



## Similarities and dissimilarities of Female Characters in the Major Novels of R. P. Jhabvala and Kamala Markandaya

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### Abstract:

*The article named Similarities and dissimilarities of Female characters In The Major Novels of R.P. Jhabvala and Kamala Markandaya mainly studies. The woman of Jhabvala and Markandaya stand for the East-West encounter, confrontation between modernity and tradition, marital discord, moral degradation, rootlessness, autonomy, liberalization, identity crisis, domestic problems of family etc. The women characters either from the east or from the west of Jhabvala and Markandaya studied in the research paper share the common characteristics like courage, tolerance, forbearance, compassion and strong will power to face life's trials and complexities.*

**Keywords:** *Concord, Discord, Dissimilarities, Female protagonist, Similarities, The East-West perspective, Traditional, Modern, Victim*

Ruth Praver Jhabvala and Kamala Markandaya are one of the two pioneering women writers in the modern Indian English fiction. Jhabvala depicts the life of the urban middle classes in and around Delhi in her fiction. While Markandaya presents the lives of the rural and urban poor in South Indian village and city in her fiction. Jhabvala and Markandaya have much in common with each other. Both the writers have faithfully presented the social situations and problems of the woman in their novels in the East-West perspective, cross-cultural values,

The main reason of having a comparative study of similarities and dissimilarities in the female characters in the major novels of R.P. Jhabvala and Kamala Markandaya is that both the novelists deal with the most common themes in presenting the image of the woman in the east and the west perspective respectively. Both of them deal with the image of the woman of post-independence India. Some of the prominent concerns of their major works revolve round the east-west encounter, confrontation between tradition and modernity, the clash between the cross-cultural values, the wide gap between the rich and the poor, westernization, sex and marriage and marital discord. Their novels also deal with domestic problems of family, poverty, hunger and predicament, moral degradation, unemployment, rootlessness, exploitation, autonomy, liberalization, search of identity or identity crisis etc.

The present research paper mainly studies R.P. Jhabvala's *Heat and Dust*, *To Whom She Will* and *A Backward Place* and Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve*, *Two Virgins* and *A Handful of Rice* respectively. Jhabvala's *Heat and Dust*, set in colonial India during the 1920s, *Heat and Dust* tells the story of Olivia, a beautiful woman suffocated by the propriety and social constraints of her position as the wife of an important English civil servant. Longing for passion and independence, Olivia is drawn into the spell of the Nawab, a minor Indian prince deeply involved in gang raids and criminal plots. She is intrigued by the Nawab's charm and aggressive courtship, and soon begins to spend most of her days in his company. But then she becomes pregnant, and unsure of the child's paternity, she is faced with a wrenching dilemma. Her reaction to the crisis humiliates her husband and outrages the British

community, breeding a scandal that lives in collective memory long after her death. The novel deals with the sad and moving story of two English women who paid their visit to India and in return they became the victims of this country. Six colorful, comic characters inhabit A Backward Place. All but one is Westerners who have come to Delhi to experience an alternative way of life. But, far from being hippies, their ability to adapt to this exotic culture often leaves something to be desired. Etta, an aristocratic, faded beauty maintains her Parisian chic while Clarissa talks enthusiastically about the simple life but stops short of ever roughing it herself. On the other hand BAL, the one Indian protagonist, holds quite Western aspirations to Hollywood glamour. Judy, an English girl, marries Bal. But this marriage also does not succeed because of their different mentality. The novel concerns the plights of several expatriate European women whose reasons for remaining in India vary. Etta, a Hungarian woman whose marriage to an Indian crumbled years before, lives as the mistress of a hotel tycoon whose dalliance with his "niece" and their impending departure for Europe cause Etta to attempt suicide. In contrast, Judy, a British woman, admires her extended Hindi family whose laughter and closeness are a stark contrast to her strict English upbringing. A Backward Place humorously explores contradictions in attitudes and lifestyles and the interplay between culture and individuality. But it is also a Dickensian drama, charting the highs and lows of everyday life against the enchanting backdrop of a bustling Indian city. In *To Whom She Will*, her first novel, Jhabvala has given us a beguiling tale of a young girl named Amrita and her deliciously forbidden love affair with Hari, a boy of dubious background. While both families cook up their own plans for their children's futures, the two lovers, busy with their separate illusions, realize only at the last moment that life has led them all to a new and very different beginning. In this novel her foolish young people (Amrita and Hari) fall in and then out of love with equal ease and the system of arranged marriage appear to be no so tyrannous after someone approved of by her own mother. Jhabvala chooses classes of the Indian community where adultery and divorce are not unknown the rich upper middle class of Delhi and the circles of artist's bohemians and expatriates.

Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* is a moving saga of peasant life in India presented in a reminiscent mood by Rukmani, the narrator and female protagonist. The wife of a poor tenant farmer, she has been the helpless witness to the destruction of the pristine beauty of her quiet village and of the old way of life when a tannery is set up near the village. With great faith and a capacity for both love and suffering, this simple, courageous woman survives the calamities of nature and industrialism as well as personal sorrows. Based on the author's knowledge of Indian village life, the novel received wide critical acclaim and became a best-seller. This is the very moving story of a peasant woman in a primitive village in India whose whole life was a gallant and persistent battle to care for those she loved. It is a memorable saga of scuffling the poverty, hunger, betrayal and death portrayed by the experiences of the female protagonist, who has passed through the harsh realities of life. In *Two Virgins*, Saroja lives in a village with her parents, aunt and beautiful elder sister Lalitha. Saroja's life is uncomplicated, and simple things give her joy like the birth of a calf or a taste of one of Chingleput's sweets. Lalitha, on the other hand, believes she is too good for the village. Ambitious and spoilt, she has dreams of being a movie star that are fulfilled when a film-maker casts her in his documentary on village life. Overnight Lalitha becomes the talk of the town; her latent sexuality manifests itself and she uses her elevated status to her advantage. Basking in Lalitha's reflected glory Saroja tries to imitate her womanly wiles, which results in confused ideas about sexuality and ambition. But when the family is faced with a scandal, Saroja emerges with a practical outlook on life. *A Handful of Rice* is a poignant novel about the triumph of the human spirit over poverty's privations and predicaments Ravi, the son of a peasant, joins in the general exodus away from destitution. The indifferent and harsh streets of the city lead him to the underworld of petty criminals. A chance misdeed acquaints him with Apu, a tailor. Ravi begins working as Apu's apprentice, and when he falls in love with Nalini, Apu's daughter, he joins the already crowded household. Apu dies, and Ravi perseveres with the respectable life, facing the problems of shortage of food, illness, dwindling customers. After the death of his son, he reverts to the life of a petty criminal, and is inexorably drawn towards a dangerous climax. In this

novel, she recreates the life of the poor with compassion and respect, presenting an overwhelmingly real book.

In Jhabvala's *Heat and Dust*, the character of Olivia has undergone the complete process of metamorphosis that India causes to its foreign visitors. Despite her sensitivity, intelligence and awareness of Indian cultural matters, she remains totally at sea in matters regarding her own emotions and desires and never attempts to rationalize her feelings towards the Nawab and his crude culture. In *A Backward Place*, Judy, Etta and Clarissa, who represent the west, fall in a puzzling cycle of attraction, and illusion towards everything Indian leading to disillusion and ending and frustration, self-destruction and disintegration of individual personality on the other hand and withdrawal and fight for survival on the other. In *To Whom She Will*, Amrita, the attractive, self-willed maiden, makes a bold, though fruitless attempt to marry for love. She tries to give herself to whom she will but does not succeed. In *Nectar in a Sieve*, Rukmani wages a constant battle that faces great odds like feminine, death, and prostitution amidst a backdrop of bone chilling poverty. She wins our sympathy by dint of her sheer will power that endures a life without hope like in nectar in a sieve. In *A Handful of Rice*, Nalini is good, lovely, beautiful, traditional and cooperative woman who symbolizes domestic happiness, a clean, healthy and traditional life. She becomes the victim of silent suffering caused by economic scarcity, traditional mooring and compulsory choice between morality and success ethics. In *Two Virgins*, the portrayal of contrasting sister heroines (Lalitha and Saroja) is very much in the moralistic tradition of female writing. Lalitha, who blindly follows modernity, becomes victim of the power of the western values and influences. When she is lured by the glamour of the modern world, she easily falls victim in the hands of Mr. Gupta, who exploits her sexually. On the other hand Saroja, who stands for tradition, is mild, obedient and tradition bound in relation to her sister. She learns from Lalitha's experience the dreadfulness that pregnancy unsanctified by marriage could lead to.

In short, the women characters either from the east or from the west of Jhabvala and Markandaya studied in the research work share the common characteristics like courage, tolerance, forbearance, compassion and strong will power to face life's trials and complexities. They also share some common features being part of the East-West conflict, rootlessness, ideal womanhood, identity crisis or quest for identity, matrimonial harmony or discord, feminine superiority, autonomy or liberalism, moral degradation etc. The confrontation between the East and the West, the strange love hate relationship that exists between the two, the cultural alienation, modernism versus tradition and the loss of identity faced by the expatriates and immigrants are some of the aspects of the female figures that are some of the aspects of the female figures that are presented with a deep insight by these writers. If R. P. Jhabvala is concerned with the problems of human relationships affected by urbanization, Kamala Markandaya is occupied with the problems of tragic encounter between the traditional Indian values and cultural practices. Jhabvala shows definite affinity with the advocates of feminism in portraying her female characters. She portrays an ironic portrayal of woman folk in traditional conservative and patriarchal society of India. She also focuses on the predicament of the enigmatic romance and unscrupulous submission of the European women who happen to come to this obsessively enchanting sub-continent. Kamala Markandaya shows feminist elements like identity crisis, march towards autonomy and freedom. Her women characters protest in spite of all docility and submissiveness. Though most of her women are victims of social and economic pressures and disparities, they raise above all these and cross the barriers of discrimination only for the larger concepts of love and concord.

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