

Clarissa is unable to come to terms with the real India, for, it has nothing to do with the idealized picture of India she has created in her imagination after reading the books by Vivekananda and other Indian philosophers. She is a victim of self deception when she speaks of the sort of vibration between these people of India and herself while the reality is that she is chased by urchins and pestered by beggars with whom she loses temper unashamedly. Thus there is something pathetic about her.

The heat in India is oppressive, yet Clarissa envisions many figures in it which take hold of her imagination and creative self. A smiling leper being driven in a cart by another leper and the image of *Shiva* being worshipped by people show aspects of India which are human and divine at the same time. She realizes that religion and religious devotion are potent forces in India. Even old, semi-starved widows, masquerading as *Krishna*'s milkmaids, dance in the country side. And the Indian sky is huge, expansive, clear, which seems to dominate the destiny of man. And with all these she has tried to be one of them herself, “Her clothes were not those of a real memsahib, nor was the untidy structure of hair on her head, nor, least of all, the excited way in which she talked” (72).

As a European in India, she is placed in a position which is naturally subjected to the pressures of alienation. As a representative of western culture and tradition, she inherits a life-view which does not seem ‘native’ to the sons of the soil. She consciously as well as unconsciously brings to bear upon the Indian ethos the western rational and scientific attitudes which inevitably become the criteria for judging Indians, their moral behaviour and their emotional or sensuous responses to

environment. This situation is a source of her strength as well as her weakness as a human being. In her attitudes towards India, she shows a sudden change in as well as there is a note of bitterness in it:

‘Why do people behave like that?’ Clarissa asked. ‘Making big promises and then, when the time comes to do something, they’re off. There’s Sudhir too. Now that we’re all ready, with such nice actors Mrs. Kaul’s found who’re all going to work for nothing, now he says he’s leaving. Found another job or something. People are so mean. But of course the meanest of all is your Guppy. Honestly, Etta, the whole thing makes me so depressed, I can’t tell you. I want to believe in people – I do believe in them – but then to be let down like that, oh it’s so unfair’. (177-78)

Etta and Clarissa hate each other but they have no where to go and they have common friends. They keep on meeting and quarrelling. The novelist has very skillfully created situations which bring out the tension between these two. Obviously Etta is an affected woman. She is also bickering, aggressive and sharp-tongued. She luxuriates in a set of clichés against Indian society. Clarissa is her opposite. Though she is meek and proclaims her love for the native customs, she too uses a set of clichés which some Europeans use to show their love for India. Between them, they characterize two attitudes, the one of intense hatred and the other of condescension.

Beside these major western characters there are some other minor western as well as Indian characters who come to contact with one another and there is certain change in their cultural perspectives. For example there is Shanti, Bal’s brother Mukund’s wife, who is influenced by Judy and her work which she thinks is never attainable for her yet she longs for it which can be seen in her dialogue with Judy:

‘Then tomorrow shall I go to your office?’

‘Why not.’

Shanti giggled. ‘Can you see me?’ Then she cried, ‘Oh I would never dare, not in one hundred years!’ [. . .] ‘With us it’s like that. Only to sit at home day and night, cooking and cleaning and looking after children.’ (12)

For Shanti, going out and working as other western women is a very ‘daring’ task which she finds herself incomprehensible yet she longs to do.

And for Mr. and Mrs. Hochastadts, who are in India for a short time, India seems to be their promised land where they can practice the interchange of cultural values. They represent Westerners who take an academic interest in India. For example, the way Mr. Hochastadt talks about India: “For the new-comer in India perhaps one of the most interesting aspects is the correlation – and here I have in mind not only physical facts but also intellectual and spiritual ones – the correlation of the old and the new” (28). For them India is the place “Where we are allowed to mix freely with the Indian intellectual and learn from him and also – yes, perhaps also teach something to him of our Western values” (86).

Jhabvala is also critical of the validity of the westernized Indians’ attitude to the problems of their country, in fact of their whole way of looking at life – everything they say, all that lively conversation round the buffet table, is not prompted by anything they really feel strongly about by what they think they ought to feel strongly about. While Jhabvala seems dissatisfied with this unreality in the sophisticated, westernized Indian’s attitude to India, she feels more at home with the semi-educated, but deeply involved Indian joint families which breathe a genuine get-togetherness. Members of such families have their joys and sorrows, loves and hatreds, cunning and compassion – but what is more important is that they feel they

form a family, a social unit in which individuals either conform or revolt. About this joint family life in India, she says:

There is actually something very restful about this mode of social intercourse and it certainly holds more pleasure than the synthetic social life led by westernized Indians. It is also more adapted to the Indian climate which invites one to be absolutely relaxed in mind and body, to do nothing, to think nothing, just to feel, to be. (qtd. in Shahane 190)

To sum up, it is the spirituality of the East, in our context India, that attracts the westerners towards it. And the material prosperity of the West that creates a charm to the Indian characters. But when they meet with each other in a common cultural background, their cultural ethos intermingle. As a result of their cultural communication they react differently as different Western characters as well as the Indians in this novel have reacted.

#### IV. Conclusion

Ruth Praver Jhabvala's preoccupation with East and West encounter and the question of identity with the Indian ethos seem to have created a peculiar fairy tale situation in her novel, *A Backward Place*. For one like her who crossed the geographical boundaries by marrying an Indian artist and coming to live in an Indian family, it may be one thing to become international in outlook and quite another to transcend cultural barriers. A total integration into another culture requires a transformation or forgetting of earlier existence which is intimately tied up with the legacy of value framework.

The function of a culture at variance with one's own is to hold a mirror to the good or bad in one's own cultural heritage. The contrastive reflection reduces them to black and white, either wholly good or wholly bad. Any attempt to cross the barrier in terms of a different culture involves or requires a forgetting of one's earlier heritage. Anybody who is disillusioned with his own culture or chooses another in preference to his own, unless he diverts himself of the vestiges of the earlier and accepts the new unquestioningly, he cannot pass into the other, as it were, with ease and be happy in it. If he clings to the old, still expecting to reap the benefits of the new; or commits to none but a synthetic abstract of the two in the form of an ideal – in either case he is deprived of the benefits of either culture or remains in a suspended state of limbo.

If we apply this formula to *A Backward Place*, it falls into a pattern and the characters excellently fit into it. While Etta and Clarissa can be described as belonging to the latter, the case of Judy can be explained in terms of the former situation. These three characters, 'expatriates' as they are called in the novel, are destined to live in India – a country of a different culture – in various capacities. They seem to signify various perspectives and attitudes of the novelist herself in relation to the ethos of the country of their adoption.

The problem is that India, as a stark reality or as a spiritual reality, evokes different responses in different western characters. The reactions may assume the forms of affirmation or negation or ambivalence. All these areas of emotive and intellectual responses to this country are endowed with fictional art in *A Backward Place*.

In this novel, Indians and Europeans meet, fall in love and marry and find either marital harmony or dissonance and friction. Interestingly these marriages are set against the backdrop of India and thus the problem of adjustment for the outsiders become more intense and difficult. The success and failure of these marriages will also measure the individual's capacity for love, understanding and self deception. It will mean prompting the self to come to terms with itself.

The westerners in *A Backward Place* are all in India including the Hochstadts, who are in India on a brief academic assignment, Clarissa, a spiritual seeker, Judy, who is married to an Indian to escape from her country and Etta, who is in India because of a chance marriage to an Indian. The Hochstadts are full of praise for India. They are full of wisdom and, since they are secure in the knowledge that they would be returning to the West where they belong, can afford to ignore the harsh reality of India in which characters like Etta or Judy are caught.

Clarissa represents the Westerners who take the attitude of condescension. Etta, an embittered woman, but by no means unintelligent, represents Westerners who adopt the sneering attitudes while Judy represents Westerners who seek to merge themselves in India. She is busy proving that it is possible for a nice healthy English girl to be an Indian wife in an Indian slum. Apart from other two characters Judy and her assimilating nature seems quite praiseworthy as negating and being ambivalent are two natural phenomenon for anyone who experiences cultural shift but it is an individual's dedicated efforts which makes him or her assimilated into other culture.

Though the novel ends in an inconclusive manner yet it quite clearly proves that it is the diverging nature of culture which results in contrasting attitudes of the people who experience any 'other' culture, needless to say even if they are from the same cultural background and experiencing it in the same contact zone.

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