

Diasporic Experiences in Ruth Praver Jhabvala's *Myself In India*

Dr. C. PRIYA., M.A.,M.Phil.,PGDHM.,Ph.D.,

Assistant Professor of English

PG & Research Department of English

Arulmigu Palaniandavar Arts College for Women, Palani

Abstract

*Diaspora is the dispersion of a people from their original homeland. People who leave their homeland face diasporic experiences. Diasporic experiences have always been considered as an unavoidable thing for those who migrate from native place to another place. Most of the people migrate for their better life. Some of the people migrate simply because their partners are there. So, they are forced to move to an alien land without any chance. In an alien land, how they are going to adopt themselves is the millinery question. They settle with their own reasons and responses in the diasporic land. A Booker prize award-winning writer, Ruth Praver Jhabvala is the apt person for this category. Ruth Praver was born in Cologne, Germany on 7th may 1927. After the escape from Nazi Germany, her family settled in England. At the age of twenty-four, she got marriage with Cyrus S.H. Jhabvala, an Indian architect. She moved from England to India in 1951 simply because her husband is there. She herself is the real example of this experience. Her three stages of writing career show her cycle of experience about India. Her *Myself in India* is the best example of this kind. This paper focuses on the diasporic experiences of the settlers in an alien land.*

Keywords: *Diaspora, migration, alienation, diasporic experiences, and alien land.*

Ruth Praver Jhabvala analyses and explores the diasporic experiences of the settlers in *Myself in India*. In *Myself in India*, she starts, "I have lived in India for most of my adult life. My husband is Indian and so are my children. I am not, and less so ever year". (MII 13) She realises and quotes the cycle of experience from the settlers in India especially from Western lands. She says,

There is a cycle that Europeans-by Europeans I mean all Westerners, including Americans-tend to pass through. It goes like this: first stage tremendous enthusiasm-everything Indian is marvellous; second stage, everything Indian not so marvellous; third stage, everything Indian abominable. For some people it ends there, for others the cycle renews itself and goes on...I think of myself as strapped to a wheel that goes round and round..... (MII 13)

She herself is the real example of this cycle of experience. Her three stages of writing career show her cycle of experience about India.

Ruth Praver Jhabvala's first stage of writing includes her first five novels. They are *To Whom She Will*, *The Nature of Passion*, *Esmond in India*, *The Householder* and *Get Ready for Battle*. The novels written in the first stage

deals with Indian domestic and social problems, joint-family system, arranged marriages verses love matches, marital dissonance, and the conflict between a modern westernized youth and traditional parents. The second stage includes her next three novels. They are *A Backward Place*, *A New Dominion* and *Heat and Dust*. In the second stage, she shifts her concern from Indians in India to the Europeans in India. It reflects Jhabvala's own heritage. She starts to focus on the lives of westerners who live in India or visit India. According to Singh, "Her relationship with India is an extraordinarily tangled one because she remained committed to India in a way and for a length of time unusual among the gamut of western writers who have taken India as their subject." (6)

The third stage of her writing reflects her physical shift from India to US. Her next four novels are the examples. The next four novels are American novels. They are *In Search of Love and Beauty*, *Three Continents*, *Poet and Dancer* and *Shards of Memory*. Her three stages of writing career reveal her unique quality of creativity. According to Waheed, "Jhabvala's merit as a creative writer lies in her being intensely aware of her limitations." (22)

Jhabvala has a tough time in India because she is not able to cope up the situations especially the Indian way of etiquettes and behavior. She wants to stay in closed room. She states that it is her fault only. She is not able to adapt the Indian society because of their way of communication. She describes that Indians can be together for a whole day and almost not talking with each other. But the Europeans who settled in India would feel pretty awkward, if they didn't talk and shared their thoughts. "All the time I know myself to be on the back of this great animal of poverty and backwardness." (MII 15) She uses metaphor. She compares life in India to a journey on an animal. The animal imagery means the tough and difficult survival that Indians undergo usually. Poverty, unemployment and other sociological factors paint the grim picture of Indian life to the westerner.

Jhabvala describes simply the process and the belief of reincarnation. A rich man would stuff himself in "pilao", and think that he has earned it due to their previous lives. Poor man who is standing in line for his next life which hopefully would be better. Indians' way of thinking makes them perfectly fit to survive the major difficulties e.g. poverty and backwardness. India has the proud movements like Indian democracy, Indian music, and Indian intellectuals but at the same time a very great number of Indians never get enough to eat. This is the pathetic condition of India easily visible at the eye of westerner like Jhabvala. "People dying of starvation in the streets...as on the back of an animal" (MII 14)

Jhabvala observes the life style of Europeans who stayed in India. Most of the Europeans have mission to stay in India. They won't bother about their migration. According to them, migration is not an important thing to think and act. Jhabvala tries to come out of a kind of unfitness in India. So, she wants to concentrate only herself in India. But she is not able to do. Even though she has a nice house to live in an agreeable way, she knows herself to be on the back of this great animal of poverty and backwardness. It is not possible to shut all the doors and windows and keep her inside the closed air-conditioner room and pretends not to see the pathetic condition of poor people. She has all the opportunity to engage herself in Delhi. She may spend her time in

Parties, Art exhibitions, Plays, Music and Dance recitals. At one stage, she wants to ignore the animal imagery.

These diasporic experiences give a new perception of approach to Jhabvala. So she wishes to concentrate only on modern, well-off, cultured westernized Indians. And she started to share her experience with a westernized Indian woman with whom she spent her time. The westernized woman speaks flawless, colloquial English. She came from an educated family. Her family led a westernized way of life in India. Anyways, they like to follow the tradition of India. She likes to wear saree, traditional jewels, and vermilion mark on her forehead. She married a well off Indian business man. She is ready to talk about all subjects with flawless English but "all the time it is as if they were talking about some *other* place - as if it were a subject for debate - an abstract subject - and not a live animal actually moving under their feet" (MII 17) Jhabvala's try of ignoring the animal is failed. Then she starts to observe Indians.

Jhabvala says that Indians are always sit together in groups, "For them it is enough just to be together; there are long stretches of silence in which everyone stares into space".(MII 17) She doesn't like this kind of gathering. She says that the climate of India invites Indians to be like this. "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."(MII 18) Though she tries to sit together and be like an Indian, very soon she realized that she is lasting her energy simply by sitting without doing any work. She says, "I feel I cannot, I must not allow myself to live this way". (MII 18) If she decides to mingle with the immigrants, immediately she realizes that they too had the same situation like her in India. So, they can't be a good companion for her. She needs a suitable companion who has the capability to understand what she wants to convey. Even the visitors from Abroad, doesn't suits with her way of thinking.

So, the abroad visitors' physical presence alone makes her happy. She likes to see their fresh complexions, red cheeks, clothes, shoes, accents, and intonations. She likes to know their opinion about new plays, restaurants, changes and fashions. When they ask about her life in India, she doesn't want to talk about India. After a long

conversation only, she understands that they didn't catch her point and also the context. She says,

I want to cry out; this is not what I mean! You are listening to me in entirely the wrong context! But there is no way of explaining the context. It would take too long, and anyway what is the point? It's such a small, personal thing. I fall silent. (MII 19)

So, again she is back to her closed air-conditioner room. As a westerner, she is not able to tolerate the heat of the mid afternoon and also day time. As an outsider, she is not able to cope up with Indian way of worshipping God. They see God through Cow. But, she sees the real worst condition of the unhealthy Cow. Anyways, she likes to hear the devotional songs. She wants to be patient. But, she could not be patient.

Jhabvala comes to the conclusion that if the westerners want to live in India with peace, they have to adopt Indians' attitudes, habits, and beliefs. They have to change their personality. It is nothing, but cheating them self. She says,

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 will say that I have not truly merged with India? (MII 21)

At the end, Jhabvala accepts that she has got used to intense heat and seems to need it. She says, "I do sometimes go back to Europe. But after a time I get bored there and want to come back here. I also find it hard now to stand the European climate. I have got used to intense heat and seem to need it." (MII 21) She realizes her willingness to stay in India. It shows her cycle of experience which she discussed in the beginning of *Myself in India*. In the beginning stage of her stay in the diasporic land, India is a compulsion. But after long years of stay in India, she has got used to stay in India.

Key to Abbreviation

MII – *Myself in India*

References

1. Jhabvala, Ruth Praver. *Out of India Selected Stories*. London: Penguin books, 1957. Print.
2. Singh, Rishi Pal. *Ruth Praver Jhabvala's Novels Woman amidst Snares and Delusions*. New
3. Delhi: Atlantic publishers, 2009. Print.
4. Waheed M.A. *The Novels of Ruth Jhabvala and Anita Desai*. New Delhi: Prestige Books, 2007. Print.