

Ruthpraver Jhabwala's "Heat and Dust"-A Feminist Perspective

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Abstract:

Anglo -Indian writer, Ruth Jhabwala(1927-) who started as a novelist in the 1950s proved her ability to entertain her readers when her novel "Heat And Dust" was published in 1975. Not in a prurient way - her writer's manners had been well known since her elegant colonial India novel "Heat And Dust" won the Booker prize the same year. The woman protagonist Olivia in the novel outrages the sensibility of the English by eloping with the Nawab of Khatm in spite of her effort to keep out the heat and dust by shutting all the doors and windows, Olivia became a victim of the heat and inherent passion in her when she became pregnant, she told the Nawab first and only then to Douglas. She also got her pregnancy aborted for the fear that the baby might look like an Indian. In her attempt to cover her guilt, she loses the child as well as her husband. She remains childless and spent a lonely life on the hill in the home bought by the Nawab for her. The novelist presents a common dilemma in the novel believably. Olivia's problem is nuclear. There is a presence of two or more relatively distinct and separate sub personalities in her person. Her loyalty is divided between her husband and the Nawab. The paper is an attempt to analyze the complexities of the woman protagonist as also the themes and issues in "Heat and Dust".

Keywords: Ruth Praver Jhabwala, Heat and Dust.

Anglo -Indian writer, Ruthpraver Jhabwala (1927-) who started as a novelist in the 1950s proved her ability to entertain her readers when her novel "Heat and Dust" was published in 1975. Not in a prurient way - her manners had been well known since her elegant colonial India novel "Heat and Dust" won the Booker prize the same year. "Esmond in India" (1958), "Heat and Dust" is about westerners trying to understand India and Indians. In the novel which is the story of the beautiful, spoiled and bored Olivia, married to a civil servant character that outrages society in the tiny, suffocating town of Satipur by eloping with an Indian Nawab, a common dilemma is believably presented. Heat and Dust is a love story, which contrasts the 1920s and the 1970s. Olivia, a passionate colonial wife, is married to an English officer. Douglas Rivers. A pretty, young woman, rather vain, pleasure seeking and a little petulant, she falls in love with the local Nawab, a minor Indian prince and becomes pregnant. She gets her child aborted for the fear that the baby might look like an Indian and abandons her husband. She remains

chillness and spends lonely life on the hills in the home bought to her by the Nawab for her.

Fifty years later her granddaughter, the narrator, travels to India to investigate the enigma of the family scandal -neither her name nor the exact year she arrived are ever stated. She takes a room in satipur and visits the house in which Olivia and Douglas had lived (it had been subdivided into several government offices, in one of which InderLal, her new land lord, works). She first visited the Nawab's palace with InderLal and then the shrine of Baba Firdausi on the day of an annual fertility festival (the husband's wedding day"), with InderLal's mother and her friends. When she subsequently visited the shrine with the InderLal, the two become lovers (near the spot where Olivia and the Nawab had become lovers in 1923).The midwives in satipur could tell that the narrator was pregnant before she herself realized it. The novel concludes with the narrator, whose choice is to carry her child to term, having arrived in X(she has taken a room; she has stood inside Olivia's house).The narrator has heard there is an ashram further up the mountain although she does not know how long she will stay, she says she rarely locks down.

Jhabvala in the novel tries to show that people have an inherent fear of what they don't know or what is different. This is the underlying concept behind the prejudices encountered by the Olivia-the woman protagonist who is led to hateful views and actions in Heat and Dust. Discrimination

based on standards such as origin, race, and appearance occurs throughout the text of the novel. The primary theme of the novel is, how drastically racism changes everything for the worse. The novel has been acclaimed for technical innovation. Margaret B.Helen in her essay in contemporary Novelists opines:"Technical innovation is also notable in Heat and Dust. Although it is a short novel, the historical dimension adds considerably to the rather enclosed interiors that characterized much of her early work. Structurally, Heat and Dust is a brilliant interweaving of contemporary observation by a young English visitor, juxtaposed with the event of 1923 when Olivia, the young wife of a district officer, falls in love with an Indian prince and runs away with him. Using Olivia letters as a basis for her own journal, the contemporary traveler, who is in fact granddaughter of the deserted District Officer, filtering the past to the present, we are able to share the complicated attitude held by the English civilian and military staff in 1923,in although background detail are selected rather than described, the reaction of the two races are totally convincing, even as cameo studies."1

As the story unfolds, we come to know about the sad plight of the heroine of the novel. The year is 1923. Olivia had been in satipur a few months and was beginning to get bored.

As Mercia tells Harry

"She had been blonde.....passionate"

"She said that where she and Olivia were most alike in their temperament which was

passionate. She claimed she could understand Olivia completely. Of course, she said their tastes differed-for instance, Mercia could never understand what Olivia had seen in Douglas, as far as she ,Mercia, was concerned, he was just a stick and she was not in the least surprised that Olivia should have got bored to death with him and gone off with someone more interesting”

There were no opportunities for the wives of the officers to relax and enjoy life. Her husband, Douglas-the Assistant district collector was always busy through he loved her dearly and always tried to do the best possible for her.

Besides being an administrator, and a clam and controlled person, Douglas was a caring husband to. He knew that most of her time his wife spent alone in her big house, doors and windows are closed against the dust. And that she felt secluded as he, due to heavy pressures of administrative responsibilities as the Asst.District collector, could hardly find any time for her. For the sake of his wife's happiness he even didn't object the visits of Nawab to his house in his absence...

“Not that he had much free time, for he kept himself as busy as ever in the district. He worked like a Trojan and never ceased to be clam and controlled, so that he was very much esteemed both by his colleagues and Indians. He was upright and just”.

In order to ensure that she may be away from the boring life for some time, he

persuaded Olivia to join Mrs. Crawford and Mrs.Minnies in their days and evenings together.

“Although Douglas had done his best to persuade Olivia to accompany them, now that she had decided to stay he was very grateful and happy. They spent lovely evenings and nights together. Olivia tried to be happy and gay for him.(underline mine)she understood that, once Douglas was home, he just wanted to be home, with her, in their tasteful English bungalow, living outside all the heat and problems he had to contend with the whole day long. So she never touched on any subject that might cast even the finest shadow on him-like, for instance that of the Nawab.....Douglas loved her more than ever at this time”.

Like many Indian rulers, the Nawab was fond of entertaining Europeans. He was at a disadvantage in not having much to entertain them with, for his state had neither interesting ruins nor was it hunting country. All it had was dry soil and impoverished villages. Olivia saw it as a great opportunity to go out for a social visit when the Nawab of khatm,a small princely state invited two couples-Douglas and Olivia and Mr. and Mrs.Crawford-to a dinner party. Excited as Olivia was, she wore a special traveling costume for the journey. She was happy thinking ahead of others soon seeing her in her evening dress and jewels. Nawab's palace which had been built in 820's, was rather grand. Olivia's eyes lit up as she was led into the drawing room and saw beneath the chandeliers the long ,long table laid with a serves when she was led into the

dining room and saw the candelabra, pineapples, complete silver service and golden bowls, she was still more charmed.

Nawab could notice the passion in the eyes of Olivia easily. So he started to visit her house every now and then. He took her to a picnic (about which she didn't tell her husband).

“That evening Douglas found Olivia not as usual half in tears with boredom and fatigue. But so excited that for a moment he feared she had a fever. He put his hand on her brow: he had seen her lot of Indian fever. She laughed at him. When she told him about her visitor, he had his doubts- but seeing how gay she was, how glad, he decided it was alright. She was lonely, and it was decent of the Nawab to have called on her”.

Olivia, who wanted to meet Nawab repeatedly, told Douglas that Harry was ill in khatm and that she was going to visit him. Douglas merely replied with an “oh, which Olivia interpreted as meaning that he knew she frequently traveled to khatm. She no longer hurried to get home before he arrived (there was little need since he was keeping longer and longer hours at his office). Olivia was usually up long after Douglas went to bed asleep when he left in the morning. One morning through she did rise with him (they quarreled). After Douglas left; she looked towards khatm and later walked.

When Olivia realized she was pregnant, she did not tell Douglas although she had meant

to-until after she had told the Nawab (Douglas had been so very busy). At the palace, she saw the Nawab leaving a meeting with major nannies and-for the first time-called him by name. After she told him she was pregnant, it seemed fair that she tells Douglas, too and so she did, later that same evening.

Nawab is temperamentally Douglas's opposite. Nawab as Indredlal tells the narrator in the early part of the novel, “had a dissolute bad life.” He knew very well about his ill reputation in khatm and in satipur. He feared that Olivia may trust on the things heard about him. He says “you will hear many things about me. There are many people to give bad report. Whatever I do-there are always those who will say one thing when it is another. Harry also warns Olivia that she shouldn't be and the palace. He dares to quarrel with her on the issue. When he informs her about the vices of the Nawab, she says Douglas says the same about him. Harry mentions having quarreled with the Nawab (over his not having introduced her to the begum). He tells Olivia how the Nawab avoids questions he doesn't want to answer. When Olivia how she becomes pregnant. Harry tells her that the Nawab had said Douglas and the others would be astonished when her baby born; she asks Harry if he thought the Nawab had meant the color (how could he be sure?). Like many Indian rulers, the Nawab was fond of entertaining Europeans. He was at disadvantage in not having much to entertain them with, for his state had neither interesting ruins nor was it hunting country.

All it had was dry soil and impoverished villages.

Olivia never believed any one of them "Of course she could not contradict or argue with them; that was always the trouble with them; she never could, she didn't have the right to say anything because they knew everything about India and she nothing. Yet she felt it was she who knew the nawab, not they. To them he was just a person they had to deal with officially, an Indian ruler, but to her he was-yes, a friend. He really was".

He is held responsible for the communal riots. Mrs. Crawford believes that he could have controlled the communal riots, had he indented so.,

"It's criminal", said Mrs. Crawford with deep feeling". When he could so easily control it-if he wanted to-"

"The Nawab?" Olivia asked. But of course he'd to!"

"Do not forget he is a Mohammedan too", they told her.

"Yes, but he's not like that: not a fanatic. Good Heaven"

Everyone believed the nawab had used Olivia for revenge (but that was not enough to excuse her). Olivia did not return to Douglas after seeing thrown out of the hospital. She went straight to the palace. Dr. Aunders had not been reticent about speaking. He had seen many women those miscarriages had been induced: Often he slapped them around before throwing them

out of his hospital. He had always known there as something "rotten "about Olivia and he now had proof.

Shortly thereafter, Harry returned to England

Since everything around her was evidence of life's unfairness-uncompromising weather characterized by scorching heat and dust, and busy husband who was unable to stay at home to love her dearly and to appreciate her costumes and rich jewellery, her views became distorted had she becomes violent. She joined the nawab on a picnic, as though believed to have someone to have someone in which to confide (she had meant to tell Douglas about the picnic but had not)..Olivia

Olivia belongs to the category of people who always want someone blame for their problem, and this is why adulterous relationships and affairs become frequent.

At the beginning of the book, it is learned that the narrator gathered information about Olivia, her grandfather's first wife from her letters believed through Harry, an accomplice of the nawab of Khatm.

Heat and Dust have been used as two central symbols to name the inner state of Olivia and later her said plight. The heat as symbol been used by the novelist to describe primarily the relationship between Olivia and nawab. The title of the book itself suggest the primarily theme represented. The heat is particularly intense before the monsoon begins. By that time, all are too beaten down by the heat and dust to compensations: the hotter the temperature, the sweeter the mango Even when the

landscape that had been heavy with a few dust went earlier now drips with water from the monsoons, she has not through about this and she sick's her hand out. This is symbolic of the inner of the woman protagonist.

Dust as a symbol has been used a symbol to describe her plight and the disturbances occurring in khatm and satipur. The problem of communal riots, satti and dacoit caused problems of law and dust storms' blow during the month of April (the month of clandestine love between Olivia and nawab) day and night: leaves that were green become ashen, dried by the hot winds. The monologues of Olivia novelist's descriptions and dialogues between Olivia and nawab bring out the theme of the book. The large Muslim population oh khatm the nawab and his family among them represent the terrible ignore of the society, much of which still prevails in society today. Since shrine was on the Nawab's land, they did not like their shrine being to over by Hindu worshippers and there was always a disturbance.

"The nawab himself was a Muslim and so were half of his subjects many of them did not take it when baba Firdausi's shrine was taken over by the Hindu worshippers and always managed to create a disturbance that day."

As the story unfolds, we come to know about Olivia and the nawab first become friends and then lovers. When she realized she was pregnant she told the nawab and then her husband. Douglas and she had the

being the nawab's mother, arrange an abortion. Following the abortion went directly to the palace in khatm and the nawab later purchases maintained a house for her in X, a small village in the steep foothills Himalayas (he never spoke of her again publicly). Olivia died in the lived a few years after the nawab, a quarter century before the narrator and in India. Against British custom, Olivia had also HD her body cremated and her ashes spread on the mountainside.

Olivia's problem is nuclear. There is a presence of two or more relatively distinct and separate sub personalities in her person. Her loyalty is dividing between her husband and the nawab. As a woman she represents the highest ideals of womanhood, when commenting on satti, she says:

"I mean, to want to go with the person you care for most in the world. Not to want to be alive any more if he wasn't."

Her view of India is different than that of Naipaul or E.M.Forster. Jhabvala, unlike Naipaul, wasn't drawn to India by ancestry or, as in Forster's case, by a desire to move beyond a complacent western liberalism. She was in Delhi, as she wrote, only because her husband was there, and she was interested not in India but in herself in India. In any case, what matters is that she managed to transmute her personal experience, however narrow, into art.² often her stories are seen from the point of view of an outsider. Some Indian critics have labeled her authorial detachment as a sign of old-fashioned western attitudes toward India.

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