



## Transcultural Identity and Cultural Exchange in Ruth P. Jhabvala's Heat and Dust

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### Abstract

This study examines transcultural concepts in Ruth Prawer Jhabvala's novel, "Heat and Dust." Drawing upon the novel's rich narrative tapestry, which unfolds across dual timelines set in the 1920s and 1970s, this research seeks to unravel the intricate dynamics of transculturalism as a central thematic element. The study aims to concentrate on the social sides of Heat and Dust. The transcultural concepts are considered a significant theme that projects the image of India, its traditions, and modernity after independence through Jhabvala's novel Heat and Dust. The analysis examines how characters navigate the complex interplay of diverse cultures and languages, and identities by employing theoretical frameworks from cultural studies, postcolonial theory, and transcultural studies. In conclusion, the influence of English culture on Indian society has been significant and multifaceted, primarily due to the historical context of British colonisation in India. The impact is evident in various aspects of Indian culture, including language, education, law, administration, and social customs.

**Keywords:** cultural exchange, Heat and Dust, Ruth P. Jhabvala, transcultural study



## الهوية العابرة للثقافات والتبادل الثقافي في رواية حر وغبار لروث براوير جابفالا

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### المستخلص:

تتناول الدراسة المفاهيم العابرة للثقافات في رواية "الحرارة والغبار" للكاتبة روث براوير جابفالا. استناداً إلى النسيج السردي للرواية، الذي يمتد عبر خطين زمنيين في عشرينيات وسبعينيات القرن العشرين. تهدف الدراسة إلى كشف الديناميكيات المعقدة للعابرية الثقافية بوصفها محوراً موضوعياً رئيسياً. وتركز بشكل خاص على الجوانب الاجتماعية في رواية "الحرارة والغبار". وتعتبر التصورات العابرة للثقافات موضوعاً مهماً يعكس صورة الهند المعاصرة، بما فيها تقاليدھا وتحدياتها بعد الاستقلال، من خلال منظور رواية جابفالا. كما يفسر التحليل كيفية تعامل الشخصيات مع التداخل المعقد للثقافات واللغات والهويات المختلفة، بالاستناد إلى الأطر النظرية في دراسات الثقافة، والنظرية ما بعد الاستعمار، والدراسات العابرة للثقافات في الختام، يظهر أن تأثير الثقافة الإنجليزية على المجتمع الهندي كان عميقاً ومتعدد الأوجه، وذلك نتيجة للسياق التاريخي للاستعمار البريطاني في الهند. ويتجلى هذا التأثير في مختلف جوانب الثقافة الهندية، بما في ذلك اللغة والتعليم والقانون والإدارة والعادات الاجتماعية

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** روث ب. جابفالا، الحرارة والغبار، العابرية الثقافية، روائية هندية، التبادل الثقافي

## 1. Introduction

Ruth Praver Jhabvala is one of the most prominent Indian novelists writing in the English language and is considered a prominent figure in contemporary English literature. Her work examines East–West relations through nuanced portrayals of cultural tension and emotional belonging in multicultural contexts. Jhabvala is known for her ability to portray cultural differences with depth and realism, both in India and elsewhere. Her writings are distinguished by their literary diversity and contributions to both literature and cinema.

This study attempts to uncover how Jhabvala addresses multiculturalism in her novel *Heat and Dust*, through her portrayal of the characters' lives and the resulting conflict of identities, cultural differences, and conditions of Indian society, such as poverty, illiteracy, and apathy. This makes the novel a "visual detector of the truth of Indian reality" (Diwakar, 2012). As Nibras J. Kadhim argues, the novel may also be read within a broader literary tradition in which, "the construction and protection of English identity become a major theme of many nineteenth-century English novels." (Kadhim, 2011. p.590). However, unlike earlier works, post-colonial narratives challenge rather than consolidate this identity.

The study aims to provide a deeper understanding and greater sensitivity to the cultural differences embodied in Jhabvala's writings, with a focus on *Heat and Dust*. It also seeks to answer key questions, most notably: How does the novel highlight the cultural overlap between East and West? How are the characters' individual experiences reflected within the context of multiculturalism? How does the novel show the fluidity and adaptability of cultural identities, particularly in a postcolonial society?

The analytical frameworks were employed to explore how characters engage with diverse cultures, languages, and identities, thereby uncovering the deeper structure of the literary text.

The importance of this study lies in demonstrating Jhabvala's ability to represent cultural, psychological, and social diversity in her texts, which in turn reflects the image of contemporary India and its colonial and post-independence history. The study also contributes to enriching the academic debate on cultural exchange and transcultural identity in modern English literature.

### 1.1 Ruth Praver Jhabvala: A Brief Biography.

"Ruth Praver Jhabvala is a world-class fiction writer and storyteller of the present century. She has distinctive achievements as a literary artist. She was born to Polish-Jewish parents on 7 May 1927 in Cologne, Germany, and

escaped to England in 1939. (Sangeethapriya,2017, p:310). Her father, Marcus Praver, was a lawyer. He was a Polish Jewish, but her mother, Eleanora, of Russian origin. Ruth studied at Queen Mary College, London University, where she majored in English literature. In 1951, she got the M.A. degree for her "The Story in England" thesis. While studying for her Master's Degree at London University, she saw Cyrus S.H. Jhabvala, a young Indian architect and the famous head of the School of Planning and Architecture. They married on 16 June 1951 and left afterwards for Delhi where she lived for the next twenty-four years. Her marriage suffered, with Jhabvala spending several months a year in India and her husband paying her extended visits to New York until he retired. Finally, she settled and died in America.

She is considered an Anglo-Indian woman writer, educated in England, came to India as a bride, and expressed through her words the experiences of Indian life and society; with an entirely new perspective; she presents the gossamers of Anglo-Indian fiction. During her first decade in India, "Jhabvala published four novels, *To Whom She Will* (1955), *The Nature of Passion* (1956), *Esmond in India* (1958), and *The Householder* (1960), each following the lives of Indian middle-class families" ( Fryer, 2020,p:8). Her awareness of society and moral dilemmas and the esthetic design is the most important thing that she projects in her novels. "She has a prying eye for the problems which are very common in the Indian society." (Sangeetha Priya & Ramya 2017, p:310). The most important event that ennobled her was the Booker prize-winning in 1975 for her novel *Heat and Dust*.

Ruth Praver Jhabvala's writing career extends over forty years; during this period, she has written ten novels, five volumes and seventeen screenplays. In 1976, she received a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial fellowship. Three years later, in 1979, she was awarded the Neil Gunn International Fellowship, and in 1986, she was offered a MacAuthor Foundation award. Ruth Praver Jhabvala 's screenplay for the Merchant-Ivory film of E. M. Forster 's novel, "A Room with a View" won an Academy Award in 1987, "Such a life trajectory makes it difficult to see Jhabvala either as a British/American or an Indian one." The interaction between European and Indian cultures is Jhabvala's central theme. Her writing draws on personal experience to explore East-West encounters (Email, 2016). Jhabvala's reaction to India and Indians is mixed. Jhabvala is carefully familiar with the life and manners of her adopted country, which provides her with unique insight into the typical traits of Indians. She presents with utmost care the Indian tradition, culture, civilization, manners, systems, pattern of living, and values that produce a new style, "Women writers introduced new styles in Indian writing, and such novels have become very popular among the

Indian readers these days."(Rayappa et al., 2017, p.221).

## 2. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 Culture and Transculturalism

Culture has been defined in various ways across disciplines. According to the Oxford Advanced American Dictionary, culture refers to the customs and beliefs, art, ways of life, and social organization of a particular group or society. More broadly, culture can be understood as a shared system of knowledge that shapes ideas, meanings, beliefs, and values learned through social membership, thereby exerting a powerful influence on human behavior across time and place.

J. Lewis (2002) conceptualizes culture as “an assemblage of imaginings and meanings,” emphasizing that culture is a human construction created to enable communication and foster community. While society and community consist of groups of people, culture represents the shared meanings through which these groups understand and express themselves (Lewis, 2002, p. 22).

As its name suggests, cultural studies places culture at the centre of inquiry. Over time, the study of culture has expanded across disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, literature, and the arts. In this context, culture is often viewed as a marker of collective identity, particularly within tribal and indigenous communities (Pandya, 2019, p. 60).

Culture is further shaped by tradition, customs, rituals, values, myths, folklore, religion, philosophy, and language, all of which contribute to the formation and continuity of a community. Although external practices such as clothing, diet, or lifestyle may change, traditional culture tends to endure because it is deeply embedded in individuals’ consciousness and social experience. Consequently, it is natural for writers to reflect their cultural and social backgrounds in their literary works (Yadav, 2016, p. 3).

The concept of transculturalism has been defined and theorized by various scholars. According to Merriam-Webster's dictionary, transcultural means "involving, encompassing, or extending across two or more cultures". (Merriam-Webster, 2021). This definition emphasises cultural interaction and exchange beyond the boundaries of a single cultural framework.

Epstein (2009) further develops the notion of transculture as a model of cultural development that differs from both homogenising globalism and isolating cultural pluralism. While culture liberates individuals from material dependence on nature, it simultaneously imposes symbolic dependencies through customs, traditions, and conventions inherited from specific social and ethnic groups. Transculturalism, in this sense, enables individuals to move beyond these fixed cultural constraints.

From a cultural studies perspective, Johnson's (1979) theory of culturalism highlights the importance of analysing textual production and social practices to understand the behavioural and social patterns of particular groups. This approach supports transcultural analysis by revealing how meanings are produced, negotiated, and transformed across cultural contexts.

Transculturalism thus involves the integration and interaction of elements from multiple cultures. This interaction becomes particularly evident when comparing societies with differing cultural orientations. For instance, Indian culture is often characterised by strong adherence to tradition, emphasising values such as respect, dignity, and honour. In contrast, British culture tends to be more flexible and less bound by rigid customs and ritual obligations, reflecting differing approaches to social responsibility and cultural continuity.

Mikhail Epstein (2009) argues that transculturalism is especially crucial in global politics, where fixed cultural identities rooted in race, ethnicity, religion, or ideology have frequently led to conflict and violence. By fostering cross-cultural dialogue and hybridity, transculturalism offers a framework for transcending such divisions. In this regard, transcultural approaches provide opportunities to remap global history more accurately by establishing connections between Western and non-Western cultures, as well as between historical and contemporary cultural forms, he writes, "transculture is a model of cultural development that differs from levelling globalism and isolating pluralism. While culture frees humans from the material dependencies of nature, it also creates new, symbolic dependencies—on customs, traditions, conventions, which a person receives as a member of a certain group and ethnos."(Epstein,2009).

Richard Johnson's concept of culturalism articulates a theoretical coherence among the Birmingham School of cultural analysts and their followers. According to Johnson (1979), culturalists maintain that the behavioural and social patterns of a group can be understood through the analysis of its textual productions and documented social practices. This approach foregrounds culture as a site where meaning is produced and social relations are articulated.

Building on this perspective, transculturalism extends cultural analysis beyond the boundaries of a single society by examining interactions among multiple cultures and the circulation of meanings across them. Rather than treating cultures as isolated or static entities, transculturalism emphasises the dynamic integration of cultural elements across different social and historical contexts.

Such an approach becomes particularly valuable when comparing societies with distinct cultural orientations. For example, Indian culture is often characterised by a strong attachment to tradition and values such as respect, dignity, and honor, whereas British culture tends to be less rigid and more flexible, with fewer binding rituals and conventional obligations. These contrasts illustrate how cultural meanings are shaped, negotiated, and transformed through cross-cultural encounters.

At a broader level, Epstein (2009) argues that transculturalism is especially significant in global politics, where fixed cultural identities based on race, ethnicity, religion, or ideology have frequently contributed to conflict and violence. By challenging essentialist notions of identity, transculturalism offers a framework for dialogue and mutual understanding.

In this sense, transcultural analysis also provides an opportunity to re-map global history more accurately by tracing connections between Western and non-Western cultures, as well as between historical and contemporary cultural forms. Such an approach highlights cultural interdependence rather than separation and underscores the transformative potential of cross-cultural exchange.

## 2.2. Anglo - Indian Cultures

Undoubtedly, when we scan the cultures of British and Indian societies, we find numerous differences. Firstly, in India, most emphasis is placed on family and clan, and people define themselves mainly by the groups to which they belong rather than by their individual status; they are family-oriented. Otherwise, Western societies are more individualist, with weaker ties to families and social groups. Another difference is that Indians essentially try to avoid sharing undesirable thoughts and comments and abuse the other person as a way of polite style. Contrastingly, the higher degree of honesty in British culture means that people are more likely to express their thoughts openly.

The influence of English culture on Indian society has been significant and multifaceted, primarily due to the historical context of British colonisation in India. The impact is evident in various aspects of Indian culture, including language, education, law, administration, and social customs. The British colonial period influenced certain social customs and norms in India. Western ideas about individual rights, social equality, and the rule of law have impacted Indian society. It's important to note that while English culture has left a significant mark on various aspects of Indian society, India's rich cultural heritage and diversity have significantly influenced the ways in which English culture is received and adapted. The impact of English culture on Indian society is complex and continues to evolve in the contemporary context. Each nation, society, and community possesses its

own unique cultural traits. Variability in cultural aspects is evident in both India and the UK. It is crucial to acknowledge the cultural distinctions between these two nations. Acquainting oneself with the cultural nuances of another country fosters awareness regarding power dynamics, respect, institutional practices, and collective behaviours within groups.

### 2.3 Exploring Cultural Transformation through Post-Colonial Fiction

Post-colonial literature emerges as a poignant narrative genre, reflecting colonialism's socio-political, economic, and cultural ramifications. This literary form serves as a platform for marginalised voices to articulate their experiences, interrogate power dynamics, and navigate the complexities of identity in the aftermath of colonial rule. Through a diverse array of narratives, characters, and themes, post-colonial literature unveils the multifaceted cultural impact of colonialism and its enduring legacy on societies across the globe.

Colonialism, characterized by the imposition of hegemonic power structures and cultural dominance, profoundly shapes the landscapes of colonized nations. In post-colonial literature, authors illuminate the mechanisms through which colonial powers seek to assert control over indigenous cultures, languages, and traditions. These narratives often depict the erosion of indigenous identities and the suppression of cultural practices under colonial rule. Through poignant portrayals of resistance, resilience, and cultural revival, post-colonial literature challenges the hegemony of colonial narratives and amplifies marginalized voices.

One of the central themes explored in post-colonial literature is the complexity of identity in the wake of colonialism. Authors navigate the intricacies of hybrid identities, diasporic experiences, and the enduring legacy of colonial trauma. These narratives interrogate notions of belonging, home, and cultural heritage through nuanced characterisations and intricate plotlines. By depicting the fluidity and resilience of identity in the face of colonization, post-colonial literature celebrates the richness of diverse cultural narratives and fosters a deeper understanding of the human experience.

Post-colonial literature serves as a platform for reclaiming narratives and amplifying counter-narratives that challenge dominant colonial discourses. Authors subvert colonial stereotypes, rewrite history from marginalized perspectives, and reframe narratives of conquest and subjugation. By centering the voices of the colonized and marginalized, these narratives disrupt hegemonic power structures and offer alternative visions of society. Through the art of storytelling, post-colonial literature empowers communities to assert their agency, reclaim their heritage, and imagine a

future free from the shackles of colonialism.

Transcending geographical boundaries, it is post-colonial literature that resonates with readers worldwide, fostering a sense of solidarity among diverse communities. These narratives bridge divides and cultivate empathy across cultures through translations, adaptations, and cross-cultural exchanges. By highlighting shared struggles, aspirations, and triumphs, post-colonial literature fosters a global dialogue on justice, equality, and human rights issues. As a testament to the enduring power of storytelling, post-colonial literature continues to inspire movements for social change and collective liberation.

## 2. 4 Related Works

Nareshkumar J. Parmar's article "Ruth Praver Jhabvala's Heat and Dust: A Critical Study" explores the Anglo-Indian cultural encounter through Ruth Praver Jhabvala's Booker Prize-winning Novel Heat and Dust. The study compares the lives of two English women: Olivia in the 1920s colonial era and Anne in post-independence India of the 1970s. Both women fall under India's spell, experiencing passion, conflict, and transformation. Olivia's affair with the Nawab leads to scandal and isolation, while Anne's relationship with Inder Lal reflects a more accepting, modern view of cultural fusion. Parmar concludes that Jhabvala portrays India as magnetic, complex, and spiritually transformative for both women. The study emphasizes how Jhabvala captures the clash between East and West, passion and propriety, modernity and tradition.

## 3. The Analytical Part

### 3.1 Methodology of the Study

Heat and Dust 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. Vineeta Sharma and Nalini Jain write, "Meeting of two cultures cannot be a petty phenomenon. It is a potential challenge for a writer"(Sharma& Jain, 2017, p.148). Modern changes in the Indian environment, political, social and ethical, have led to a new way of life as a new perspective appears in India. The story revolves around two parallel narratives set in India during different time periods. Olivia is a central character in the novel. She is an Englishwoman who marries an Indian prince, and her story is set in the 1920s. The novel explores themes of cultural clash, colonialism, and the impact of British presence in India.

Olivia's character is depicted as being influenced by the Indian culture in various ways. She becomes enamoured with India's local customs, traditions, and exotic allure. However, as the narrative progresses, tensions arise due to the clash between British and Indian cultures, leading to

complex consequences.

Both protagonists, Olivia and Anna, the narrator, lived the same life. The fiction offers a double vision of the country: skillfully interwoven to contrast two time periods, fifty years apart. At the same time, half of the novel (Olivia's story) is set during the British Raj, and the other half is based on the pilgrimage and experiences of Olivia's students in India after independence. Both are under the spell of India.

The novel evidently juxtaposes the cultures of East and West, especially that of the Anglo-Indian Raj before the independence of India. The author contrasts the past and present, showing the transculture through the realistic characters. "Heat and Dust examines a far greater and more varied range of English characters than can be

found in any of Jhabvala's earlier novels." (Yadav, 2016, p129)

Olivia is drawn from her British roots into the world of the Nawab, highlighting the novel's exploration of the attractions of European and Indian cultures and the difficulties inherent in crossing cultural boundaries. The mode of presenting the East-West cultural and social encounter is made highly amusing through characters and ironic situations in the novel. ( Al-Malik,2014,p:130)

Heat and Dust deals with two parallel stories; Ganesan and Chitra write, "The interaction between two cultures, European and Indian, is Jhabvala's strong point."(Ganesan, 2019, p.49), based on the Indian, the Western culture and the influence of each on the other. Ann directly mentioned the existence of the Europeans in India, when she says: "The sidewalk outside A.'s was crowded — not with Indians but with Europeans. They looked a derelict lot."(Jhabvala, p.5).

The novel is about a young Englishwoman (Anne) who comes to Bombay with the intention of making it her hometown for a while. She wanted to tell the story of the problematic marriage of her grandfather, a law enforcement officer named Douglas Rivers, and his English wife, Olivia. Olivia wrote a collection of fascinating letters to her sister, Marica. She tries to relive Olivia's experiences in similar places to understand Olivia and India better. The events begin with the arrival of Olivia to her husband, Douglas Rivers, who is a British ICS officer. She is an attractive, "beautiful"( Jhabvala, p:95) and spirited young woman, so she found difficulty in transforming her life in the British colonial community of Satipur.

Douglas spends very little time with his wife, as he is outstanding at his official job; Olivia feels that she is choking on his blood type , as she prefers to be independent and intellectual and desires to live a more passionate life, it is mentioned "He worked like a Trojan and never ceased to be calm and controlled, so he was very much esteemed both by his colleagues and the

Indians. He was upright and just.” ( Jhabvala, p. 1)

Olivia was panting for breath from the social imperatives of her situation as the spouse of a significant British government employee. She trusts that having a child will take care of your concerns; however, you understand that pregnancy is more troublesome than you might suspect. Not long after showing up in India, Douglas, Olivia, and the absolute most significant individuals from the local area were welcomed to the castle of the Nawab Hatma. When Olivia meets Nawab at a dinner party, she feels that "finally in India, she has come to the right place." (Jhabvala, p18); from the beginning, She acknowledges being influenced by Indian culture. Olivia falls under the spell of the Nawab, who is extremely attractive. She is fascinated by Nawab's active charm and romance, and begins spending most of her time in their company; the handsome and intelligent prince proximately mesmerises her. Their friendship became passionate, it is clear in “It was about this time of her growing friendship with the Nawab” (Jhabvala, p:96). Ruth Jhabvala describes Olivia's penchant for the stereotypical image of traditional India; as a human being, she can choose the way of life. Heat and Dust portrays the intercultural relationship and other issues; it narrates from the Western characters’ point of view” (Geremew, p:4).

Fascinated by India and its cultural diversity, she explored the relationships between East and West as a central theme in her work, suggesting that human nature is infinitely malleable. Her novels portray the cross-cultural experiences of isolated men and women, examining the complex conditions of belonging—both psychologically and experientially—within a diverse cultural landscape. Through her realistic and unflinching depiction of social and cultural challenges, she captures the tensions and negotiations inherent in navigating multiple cultural worlds.

Ganesan and Chitra mentioned, "Human beings are passive creatures and do whatever their culture tells them to do. This explanation leads to behaviourism that locates the causes of human behaviour in a realm that is totally beyond human control" (Ganesan & Chitra, 2019, p. 49).

Jhabvala’s wanted people to be sensitive about how women feel and think through her writings; she is a realist and humanist whose fundamental aim is to establish essential oneness of humanity, her “blending of two modes of lives, the Eastern and the Western” or “the clash between tradition and modernity within the framework of family” are essential dimensions of Jhabvala’s “social realism.”

The Indian family life provides Jhabvala with the central material for her early novels' plot and point of view. India is portrayed as a backward place inhabited by the poor, sensual and imbecile people. Its stronger climate is oppressive enough to devour the Europeans who are sensitive to it. In Heat

and Dust, Ruth Praver Jhabvala explores several themes. The first theme delves into the experiences of Europeans in India, shedding light on their encounters and interactions within the Indian context.

Another significant theme is the detrimental impact of imposing one culture upon another. Jhabvala portrays the destructive consequences that arise when one culture is forcefully introduced or imposed on another, examining the resulting conflicts and complexities.

The novel also intricately examines personal relationships, offering them intermittent respites on the ever-turning wheel of experience and disillusionment. Jhabvala skillfully delves into the nuances of these relationships, providing insights into the human connection amidst the broader socio-cultural backdrop.

The fourth theme revolves around the author's convictions, expressed throughout the narrative. Jhabvala articulates her beliefs and perspectives, weaving them into the fabric of the story, thereby contributing to the overall depth and meaning of the novel.

### 3.2 Exploring the Cultural Impact of Post-Colonial Literature through Olivia

Olivia, as an Englishwoman in India, represents the colonial mindset. Her struggles and conflicts in adapting to Indian culture serve as a microcosm of the broader challenges faced by the English in understanding and assimilating into the Indian way of life.

The novel portrays Olivia's gradual assimilation into the local traditions and customs. The novel presents several moments that illustrate the ways in which Indian culture shapes and influences Olivia's perceptions, emotions, and sense of identity. Through her encounters with Indian social customs, values, and relationships, Olivia gradually moves away from her British cultural framework and becomes increasingly engaged with the Indian cultural environment. These experiences not only affect her personal choices but also redefine her understanding of belonging and selfhood. The following examples from the novel demonstrate how Indian culture exerts a profound influence on Olivia's transformation.

#### **Clothing and Appearance:**

The novel emphasizes the idea of Olivia's adaptation in Indian clothing, wearing saris and other traditional attire. This change in her wardrobe reflects her growing affinity for local customs " She was also in native dress, a servant's coarse sari"(p.187)

The quote seems to describe a moment of admiration and affection

between Douglas and Olivia, the narrator expresses appreciation for a woman's physical appearance, focusing on her golden hair, white neck, and graceful posture while sewing. The mention of the man's vague understanding of women's clothes and his preference for what she is wearing suggests a personal and subjective connection to the woman.

indicates a casual inquiry into the woman's attire, possibly reflecting the man's interest in her and a desire to engage in conversation. The overall tone of the passage conveys a sense of intimacy and appreciation of the woman's presence.

Douglas asked Olivia about her dress:

“He looked at her golden head bent gracefully from her white neck: he loved to have her sitting there opposite him, sewing. She was wearing something soft and beige. He was vague about women’s clothes and only knew what he liked and he liked this.

Is that new?” (p. 41)

This quote illustrates Olivia's subtle but significant transition toward Indian cultural assimilation, which is represented by her attire. Her clothing is described as "soft and beige," which deviates from the stiff and formal look typically associated with British women's clothing and instead suggests a move toward the ease and comfort of Indian clothing. Her posture, which is "bent gracefully from her white neck," further supports the idea that she is at ease and adaptable in the Indian environment. Furthermore, the male observer's admiration for her looks highlights how Olivia's physical attributes fit in with the local cultural context. His hazy knowledge of women's fashion contrasts with his instant admiration for her present look, suggesting that her clothing speaks to Indian culture and aesthetics. Olivia is further positioned within Indian cultural norms through her sewing, a domestic and traditionally valued activity.

As a result, the quote demonstrates how Olivia's attire serves as a symbol of her growing cultural affinities. Through this subtle metamorphosis, the book implies that Olivia's attraction to India is not just ideological or emotional but also manifested in her daily activities, such as her attire, which serves as an outward manifestation of her sense of cultural identity and belonging.

### **Participation in Religious and Social Events:**

In Indian culture, tying red strings symbolizes faith, hope, and divine

intervention. This ritual reflects a worldview that intimately connects spiritual forces with daily life. Olivia's participation in this act contrasts sharply with the more reserved and formal religious practices associated with British colonial society. While British culture often emphasises personal faith and social etiquette, the novel's Indian religious expression is public, emotional, and richly symbolic.

The symbolic act of tying red threads at the shrine illustrates this shift:

“He held two red threads. She tied hers first, then he tied his. Then he asked her, ‘What did you wish for?’ ‘Are you supposed to tell?’... ‘Do you know why women come here? What do they wish for? Is this what you wished for too?’ ‘Yes,’ she said.” (p. 145)

Similarly, the shrine is described as a place “where people tied threads, praying to God to grant their wishes” (p. 48).

This contrast is further highlighted by the Nawab's arrangement of a traditional performance:

"He clapped his hands and gave an order, and after a while, a troupe of transgender people was brought in, and the Nawab made them sing and dance for Olivia in their traditional way." (p. 10)

The presence of the Hijaras—a group with a distinct cultural identity and ceremonial roles—highlights the vibrancy and performative nature of Indian social traditions. These performances are radically different from the structured and restrained forms of entertainment prevalent in British colonial communities. Olivia's exposure to and acceptance of these performances suggest a shift away from British cultural norms toward a more fluid engagement with Indian customs. Thus, through her participation in religious rituals and traditional ceremonies, the novel presents a clear cultural contrast. Olivia's transformation is not only emotional but also manifested through her involvement in practices that embody the spiritual, communal, and symbolic richness of Indian culture, a stark contrast to the formality and reserve of her British origins.

### **Embracing Indian Cuisine: A Cultural Shift**

Olivia's growing acceptance of Indian cuisine reflects her gradual shift away from British cultural traditions toward a deeper embrace of Indian life. Food, as a cultural symbol, often signifies belonging and identity. In the novel, the act of cooking becomes a subtle yet

significant indicator of Olivia's cultural transformation.

The narrator notes:

“Moist food that the Crawfords might have eaten at home had their Indian cook not made it so moist... that it became enjoyable, something Olivia was beginning to understand: like good parents, they loved India, no matter how eccentric it was.” (p. 62)

The description of “moist food” initially suggests dissatisfaction and carries a subtle ironic tone, perhaps reflecting British expectations of home cooking. However, the mention of the “Indian cook” introduces a cultural shift to what would otherwise have been considered familiar English dishes. Despite the similarity in the food's origins, it has undergone modifications within the Indian context, symbolizing the blending and reinterpretation of cultural forms. More importantly, the phrase “even the pleasure that Olivia began to master” indicates a shift in her perspective. What previously seemed strange or imperfect gradually transforms into a source of enjoyment and familiarity. This transformation contrasts with the more rigid attitudes of the other British characters, who often maintain an emotional and cultural distance. In contrast, Olivia demonstrates openness and adaptability.

Here, the culinary experience is not merely a minor detail but becomes a metaphor for cultural fusion and hybridization. While British culture in the novel tends to maintain its identity through separation and critique, Indian culture transforms and absorbs external elements, demonstrating its capacity for such transformation and reconciling its identity within both cultures.

### **Learning the Local Language: Linguistic and Cultural Integration**

Olivia's decision to learn Hindustani represents another significant step in her gradual integration into Indian society. Language functions as a central marker of cultural identity and social belonging; thus, her willingness to acquire the local language signals more than practical adaptation—it reflects an intentional movement toward cultural immersion.

The exchange between Olivia and her husband underscores this turning point:

“If you say it in Hindustani, yes.

I must learn!

Yes you must," he said. (p.42)

The brevity and directness of the dialogue create a sense of immediacy, highlighting the determination embedded in Olivia's declaration, "I must learn." Unlike the more detached or administratively oriented British colonial attitude toward India—where English remains the language of authority and distance—Olivia's desire to speak Hindustani suggests a departure from colonial hierarchy. Rather than expecting others to accommodate her linguistically, she chooses to adapt herself.

Learning Hindustani thus becomes symbolic of a deeper cultural engagement. It indicates not merely communication but identification, as language carries with it values, social codes, and modes of thought. In contrast to the British community's tendency to preserve cultural separation through linguistic exclusivity, Olivia's effort to speak the local language demonstrates openness and a willingness to cross cultural boundaries.

Accordingly, language in the novel operates as both a practical tool and a metaphor for belonging. Olivia's linguistic initiative reflects her gradual transformation and her increasing alignment with Indian cultural life, reinforcing the broader theme of cultural negotiation between East and West.

### **Relationships and Interactions:**

Olivia forms close relationships with Indian individuals within and outside her immediate family. Her interactions with the local community reflect her integration into the social fabric of Indian society.

The narrator writes:

"Olivia loved revisiting the Palace, even though they were ushered straight into the ladies' quarters this time. These were also very elegant, though more in Indian style, with floor-level divans covered in rich textures and little mirrors in enamelled frames. Three good European chairs had been arranged " (P.30).

The indication of Olivia's fond in visiting the Palace sets a positive tone, suggesting a sense of anticipation or enjoyment. The change in the visit, being ushered into the ladies' quarters, introduces a specific setting within the Palace.

The mention of the ladies' quarters being more in Indian style suggests a cultural layer. The inclusion of floor-level divans and

mirrors in enamelled frames reflects the influence of Indian design, providing a sense of the cultural context of the setting.

" She followed him wherever he called her and did whatever he wanted."(P.167).

The above quotation indicates submissive or obedient behaviour, emphasising the male character's influence or control over the female character; it might suggest a starting point for exploring how the characters evolve or how their relationship changes over time. At this fact, Olivia begins to understand and adapt to the gender roles prevalent in Indian society. She may navigate and adjust to the expectations placed on women, reflecting the cultural norms of the time.

### **Adoption of Cultural Norms:**

Olivia gradually adopts cultural norms, including the expectations placed on women in Indian society. Her behaviours and choices start aligning more with the cultural expectations of the community she is a part of. Olivia appreciated the Indian habit of burning the wife with her husband after his death; she wanted to go with her husband and consider it as a "Nobel"(p.65).

"Fond as I am of you, dear man," she told her husband across the table, "I don't think I could-..... I would be grateful for such a custom." (p.65).

Olivia's apparent admiration for the widow-burning practice (sati) should not be interpreted as mere acceptance of Indian cultural norms, but rather as evidence of her romanticised and sentimental view of India. Historically, sati was a controversial and geographically limited practice, officially abolished under British colonial rule in 1829, and cannot be considered representative of Indian culture as a whole (Spivak, 1988; Mani, 1998). When Olivia expresses gratitude for such a custom (p. 65), her statement reveals little about Indian society, but rather her psychological yearning for absolute devotion and self-sacrifice. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) points out, colonial discourse often portrayed the "Indian widow" as an arena for ideological conflict, frequently distorting complex social realities. Similarly, Lata Mani (1998) demonstrates that discussions surrounding sati have been shaped by both colonial and nationalist agendas, rather than reflecting a unified cultural practice. In this context, Olivia's fascination with the custom appears to be a projection of her emotional dissatisfaction and desire for an

exciting experience, rather than a genuine understanding of Indian traditions. Thus, this incident highlights the novel's exploration of intercultural misunderstandings and the dangers of glorifying the "other."

### 3.3 Symbolic Practices:

The novel might depict Olivia participating in or witnessing various significant symbolic practices in Indian culture. This could include rituals, ceremonies, or traditions that hold cultural and religious importance. Olivia went with al Nawab to many traditional places, such as Baba Firdaus,

"He led the way up the rocky path to Baba Firdaus' grove. He went on talking, and she listened to him"(p.144).

He describes to her how Indian people come to pray and tell their wishes, "but still they are human beings who come here — you see — to pray and tell their wishes."(p.147).

The theme revolves around the shared humanity of Olivia, who comes to pray and express their wishes. This theme may explore the commonality of human experiences; regardless of cultural or individual differences, she engaged in a spiritual or personal ritual. This implies a setting where religious or spiritual practices are significant. This cultural context may influence her behaviours and perspectives.

### 3.4 Involvement in Domestic Rituals:

Olivia becomes involved in domestic rituals and practices within the Indian household. This could include participating in daily prayers, observing family customs, and engaging in routine activities that are culturally significant.

Douglas addresses Olivia:

"You know —well, you can have a good time with them. Just as long as you're not fooled. It's rather fun really."(p.41)

This excerpt between the couples suggests a nuanced perspective on a certain type of interaction or relationship. Douglas seems to be acknowledging that Olivia can enjoy the company of a particular group of people or individuals, finding it pleasurable or entertaining. However, he adds a cautionary note by emphasizing the importance of not being fooled. While the experience can be enjoyable, there may be an underlying complexity or potential for deception that one should be mindful of.

However, it is essential to note that Olivia's immersion in Indian culture is not without its challenges. The novel also explores the tensions and conflicts that arise due to cultural differences and the complexities of navigating a society undergoing significant changes during the colonial period. The juxtaposition of British and Indian cultures forms a central theme in the narrative.

These examples collectively depict Olivia's journey of cultural assimilation, showcasing how her lifestyle, mindset, and behaviours gradually align with the cultural milieu of the Indian society portrayed in the novel. The novel uses these cultural transitions to explore broader themes of identity, belonging, and the impact of colonialism on personal and cultural narratives.

#### 4. Conclusion

Post-colonial literature, here, operates as a methodological and theoretical framework for interrogating colonial cultural formations and for theorizing practices of decolonization and liberation. Through its exploration of identity, resistance, and solidarity, this literary genre confronts the legacies of colonialism, offering narratives of hope, resilience, and transformation. As we navigate the complexities of our interconnected world, post-colonial literature reminds us of the power of storytelling to shape our understanding of the past, illuminate the present, and imagine a more just and equitable future. The researcher presented the manifestation of the transcultural between Indian and British colonial through the heroin Olivia in "Heat and Dust." The impact of imposing one culture upon another. Jhabvala portrays the destructive consequences that arise when one culture is forcefully introduced or imposed on another, examining the resulting conflicts and complexities. The impact of English culture on Indian society has been profound and diverse, largely shaped by the historical experience of British colonial rule in India. Its influence can be observed across multiple spheres of Indian life, such as language, education, law, governance, and social practices.

#### 5. Suggestions and Recommendations

Future studies on Ruth P. Jhabvala's *Heat and Dust* should explore the novel's representation of transcultural identity through comparative analysis with other postcolonial women writers, such as Anita Desai or Kamala Markandaya, to deepen understanding of East–West encounters. Researchers may also examine how Jhabvala's dual heritage as a European living in India shapes her depiction of cultural hybridity and displacement. It is recommended to focus on how the novel redefines gender, class, and identity within

the frameworks of colonialism and postcolonialism. Additionally, interdisciplinary approaches combining literature, sociology, and cultural studies could offer richer insights into cross-cultural transformation and global identity formation.

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