

A Postcolonial Study of R. P. Jhabvala's *Heat and Dust*

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Abstract: *Most of the third-world countries were ruled, dominated and exploited by British as well as European colonies during their administrations in the colonial era. The people of native countries experienced not only a new system of administration and discipline but also cultural amalgamation, social fusion and political upheavals. Subsequently, after the colonial rule, a new genre in the field of literature was born in the name of Postcolonial Literature. Plethora of terms like Colonialism, Imperialism, Neocolonialism, Subaltern Studies, Hybridity, Diaspora, Cosmopolitanism, Imagined Communities, Multinational Citizenship, Tricontinentalism and Multiculturalism were ensconced having their relevant meanings and definitions. Ruth Praver Jhabvala's Heat and Dust projects many facets of postcolonial literature like imperial temperaments of European as well as elite Indians, multiculturalism and hybridity, gender discrimination, natives' abhorrence towards colonials. Moreover, Jhabvala has also thrown light on the various aspects of socio-economic conditions of post-colonial India.*

Keywords: *Colonial, Postcolonial, Imperial, Hangover, Gender Discrimination, Cultural Amalgamation.*

The third-world countries like India suffered heavily during the colonial rule of British. The natives were dominated, suppressed and exploited to the largest extent. Almost all the aspects of their life were marred and maimed. Pramod K. Nayar substantiates the indelible sufferings of the natives by saying, "Colonization in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries meant violent appropriation and exploitation of native races and spaces by European powers." (03) The impact of the colonial rule was so severe that its hangover persisted for a long period and it also took a prominent place in the postcolonial literature.

Apart from the colonial hangover postcolonial literature significantly focuses on many debates and discussions on different topics like imperial attitude of the Occidental and elite Orientals, gender discrimination, problems related to diaspora, cosmopolitanism, natives abhorrence towards colonials, cultural amalgamation and hybridity, neocolonialism, subaltern aspects of life, decolonization. Ruth Praver Jhabvala's *Heat and Dust* accords with most of these facets of postcolonial literature. It also begets some innovative and revolutionary ideas like "social justice, emancipation, and democracy in order to oppose oppressive structures of racism, discrimination, and exploitation" (Nayar 17).

Heat and Dust, the Booker Prize winner novel in 1975, presents a picture of India in both colonial and post-colonial stage. It contains the descriptions of the pathetic conditions of Indians during colonial period and also brings out the overbearing of Indians over the British in the post-colonial stage. Yasmine Gooneratne finds the novel more interesting as its different parts are collectively organized into a beautiful story as she says:

From a technical point of view, one of Ruth Praver Jhabvala's most impressive achievements in this novel is her maintenance of a scrupulously detached narrative tone which works in harmony with parallels of character and incident throughout the novel, to create an atmosphere of objectivity in which certain major thematic concerns can be fully explored. (211)

Mr. Douglas and his wife, Olivia, are shown in the colonial period. They have come to India with a definite purpose. Mr. Douglas is the collector of Satipur and he maintains his attitude of discriminating the ruler and the ruled. Olivia is not less than her husband in keeping imperial attitude against Indians. She gets satisfaction in keeping friendship with British people only. Being in a higher post, Mr. Douglas believes in suppression and exploitation. He is so atrocious and heartless that he finds pleasure in torturing and inflicting pain on natives. He hates and despises the natives during his stay in India. Mr. Douglas' imperial attitude is an example of suppression and exploitation of natives at the hands of British administration. 'Imperialism' is more or less a synonym of 'colonialism' and it is also the colonial practice of domination but without the actual 'settlement' by the masters. (Fieldhouse 373)

On the other hand, the Indians do not like the monstrous behaviour of the British administrators during colonial rule. In *Heat and Dust*, characters like Nawab are shown as lionhearted Indians who dare to fight with British surreptitiously. Ronald Shepherd asserts: "The known fact concerning the Nawab are reiterated: he is a robber, but also a prince. From the point of view of these Englishmen, especially Douglas, the Nawab is a personification of Evil, a

prince of darkness” (133). Nawab avenges on British to continue his ancestral battle and organises his dacoit’s gang to fight with them along with his secret army. Olivia becomes a perfect prey of his secret plan. Nawab takes advantage of her loneliness and contaminates her mind by wrong thoughts against British. She not only gets attracted towards him but also she believes in every words said by him. She even betrays her husband by concealing many facts related with Nawab though she is aware of his secret army. It is a kind of rebellion that she moves with Nawab and wanders around the various places near Satipur and Khatm. She favours natives and criticises her own people. She considers ‘suttee’ as an integral part of Indian custom.

Nawab considers that his family’s ancestry was devalued due to British Empire. British looted his ancestors and they lost their power and wealth. He reveals the facts to her and shows his resentment against British. He tells her how British plundered their freedom and power referring his ancestor Amanullah Khan as: “I envy him. His name was feared by everyone – including the British! When they saw they could not subdue him by any means, then they wanted him for their ally. Oh they were always cunning people and knew which way to take out their own advantage” (HD 135). The activities of Nawab and his gang so how nationalist consciousness arises among the colonised people as a counter to colonialism. It can be said as the anti-colonial nationalism and this particular spirit bring solidarity among separate classes and groups. It also helps in preventing and overcoming the cultural and psychological damages resulted out of colonialism. The progress of nationalist spirit is nicely marked by Franz Fanon, “Tribalism in the colonial phase → regionalism in the national phase → federalism in the decolonized phase” (92).

British in India during colonial period keeps anti-native policy and imperial attitude against Indians. Mr. Douglas and Major Minnies consider Indian customs as foolish and reckless acts. Being the authorities, they are supposed to pay proper heed and scrupulous care related to the security of large gatherings in the traditional and religious functions like ‘Husband’s Wedding Day’. They are also aware of the accident two years before when 6 people died and 43 were injured. But, they are not doing anything meticulously in this regard because they consider Indians and their lives are worthless and not more than insects. In another incident, Major Minnies misguides Maharaja of Dhung though he is officially appointed as his adviser. He deliberately pursues the Maharaja to take some unethical and whimsical decisions by which he would be ruined and annihilated. In spite of persisting famine, Major Minnies advises Maharaja to construct a monumental building by borrowing “an architect, and a decorator, and a tailor . . . from Vienna” (HD 92). He has made the Maharaja “a fool” of himself. The Britishers, in the colonial era looked at India from their perspective and found it a land of strange and peculiar people, activities and manners. In this context, Shahane points out, “The incidence of riots of Khatm, of the ‘suttee’, of the dacoits and Nawab’s involvement with them, the gay parties, the hijras – all the events depict India, a country of heat and dust, as exotic, strange and peculiar, especially from a European point of view” (225).

Gender discrimination is one of the arresting attributes of postcolonial literature. In *Heat and Dust*, not only Indian women but also British women suffer badly for their gender. Olivia is dominated and ill-treated by Mr. Douglas, her husband. He leaves her alone solitary place like the official bungalow of a collector where she feels isolated and desperately needs company. He does not pay any attention and pass any quality time with her. She aspires to bear a child but her husband has no time in his busy schedule to keep sexual relationship with her. Any how she is forced to develop physical contacts with another man like Nawab to fulfil her sexual appetite and gets pregnant. As a result, Mr. Douglas inflicts insult and trauma on her and deserts her.

Ritu, an Indian woman, has been subject to endless torture and tribulation at the hands of husband and mother-in-law. She suffers only because she is a woman and the society believes in gender discrimination. She is prey of domestic violence. Her mother-in-law considers her a witch and makes her go through many superstitious practices. She also inflicts burn injuries on her by applying hot iron rod. Her leaves no stone unturned to excruciate her by supporting his mother in treating her with domestic violence and keeping illicit relationship with other women.

Postcolonial writers including Ruth Praver Jhabvala give a fair space to reciprocation of cultural and religious activities between the colonisers and the colonised. It is termed as cultural amalgamation or multiculturalism. The narrator herself seems to be completely engrossed with the Indian atmosphere. She becomes a friend of many Indians. In search of her targeted place in India, she meets with many types of people and adopt their habits. She comes to Satipur and meets with Inder Lal’s family. She wears Indian dresses and becomes a part of many rituals of India. Once she wears ‘Panjabi’ dresses and she has been called as ‘hijra’ by the children of the town (HD09). It happens due to cultural amalgamation as her complexion and slender physics never suit to Indian dresses. She goes with other Indian women to follow certain rituals on ‘Husband’s Wedding Day’. (HD68) Moreover, she becomes a part of widows procession to ‘suttee’ place. She likes to stay with Inder Lal and decides to keep his baby at the end of the novel. She justifies Olivia’s decision to stay in India after getting departed from Mr. Douglas. Nirmal Mukerji appreciates her character and asserts, “She not only dresses like an Indian and lives like an Indian (in a lower middle class neighbourhood), she says, she feels part of scene. Heat and dust do not bother her much as it very much does the other English men and women” (184).

Chid seems to be attracted towards Indian spirituality. He visits various places of India and meets various types of people. He experiences spiritual bliss at the mountain lines of Himalayas and spends inside the big caves with

the groups of sadhus. He accepts all the ways of Indian life style. But when he meets to the narrator, he has been shuddering with pain and injuries. He has been plundered by some rogues. He asks her help and takes accommodation at her room. While being with her, he chants some mantras and meditates like any sadhu. He suggests Inder Lal's mother to take Ritu to such a superstitious man. He goes along with them to cure Ritu by these means. As he goes away from the narrator, he contacts her through letters and he writes, "Jai Shiva Shankar! Hari Om!" (HD94)

Karim, Nawab's nephew, accepts the British life style at London. He goes to London for doing business of designer dresses. He is introduced during the discussion with the narrator as she is collecting information for her journey to India. He laughs over Nawab for his womanistic behaviour. When Karim explains about his uncle, Nawab of Khatm, he uses wrong words as 'Wasn't he a naughty boy?' (HD98) He behaves like a British man.

Ruth Praver Jhabvala has lucidly describes the colonial as well as post-colonial India from her critical perspective through the narrator in *Heat and Dust*. The novel swings from colonial to post-colonial stage with their ins and outs. The transition witnesses a lot of public hue and cry; political commotions and permutations; and social assumptions and presumptions. It also makes us aware how abhorrence and indifference of Britishers in the colonial era are altered to love and concern in the post-colonial period.

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