

## Cultural Fracas in Ruth Praver Jhabvala's Esmond in India

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### Abstract

Ruth Praver Jhabvala is an outstanding English novelist with an intimate connection with India. Ruth Praver lived in England from 1939 to 1951. To the European woman, who came to India in 1951 with her London University education, Post-Independent India offered experiences that would arouse in the creative writer responses ranging from genuine enthusiasm to deep disillusionment. The problem of east-west encounter in Jhabvala's fictions has social, cultural, economic and spiritual dimensions. In the social context Indians and Europeans, meet, fall in love, get married and face either mutual dissonance or familial friction. The east is looked upon as having a traditional and conventional background with its roots in religion. The west, on the other hand, believes in reason, materialistic development and believes in its supremacy in the world. The major themes in Jhabvala's fiction are east-west encounter and marital dissonance. Esmond in India is first major novel. Jhabvala that deals with the dilemmas in the characters from the west in an eastern country

**KEYWORDS:** Cultural Fracas, Strangeness, Integrity, Existence, Wisdom

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### Introduction:

Ruth Praver Jhabvala was born in Cologne, Germany on 7<sup>th</sup> May 1927 to Jewish parents Marcus Praver and Eleanora Cohn. Marcus Praver was a lawyer originally from Poland. Ruth Praver was the second child and her only brother was Swiegbert Salomon Praver who later became professor of German Language and Literature at Oxford University. In 1951, Ruth married Cyrus S.H. Jhabvala, an Indian Parsi architect, and moved to New Delhi, where their three daughters Renana, Ava and Firoza, were born. Jhabvala has written twelve novels, six volumes of short stories and several screen plays. She has won many awards, including the Booker Prize for her novel Heat and Dust and two Oscars for her adaptations of E.M. Forster's A Room with a View and Howards End. She also wrote several screen plays for movies. She passed away on April 03, 2013 at her home in New York city at the age of eight five.

It seems as though, Jhabvala was a settler in India for a long period, she has her own style and techniques to portray the different aspects of Indian society. The interaction between two cultures. European and Indian seems to her forte. The paper focuses attention on the theme of cultural clashes in the novel Esmond in India. The clash between the East and West are the major themes in the post-colonial era. The cultural fracas is based on the difference in the belief systems of two spheres, occident and the orient. The occident has its strong confidence in its beliefs, reason, materialistic harmony and its supremacy in the world. On the other side, the orient has strong beliefs in its traditional and conventional

faith in the supernatural power of religion. The clear cultural fracas between tradition and modernity can be understood with the analysis of her novel *Esmond in India*.

*Esmond in India* was published in 1957. It narrates the urban middle class post-colonial society of India. It depicts the differences in the attitudes of East and West. After independence, the British came as visitors and some of them mixed with natives. Esmond Stillwood in *Esmond in India* is an Englishman who marries an Indian girl called Gulab, but later tries to detach himself from her and go on his own passionate journey. In the prime stage he has attracted by the culture and tradition of the east and develops a deep knowledge of the history and the traditional poetry of India. Gulab has married Esmond much against the wishes of her family. Esmond's way of life and tastes do not agree with those of Gulab. In the budding stage of their life Esmond takes Gulab everywhere because he has married her from a land, he is fond of. Unlike Esmond, who is modernized in every way, Gulab is very traditional and dislikes attending cocktail parties. She is embarrassed by the western ladies. Esmond leaves her and sets out alone, which gives him a feeling of amazing freedom. Esmond earns his living by giving lectures to western and elite groups of ladies on Hindustani and the art and history of Indian. He also guides some western ladies to historical places in Delhi. Though he has the ability to tackle any situation with his vast knowledge, he fails to tackle Gulab and his servants. Esmond keeps his home well furnished, spick and span in European style. He urges Gulab to adopt his western ways of life, which she is not able to do.

After the birth of their son Ravi, she suffers much because of the difference between her culture and attitude and those of Esmond. Esmond craves for Gulab's company and treats her as his possession and commodity. He expects his son to have boiled English food, as well as to sleep in separate bed. Unfortunately, Gulab's born up instincts fails to follow this. Esmond starts to haunt her mentally and physically. Fed up with the ill treatment of Esmond, Uma wants Gulab to leave his husband. Gulab allows herself to be insulted by Esmond and tolerate everything silently and patiently like an Indian wife. Gulab's behaviour haunts Uma and she burst out before her brother Ram Nath. Whenever oppressed by Gulab, Esmond spends time with Betty. He is fond of attending cock tail parties with Betty who was light, modern and more than an English girl according to his taste. To him being with her is almost feeling his own native land England.

Exhausted Esmond leaves for Agra and with Betty, some English ladies and Shakuntala whom he met in the parties. Shakuntala is fond of Esmond's appearance and knowledge. She does not mind having an affair with the middle-aged Esmond. In Agra, in the moonlight Taj Mahal's garden, she loses her heart to Esmond. She was ready to submit herself as slave to him which he dislikes and moments for him were those with another girl in a series of his casual conquests. Esmond spends most of his time with Betty and plans to escape with her.

When two humans with opposite identity come into contact with each other, it leads to a cultural clash between them. The young couple, Esmond and Gulab find that for them it is not a question of understanding each other, but of living together in an environment which is familiar to one and alien to the other. As a result of this Gulab is stuck between two cultures, one in the culture of her husband's flat and then other in her mother's home.

Esmond is left in a dilemma as whether he should to stay in India or to go back to England.

At the end of the novel when a servant tries to physically abuse her, Gulab spits at him and jerks against him like Goddess Durga. Gulab is strongly upset by the incident and she feels Esmond has failed to protect her as a husband should. Immediately she leaves the flat and goes to Uma's home. In the cultural Fracas in which Esmond and Gulab are engaged, nobody seems to be the winner. Each one loses, holds on to their own cultures. Gulab goes back her mother's home; Esmond planning returned England where he hopes to "be happy" all day long and light hearted (203).

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