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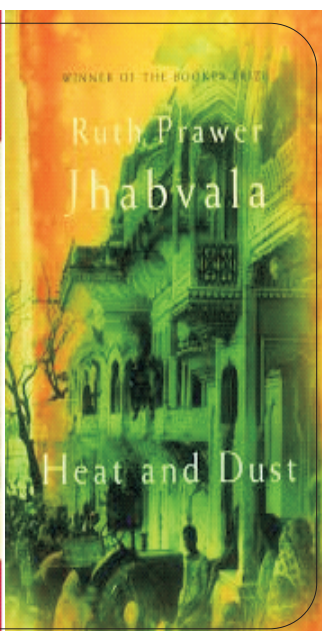
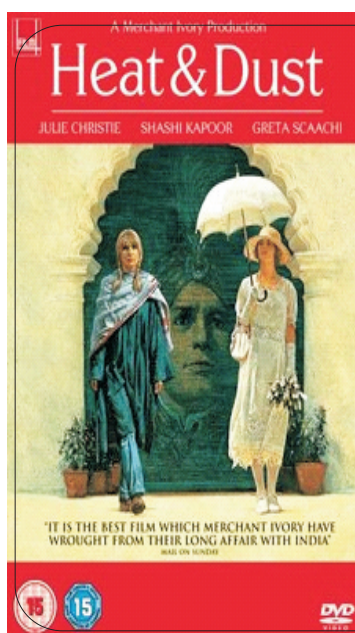


POST MODERNIST ELEMENT IN THE NOVEL “HEAT AND DUST” BY RUTH PRAWER JHABWALA



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ABSTRACT

In the field of literature postmodernism has become an important phenomenon because it is a movement that makes us to understand the dominant mode of representation at work in our society. Though there are many fiction writers who employed the post modernistic technique to produce the text, the novels of Ruth Praver Jhabwala abounds with post modernistic elements. Though in her early novels Jhabwala was critical of India like an outsider, yet she seemed an insider because of indelible impact of India on her mind. Heat and Dust that brought her Booker prize in 1975 has the postmodern element of Meta fiction novel yet it also fits into the postmodern epistolary tradition.

KEYWORDS : Post Modernist Element , Heat And Dust , literature postmodernism .

INTRODUCTION

During the last twenty years a significant number of epistolary novels by women have appeared, of the type which flourished in England and France in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. But the difference lies in the fact that the epistolary novels emerging now radically rewrite women's lives in the postmodern genre. Although such novels have always been about sexual politics but postmodern novels are most likely political in theme and more radical in form. Many of them are written by women in post-colonial culture, in which women have been doubly oppressed- from outside by a chauvinistic imperialism and from within by a patriarchy. Ruth Praver jhabwala's Heat and Dust is one of them. To produce this novel, Jhabwala has played in a postmodernist sense with epistolary convention. In fact epistolary novel is that which is written in the form of letters, either an exchange of the letters between two or more correspondents, or a single letter, or number of letters from one correspondent to one or more recipients. But the novels which are not in the form of letters yet their plot is determined, advanced and resolved by letters can also be classified as epistolary.

In the light of above point, *Heat and Dust* can be categorized as an epistolary novel because the protagonist of this novel travels to India after reading fifty-year old letters and becomes the victim of the same condition as the writer of the letter. In this novel Jhabwala uses the letter to achieve simultaneity, to superimpose one life on another. The unnamed narrator in the text, uses Olivia's fifty year old letters to write two stories simultaneously- Olivia's and her own. The "I" of the narrative is Miss Rivers. She belongs to post independent India of 1973. Though she does not carry her name as such in the novel, we can call her so because of being the daughter of Mr. Douglas. She is the narrator of the first story of Olivia who came to live in India in 1923 when it was under British rule. The narrator reads the letters that Olivia wrote to her sister and tells us Olivia's story through her own journal and relives the events described in the letter in order to understand Olivia's actions. Olivia is the first wife of Douglas Rivers. The young narrator is the grand- daughter of his second wife, Tessie Crawford. The narrator comes to India to solve the mystery surrounding Olivia.

We learn of Olivia through her letters written to her sister Marcia as narrated by the narrator. The narrator notes that,

"Olivia's handwriting is clear and graceful, even though she seems to have written very fast just as the thoughts and feelings came to her. Her letters all addressed to Marcia, but really they sound as if she is communing with herself, they are so intensely personal."

Besides the letters of Olivia, there are also letters from Chid to the narrator, but the difference as found by the narrator is that Olivia's letters are personal whereas Chid's letters are impersonal. But Chid's letters play an important role in the development of the narrative. It is only due to Chid's letter that the narrator and Inder Lal come closer because, "Inder Lal is always eager to hear Chid's letters. Apart from this Chid's letters also present the corrupt picture of the religious authorities of India. In one of the letters Chid informs: "We are here in Y Dharmshala, a pure place except the priest who tries to cheat and rob us."

Heat and Dust anticipates postmodernism though without fantasy. Its structure is that of an artifact. John Updike objected "the alteration between plots, drains both of momentum or of the substance that lends momentum." This alleged flaw is really a postmodernist virtue. It prevents the reader from getting too observed in the world of novels and thereby keeps him/ her alert and critical. There is no attempt to create character as in realist fiction. For this Jhabwala's characters are often compared with that of Jane Austen's. But this comparison is not appropriate and applicable because *Heat and Dust* is very postmodern.

At the beginning of the novel we see that Olivia is in love with her husband Douglas. He was an industrious administrator, upright, capable, manly yet unable to make her pregnant, though both he and Olivia feel that a child will end their respective dissatisfaction. Everyday Douglas leaves early in the morning and returns late in the evening. All day long Olivia feels sick at home:

"She had by that time been in Satipur for several months and was already beginning to get bored.....The rest of the time Olivia was alone in her big house with all the doors and windows shut to keep the heat and dust out."

So the invitation of the Nawab proves to be the drops of water in her withered life and she is attracted towards the Nawab. In the same part Inder Lal and the narrator enter into a relationship during their visit to Baba Firdaus' shrine when they were alone as Inder Lal's mother, wife and Chid had gone to a pilgrimage. In both the narratives there is the theme of love between an English lady and an Indian man. Olivia and the narrator both visited Baba Firdaus' shrine on Husband's Wedding day; both the women are made pregnant by their Indian lovers, but the only difference is – Olivia decided to abort the child and stayed with the Nawab; whereas the narrator decided to have the child and to live alone in

the monasteries of Town X. By maintaining this difference Jhabwala has given a postmodern touch to the narrator's story. Olivia surrenders before the social morality whereas the young narrator, a representative of the postmodern world moves away from despair to revolt. Here David Rubin's words are worth quoting:

"Olivia aborted her half-Indian baby but remains faithful to his Indian father, whereas the narrator in a more enlightened age, or perhaps merely one more decadent, though she discards her Indian lover after unsuccessfully trying to abort her child, finds a rapture in the idea of having it."

Another aspect that makes *Heat and Dust* a postmodern novel is: how the Europeans get impressed by Indian spirituality and how soon they are disillusioned. Europeans get introduced to Indian spirituality either through discourses of ascetic or Indian scriptures. But once they arrive here, the process of their being cheated begins and they realize that realizing spirituality by following the instruction of an Indian Guru is a tough job for them and finally they decide to quit disappointedly. The character of Chid or Chidanand represents this view in the novel. He became influenced by Indian spirituality through books, came to India and lived here for months "like an Indian pilgrim, purifying himself and often so rapt in contemplation that the world around him had faded away completely. He too developed dysentery and ringworm ". Pilgrimage which is supposed to rejuvenate one spiritually, leaves Chid sick and broken. The man who came to India to seek spirituality is left alone with the ailments and he finds his nurse not in any Indian but in the narrator, a British woman.

In this novel Jhabwala has also very deftly used the postmodern weapon of satire to present the East-West encounter in the novel. When the local rich men come to pay their respects to Douglas, the sahib, he speaks to them as if he "were playing a musical instrument of which he had entirely mastered the stops". But soon after they leave, he calls them "a pack of rogues". Jhabwala's satire suggests that both parties are putting on an act. To the British Indians are "lesser breeds without the Law" (to use Kipling's notorious phrase). Jhabwala is particularly subversive of the British Colonialists when she shows how the sahibs and memsahibs think that the Indians are under their thumb.

The novel *Heat and Dust* also presents the contrast- how gender relations have changed between colonial and postmodern times. The character of the Nawab's wife, "Sandy" is a parallel to that of Inder Lal's wife, Ritu. Both suffer from mental problems which negate their worth; they are put on the shelf by their husbands. Olivia's abortion is counterbalanced by the narrator's failed abortion. The narrator's decision is the best example of postmodern human dilemma that leads to a positive action. Both ascend to the Himalayas. Olivia's discovery of herself, of India, parallels the narrator's discovery of Olivia, of India and herself. These similarities, contrasts and parallels seem to me to constitute a successful postmodernist attempt to impose the writer's vision on the reader, and to exploit the intertextuality which goes back to the ancient literary device of palimpsesting.

Being a woman, Jhabwala could not stop herself from exposing the feminine power. Though in the novel, both the women succumb to the masculine power, but the narrator's decision to have the baby represent the feminine victory over the masculine power. Here Rishi Pal Singh's words are worth quoting:

"It is really thrilling though tragic when we see the pregnant young woman- the narrator- madly possessed with the romantic impulse, climbing higher and higher and never to look down any more. The novel stops short before the narrator sets out on the next stage of her 'quest' and we are left to speculate about the inevitable self destruction or unpredictable heroism declaring some victory of femininity over masculinity in this final ascent. If so then certainly the mountains symbolize feminine power and the hot perched Indian plains the masculine domain and the growing child in the narrator's womb- the final trophy of this East-West encounters."

CONCLUSION-

Thus in *Heat and Dust* there is a multilayering of postmodernism. Jhabwala has handled with great skill the postmodern themes such as East-West encounter and human dilemma and also the postmodern fictional techniques such as flashback, interior monologue and stream of consciousness. Like a traditional storyteller, she has an easy flow of words. Not only this while deploying postmodern strategies in the work Jhabwala concerns herself with the theme of female subjectivity. The inevitable fall of the European women in the novel to the sinister masculinity of Indians, inspite of all the warnings of Christianity and rationalism, may be ascribed to the mutual erotic calls of flesh and arousal of the sexual hunger in this tropical land. However the feminine quest for self actualization has again ended in self pity and self immolation in this land of rapacious masculinity and reveals Jhabwala's postmodernist interest in the effect of text on life.

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