



## Ruth Praver Jhabvala's Heat and Dust: A Critical Study

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### Abstract:

*Ruth Praver Jhabvala's Heat and Dust –a Critical study is an article which includes a critical study of a powerful and beautifully written novel Heat and Dust. The study explores Anglo Indian relations through the power of romance set in two distinct eras, colonial India of the nineteen twenties, during the time of Raj and the independent, freewheeling India of the seventies. Both the central figures Olivia and Anne, the narrator lead the same life. Heat and Dust offers a double vision in terms of the image of the country that it portrays. While one half of the novel (Olivia's story) is located in the days of the British Raj, the other half is based on the peregrinations and experiences of Olivia junior in post-independence India. Heat and Dust is a very engaging story with enough romance, political intrigue, history drama, scandal etc to satisfy most readers.*

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### 1. Introduction

Ruth Praver Jhabvala, a well-known Anglo Indian novelist, wrote 8 novels The Householder, Get Ready for the Battle, A Backward Place, The Nature of Passion, Esmond In India, A New Dominion, to whom she will and Heat and Dust. Jhabvala succeeds to catch India and Indians in her fictional works.

Among these novels she won the Booker prize for Heat and Dust in 1975. Ruth Praver Jhabvala is powerful and beautifully written novel – Heat and Dust presents: “An outrageous Anglo-Indian romance in 1920s khatm and Satipur won the Booker prize in 1983. The author has created parallel tales of two young women, distantly related and separated by two generations. Anne, the story's narrator, travels to India to discover more about the mystery surrounding her grandfather's first wife, Olivia”

### 2. A Reviewer named lawyeraau asserts

“This is a well-written book that explores Anglo Indian relations through the power of romance set in two distinct eras, colonial India of the nineteen twenties, during the time of Raj and the independent, freewheeling India of the seventies, during the time when India was a Mecca for disenfranchised youth it tells the story of two women”

The book is a beguiling story of two women from the different generations. Both of them come under the spell of India. The novel concerns a young English woman, the narrator. She arrives in Bombay intending to make it her home for a while. She wants to reconstruct the story of the doomed marriage of her grandfather, a law officer named. Douglas Rivers and his first wife Olivia. She sets information of Olivia from a collection of intriguing letters that Olivia has written to her sister Marica. She tries her best to relive Olivia's experiences in the same places to attempt at a better understanding of Olivia and India.

A profound and powerful novel set in colonial India during the 1920s. *Heat and Dust* tells the story of Olivia Rivers. Olivia comes to India in the traditional role of a wife to the sub-collector of Satipur. Her husband Douglas Rivers is an English ICS Officer. She is a beautiful, spoiled, and spirited young woman. She finds it difficult to adjust to life in the British colonial community of Satipur. Because of his official duty Douglas, spend very little time with his wife. Olivia loves her husband very much but she feels suffocated by inbred group. She longs for independence, intellectual stimulation and a more passionate life. She is suffocated by social constraints of her position as the wife of an important English civil servant. She hopes that a baby will solve her problems but finds it more difficult to become pregnant than she has thought.

Shortly after their arrival in India, Douglas, Olivia and some of the more important members of the community are invited to the palace of the Nawab of Khatm. When Olivia meets the Nawab at a dinner party, she feels that she “had at last in India come to the right place.” Longing for passion and independence, Olivia is drawn into the spell of the Nawab of khatm. The Nawab is extremely attractive. Olivia says, “He is a fascinating man...And terrifically handsome” She is intrigued by the Nawab’s charm and aggressive courtship and soon begins to spend most of her days in his company. Thus, the handsome, charismatic prince immediately intrigues her. She courts her friendship turns passionate. She makes frequent visits to the place of Nawab.

Olivia is an aesthete. She loves music and plays on the piano with competence. The grand opulence of the palace and the sumptuous royal dinner satisfy Olivia’s aesthetic sense. Naturally, the aesthete in Olivia feels irresistibly drawn towards him. Olivia is obsessed with the stereotypical image of the princely India. She fails to see its obverse side that of decadence, cruelty, venality etc. The Nawab of khatm is actually deeply involved in gang raids and criminal plots. He is the bankrupt ruler of a state. He has drained the exchequer of the poor state of its last pie by his vulgar extravagance. In addition, when the state coffers are not in a position to support his decadent style of living, he joins notorious bandits to rob and plunder his own people. Once Olivia visits Babu Firdaus’s shrine with the Nawab of Khatm. There she indulges in sexual act with the Nawab. The Nawab tells Olivia of the horrifying tale of his ancestor Amanulla khan’s glory

### 3. Revenge on a Marwar prince

“Once it happened that a Marwar prince did something to displace him. I think he did not offer opium out of the correct silver chalice – it was only a very small thing, but Amanullah khan was not the man to sit quiet when insulted...He invited this Marwar prince and all his retainers to a feast. A ceremonial tent was put up, all preparations made, and the guests came ready to eat and drink. Amanullah khan greeted his enemy at the door of the tent and folded him to his heart. However, when they were all inside, he gave a secret sign and his men cut the ropes of the tent and the Marwar prince and all his party were entangled within canvas. When they were trapped there like animals, Anamullah khan, and his men took their draggers, and stabbed them through the canvas repeatedly until there was not one enemy left alive. We still have that tent and blood is so fresh and new, Olivia, it is as if it had happened yesterday.”

This tale proves sadistic violence of the princely India. The Nawab must have felt that Olivia is trying to remove her hand from his heart so he holds it against himself tighter. She cannot escape him now, even if she has wanted to.

Olivia does not tell Douglas about her frequent visit to the Nawab. Douglas always comes late at home. Therefore, she does not find an opportunity to tell about her wish to be a mother. She says: “He cannot even get me pregnant.” Olivia’s experience of India is limited to the Nawab. The Nawab gives her a sense of belonging and the kind of importance that flatters her ego. She realizes that “here at last was one person in India to be interested in her the way she was used to” Her illicit relations with the Nawab results into pregnancy. Her relationship leads her down a path that is

shaky, exciting. She makes her rely totally on the opposite sex for her very survival. She is willing to give up the safety of everything she has ever known to become the lover of an Indian with minor royal ties. She hides the fact of her pregnancy from her husband. She tries an abortion with the help of Harry (the Nawab's friend). Douglas Rivers divorces her when he comes to know about the affair. Then he remarries and Olivia remains in India for the rest of her life. She accepts drumming and chanting as a part of Indian life.

The second story is that of the narrator, a descendant of Douglas, and his second wife. She arrives in Bombay intending to make it her home for a while. She wants to reconstruct the story of the doomed marriage of her grandfather, a law officer named Douglas Rivers, and his first wife, Olivia. She presents her adventures, thoughts, and reflection in the form of a journal. She tries her best to discover what motivates Olivia to change her life so drastically. Anne, the narrator stays in the town where her grandfather and Olivia fifty years before. Anne has "tremendous enthusiasm" about India. She accepts the sick and deformed men of Satipur as part of landscape. She visits the places her step-grandmother frequents. She also interviews people who know of her. Finally, she adopts to live her life the Olivia way. Her subject of research slowly widens from Olivia's life in India to herself in India. She reads the letters and journals that Olivia wrote so long ago. She ventures into experiences similar to Olivia's adventures but more acceptable in our modern time. Anne's spiritual and sensual journey in the 1970s parallels Olivia's as the color, heat, exotic landscapes, and people of India penetrate her western upbringing. Anne writes in her own diary: 'fortunately, during my first few months here, I kept a journal, so I have some record of my early impressions. If I were to try to recollect them now, I might not be able to do so. They are no longer the same because I myself am no longer the same. India always changes people, and I have been no exception.'

As earlier mentioned Anne, the narrator adopts to live her life the Olivia way. Olivia Rivers is highly sentimental and romantic. While the narrator applies the reasons. Like Olivia, she too falls in love with an Indian man. He is a meek clerk named Inder Lal. He comes from lower middle class and in many ways; he is a representative specimen of the new India. In this role, he offers a contrast to the rajahs and nawabs of British India. The members of this class are depicted as sensual, hypocritical, pretentious, ambivalent and so on. Inder Lal is married and Ritu is his wife yet he develops relationship with the narrator. Anne's relationship with Inder Lal is mechanical.

Inder Lal is an educated Youngman and a member of the 'bureaucracy.' He is definitely not a part of the indistinguishable mass of Indian poor. He finds it difficult to maintain a reasonably decent standard of living. His relationship with Anne is only mechanical one. He makes her pregnant. Unconsciously Anne fall the same path of her step-grandmother. As Olivia did, she has also an Anglo-Indian love affair and picks up where Olivia left. She has also a casual attitude to her pregnancy. Unlike Olivia, she decides to have child of Inder Lal.

Both Olivia and Anne, the narrator led the same life. Olivia seeks merger into Indian through sex but remains to suffer. She does not return to England but stays in a house upon hills. Then she hopes to find the resolution of conflict of two cultures. The narrator is different from Olivia in some matters. She imbibes the spirit of the land, she identifies herself with India. Olivia consents to abort the child in her. Unlike her, Anne is determined to have her baby. Both of them have also the influence of Anglo and Indian culture in them. They fall under India's spell.

The narrator observes that India is a magnet for Europeans in search of a certain spirituality that they have failed to find in western religions. In particular, she meets a young Englishman named child. He has become a Hindu ascetic. Hindu scriptures attract Child alias chidananda. However, his experiences in India are not all rosy. He suffers hardships in India. He finds it impossible to live simply under trees as instructed by his guru. Nevertheless, he has to seek shelter at night in cheap hotel rooms. Finally child's dalliance with Indian spirituality is over. After the long pilgrimage, he no

longer wears his orange robe but has acquired a pair of khakhi pants, a shirt, and a pair of shoes. Now he has become a Christian boy from a Hindu ascetic.

#### **4. Jessica Jacobson asserts about the novel Heat and Dust**

“Beautiful, prosaic, well-woven story about two English women in India in two different eras. A work of art that is a pleasure to read and savor.”

Heat and Dust is a very engaging story with enough romance, political intrigue, history drama, scandal etc to satisfy most readers. Olivia was the tiniest bit annoying, but overall, the characters and dialogue were realistic and fascinating.

The fiction is really the presentation of Indian society. The story of Olivia and the Nawab of Khatm or the story of the narrator is interesting one. This well-written book explores Anglo-Indian relations through the power of romance. J. Marren says: “From a historical point of view the novel is fascinating in describing the lives of the British as the Empire disintegrated-their kindly arrogance, their isolation from the people, the idleness of their families. The Nawab’s life is worse. He resorts to crime and extortion to maintain his luxurious life-style.”

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