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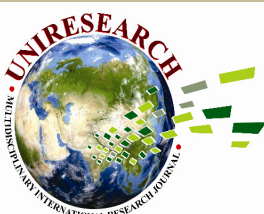
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Chief Editor :

Dr. Dhanraj Dhangar,
Deptt. of Marathi,
MGV's Arts & Commerce College,
Yeola, Dist. Nashik.[M.S.] India
Email: dhanrajdhangar@gmail.com
Mob. 7775982534



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The Postcolonial Study of Ruth Praver Jhabvala's *Esmond in India*

Lakhan R. Gaidhane* & Dr. Dilip Jena**

*Assistant Professor in English
S.S. Girls' College Gondia
Dist- Gondia, Maharashtra

lakhangaidhane@yahoo.in 09405729947

**Assistant Professor in English
NMD College Gondia
Dist- Gondia, Maharashtra

dilipsjena@gmail.com 09422134887

Abstract:

The Postcolonial Literature deals with the impact of colonies on the native countries or the third-world countries after the end of the colonial rule. Some new terms like Colonialism, Imperialism, Neocolonialism, Subaltern Studies, Hybridity, Diaspora, Cosmopolitanism, Imagined Communities, Multinational Citizenship, Tricontinentalism and Multiculturalism are coined to literature with their own values and validities. Ruth Praver Jhabvala's Esmond in India presents many aspects of postcolonial literature like colonial hangover, imperial temperament of Europeans, diaspora, multiculturalism and hybridity. She has also focused on the distinctive features of the socio-economic condition of post-independent India.

Keywords: Postcolonial, Oriental, Colonialism, Occidental.

World has been changing constantly since the inception of mankind. Powerful always overpowers the weak and meek. In the old era, there were some groups and their leaders, but gradually, these groups made small villages to keep themselves powerful and sovereign. In the course of time, the world had been divided into countries and continents. Consequently, some of them became powerful with their military strength. European people wandered around the world to spread their business and gradually, they developed colonies in Asia, Africa and South America (the Third World). Basically, they wanted to spread their religion and to create such a mass that could understand their language. For this purpose, the native people were educated from missionary schools. They started to exploit the native people as they were poor, underprivileged and unaware. In most of the cases, the native people were treated as slaves. Moreover, their culture and tradition were replaced by the European ones. Particularly, the colonies of European countries were largely developed during eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Eventually, after the completion of two world wars, the mindset of colonized people got changed with persistent development and increased awareness regarding independence of their own land. Dennis Walder observes, "While losing political and economic leadership, Britain has maintained a certain cultural predominance through such institutions as the commonwealth, a loose collection of countries which before 1947 formed part of the British Empire: and by growth of English as world language"¹

The period after colonial era is called as 'the postcolonial era'. Literature of this period has visible impact of the colonial era. The themes of literature are mostly related with the violence of colonial era. Ania Loomba's *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* introduces the postcolonial theory. The colonialism has been defined by her as, "the conquest and control of other people's land and goods.... A wide range of practices including trade, plunder, negotiation, warfare, genocide, enslavement and rebellion."² The literary critical theories based on the literature of this era are

related with a dark side of the colonial era. Basically, these theories are concerned with conflicts and confusion of colonized people. The writers, who treat violence of colonized era as their major themes, give emphasis on inhuman nature of the colonial people and their tactics related with the oppression of the colonized. The widely discussed writers and works are Chinua Achebe's *A Man of The People* (1966), Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood* (1977), V. S. Naipaul's *The Mimic Men* (1967), Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1982) and Ruth Praver Jhabvala's *Esmond in India* (1958). The thinkers like Franz Fanon, Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravarti Spivak, Homi K. Bhabha and Mahatma Gandhi have discussed the situation of oriental countries and put the theories based on the oppressed condition of the people in colonial era. Colonialism, Imperialism, Neocolonialism, Subaltern Studies, Hybridity, Diaspora, Cosmopolitanism, Imagined Communities, Multinational Citizenship, Tricontinentalism and Multiculturalism are the terms which are prominently discussed in the postcolonial literature.

Postcolonial literature has been studied for its diverse peculiarities. After the second world war, virtually, world has been divided into two parts, one is called as the Oriental and other as the Occidental. It is well described in Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978). Pramod K. Nayar asserts it well:

Postcolonial literature seeks to address the ways in which non-European (Asian, African, South American, but also settler colony) literatures and cultures have been marginalized as an effect of colonial rule, and to find, if possible, modes of resistance, retrieval, and reversal of their of their 'own' precolonial pasts. That is, this literature seeks to understand, negotiate, and critique a specific historical 'event'- colonial rule – while looking forward to a more just, socially egalitarian world order. It is literature of resistance, anger, protest, and hope. It seeks to understand history so as to plan for the future.³

The colonized never tried to go against the colonial and they lived in much neglected condition. Postcolonial literature is about the oppressed people of the third world countries. After getting independence, they are breathing the fresh air of freedom. They are thinking about the improvement and planning for their future. In fact, they are preparing to become one of the developed countries. But, the reminiscences of their dark past never let them work freely for their development plans. The political internal conflicts, the long laid traditions and their stern mentality for old things stand as hurdles in their progressive path. The new generation of the colonized is imitating the colonials and criticizing their old generation for the underdevelopment. It is witnessed from many instances of postcolonial era related to subaltern and domestic violence that the colonial attitude still remains among the rich and upper middle class people of the society. The underprivileged and downtrodden people are still treated as slaves in the internal system.

Being a writer, Jhabvala always discriminates between Occidentals and Orientals. European characters in her novels have some peculiarities which have been projected through their dresses and behaviour. Raji Narsimha rightly observes: "She writes about India, of course. But that it is a foreigner's perspective and the voice has unmistakable foreign inflexions have come to be overlooked in misplaced magnanimity towards Indo-English."⁴ In the present novel, *Esmond in India*, there are many aspects of postcolonial literature as well as the socio-economic condition of post-independent India. Not only the title of the novel refers to European but the background of the novel has a touch of Europeanism. Major characters consider that life in European continent is better and stylish than India. Ram Nath, Har Dayal, Raj and Amrit have been educated from European universities, particularly; at Cambridge University and their views about conditions in India are different. Har Dayal and Amrit like to enjoy life like a

European. Similarities can be pointed out as it is reflected from their way of talking, sense of clothing and practice of keeping contacts with Europeans and attending regularly the European gatherings. They take special care to appear different from other Indians.

The locale of the novel is basically centered in Delhi. Hence, the instances of 'hybridity' (a recently developed term and popularized by Homi K. Bhabha) are plentifully available here. Though the colonies of British government have been sent back to their country, the Britishers have left an indelible impact on Indians as Homi K. Bhabha rightly says, "The White man's artifice inscribed on the Black man's body."⁵ In postcolonial discourse, the colonized compare themselves with colonial men and they like to accept the lifestyle. Consequently, they start to praise the colonial era for its richness and decorum. After becoming independent, they need to think about future progress but, instead of following the Indian traditions and cultures they get themselves busy to appear different and project their superiority over native people. The previously colonized people like Amrit, considers a white man is better than the people having dark skins as they require lot of improvements. Amrit views Narayan as a primitive because he serves in village area as a doctor. He makes comments on contemporary Indian political policies and suggests it should be modified. He regards the western lifestyle and modernity in clothes can keep a person young and energetic. Jhabvala puts her side in words of Indira, Amrit's wife:

'It is strange, but one can always tell if man has been to an English university or not. If Amrit had not been abroad ...' she did not finish, because it was needless to finish. An Amrit who had not been abroad, had not acquired an English polish, would simply not have been Amrit; not her Amrit. 'I think,' she added, ... 'that Raj also will come back quite different.'⁶ (EI p. 22)

Shakuntala likes modern clothing and stylish way of talking. Due to her susceptible nature she becomes an easy prey for Esmond and gets her character damaged. Har Dayal and Shakuntala are fond of English music, particularly, the song 'Ozymandias' (EI p. 69). Har Dayal likes to put lines from Matthew Arnold's poems in his speeches off and on. Moreover, Madhuri likes to bring up her daughter in English surroundings.

Esmond comes to India for studying the Indian culture and literature. He collects enough knowledge about the different aspects of Indian traditions and dogmas. Having completed his study, he starts the private tuitions for Indian as well as European women. His girlfriend, Betty, helps him in his work and arranges such gatherings. He considers Indians are poor in knowledge and he applies all his tricks to succeed over Shakuntala and enjoys life with her, though he has already his Indian wife, Gulab. In his private gatherings, he prefers western ladies to Indians. During colonial era, British officials used to despise native people and they thought Indians were below the standard and needed rectifications and reformations in various aspects of life.

The attitude of Esmond to oppress and subdue native people clearly shows and symbolizes the Europeans eye-view towards Orientals. His way of talking with his servants and using foul languages to treat them as an inferior fellow prove that he still possess European mentality of colonial period. His domestic life is not happy one, he beats and quarrels with his wife during night time and forces her to stay at home even in his absence like a slave. He does not like to accept his son because he has Indian complexion. He uses words for his son, 'Angles not Angles' (EI p. 34). In one of Esmond's private gathering, a western woman speaks against Indian music that it lacks the joy of rock music and it is quite boring with its calmness and serenity. Esmond visits to Taj Mahal with a group of ladies. When they return from Taj Mahal, he notices that his shoes have been stolen from stand and considers all Indian system as mean and fraudulent. In another incident, he and Shakuntala travel by bus, they are offered special seats though the bus is

already packed with passengers. At that moment, he feels proud over his Englishness. He also visualises that the British officials during the colonial era must have elicited the same awe and respect from the native people.

To sum up, it may be inferred that some distinctive features of postcolonial writing are available in Jhabvala's *Esmond in India*. The attributes like hybridity, oppressing attitude of rich and powerful people, the sufferings and endurance of oppressed people, a watertight compartment between Orientals and Occidentals and the bullying attitude of the Occidentals towards the Orientals are effectively presented in the novel.

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6. Jhabvala, Ruth Praver, *Esmond in India* Harmondsworth, Penguin Books Ltd. 1980, p. 22. All subsequent references to this novel are given parenthetically with abbreviation as EI and the concerned page numbers.