

A STUDY OF EASTERN-WESTERN FATALISM IN JHABVALA'S "A NEW DOMINION"

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Abstract:

The Indian writers regard the East-West problem not so much on Indian –British aspects of dilemma but as the Indian— Indian conflict. The blending of two cultures has probably proved a challenge for many creative writers in Indo-English Literature. G.V. Desani views the encounter of the two cultures on more mundane plane and against of background of colonialism where there are meaningful attempts to blend Western and Indian cultures. The encounters take several forms such as social, cultural, political or religion-philosophical, Ruth Praver Jhabvala in her "A New Dominion" also dealing with the experiences of the Western in India. Jhabvala is thoroughly familiar with life and manners of her adopted country and endows her with unique in insight into the typical traits of Indians. She presents with utmost care the Indian tradition, culture, civilization, manners, systems, pattern of living and values.

Key words: East-west encounter, cultural, religion-philosophical, Indian spirituality.

Ruth Praver Jhabavala was born in Cologne, Germany on May 7, 1927 to Marcus Praver lawyer, and Eleanor (Cohn) Praver. Her father Marcus Praver was a Polish-Jewish lawyer. Hitler assumed power about the time that her elementary education began, and she and her brother, Seeger Solomon Praver, attended Segregated Jewish Schools before the Family moved to England as refugees in April 1939. The experience of losing in the Nazi holocaust her father's entire family, part of her mother's family, her entire social and family circle was painful.

Her experience of growing-up in England included graduation from London University, where she majored in English literature. After graduation she wrote thesis on *The Short Story in England (1700-1750)* for M.A. degree, which she earned in 1951. During this time she studied many of the great European classics. She became a British citizen in 1948. Among the students Ruth Praver met at London University was Cyrus S.H. Jhabavala, an Indian architect. They were married on June 16, 1951, and left England to make their home in the old, quiet section of New Delhi. In 1951 Ruth Praver left Britain for India as the 24-year old wife of Cyrus Jhabvala, a young Paris architect. She has said, looking back, that as a writer I consider myself exceedingly fortunate to have come here when I did and the way I

did. Her descriptions of this first encounter with India suggest that writing and living in Delhi blended for her into an intense joy of discovery.

The first stage of Jhabvala's experience of India, invariably described by her in terms of 'excitement', 'rapture' and 'love', included the birth of Jhabvala's three daughters and publication of four novels, *To Whom She Will* (1955), *The Nature of Passion* (1956) *Esmond in India* (1957) and *The Householder* (1960). It lasted nine years, during which time she never left India, but entered with increasing delight into the experiences it held out to her.

Looking two type characters, Ruth Jhabvala consistently bases the conflicts that arise between Indians and Westerns in her novels upon the complexities of culture and history, avoiding the simpler, more obvious issue of color. Her Indian characters, as seen by Western eyes, range from the comic to the beautiful; her Westerners, as seen by Indian eyes, range from the sexually titillating to the grotesque. Once they have crossed the initial barrier set up by what is unfamiliar or foreign, her characters respond to one another as individuals. Those who are unable or reluctant to do reveal their immaturity, or the falseness of their claims to liberalism or spirituality. Prem (*The Householder*), Gopi (*A New Dominion*), Nalini (*A Course of English Studies*), Clarissa (*A backward place*) are characters on both sides of the cultural prejudices that betray their immaturity and superficiality of their sophistication. As time and experience revealed how much there is and always will be to learn about India, Ruth Jhabvala's lens shifts from the comic incongruities of Indian life to focus more and more searchingly on those who pretend that such knowledge is easily acquired or inherited by birth.

Gopi (*A New Dominion*) is possibly Ruth Jhabvala's most satiric study of an ignorant Indian who sets himself up as an authority on India's cultural traditions, deeming himself better qualified by his 'Indianness' to penetrate to essential truths than any Western seeker after knowledge, however intelligent they may be or earnest. These sketches acquire deeper ironic shading when they begin to include Westerners who seek to interpret India to the Indians.

A New Dominion, like Jhabvala's other major novels dealing with the experiences of the westerner in India, takes up the responses of a group of Westerners, differentiated by the degree and nature of their involvement in Indian spirituality embodied in the worship of the guru. Though none of the characters measured up to group of Britishers Jhabvala studies in *Head and Dust*, the novel throws up with irony and ambiguity, the magnetism and dark attraction of India, about which not even the most rational of the Britishers in the new dominion, Raymond (though he is not without his 'darker' side in the relationship with the college student Gopi), can supply the right answers. The dominion (control) of India's spirituality over the forces of western materialism, seen in the carefully individualized single girls-Evie, Margaret and Lee-is Jhabval's problem theme in the novel.

These three girls "on a spiritual quest" come to India for different reasons and meet different fates according to the bent of their own nature. Evie, is shown in her last phase (Passivity and humble adoration) in relation to the Swami who heads the ashram ten miles out of Benares, which appears to be the middle of nowhere to lee. Evie has been appointed note-taker and chronicler of the Swami's dialogues and thoughts-her will is not separate from his. Of the three, she has been longest at the ashram. Margaret has rebelled against the "modern materialism" of her family back home, and has walked out of her own sister's wedding to find solace in India. She interest Lee, and their discussions as fellow boarders at Miss Charlotte's mission in Delhi, centre on the westerner in India, divided historically into two groups. Lee has been told by Margaret that... "...people just don't come any more to India to do good, those days are over. What they come for now is - well, to do good to themselves to learn, to take from India...." (Jhabvala, New37)

The truth of her remark is exemplified in the extradition orders Miss Charlotte (the missionary in whom Raymond finds his own 'rational' and collected kind) receives for her mission in the ebbing of the missionary tide, Jhabvala records the fade-out of British dominion. She is orthodox and unambiguously western and it comes as no surprise when, thoroughly looking forward to the return, she exclaims "still, home is home...." Miss Charlotte has kept clear of the attraction of India.

Lee, who becomes first-person narrator of the story after the first few chapters. Unlike Margaret, fluctuates in her perceptions of an appetite for the Swami. She starts out with an exultation which makes her write to Raymond: "... You are wasting India which has such supreme things, such gifts, to give those of us ready to take them..." (Jhabvala 92). She lets her will resist the Swami's: "I was proud, I was obstinate - but I couldn't help myself." She was troubled by his neglect, missing his piercing eye singling her out for attention amongst a group of disciples. Lee visits him in his hut on a moonlit night. His well overcomes hers, as he first hypnotizes and then sexually dominates her. Hurting and abusing her through sex, he frightens Lee into running away from the ashram to Asha (Rao Sahib's sister and Gopi's mistress), who is herself seeking solace in love from Banubai. Lee's restlessness, her swings of mood her attraction to the hidden meaning of India, bears links with Jhabvala's own responses to India. Lee confesses, while staying in the mission house: "But all the same - I don't know - I do get bored sometimes... I feel restless. I don't know what to do.... It's so disturbing out there in the garden.... I keep thinking there must be tigers behind those bushes ready to spring, and surely there must be snakes in all that uncut grass" (Jhabvala 39).

Lee's way looking, places her between a die - hard missionary like Miss Charlotte and a die - hard devotee like Evie. She is against the "tourist" approach for "tourists don't live... they only look- and looking is nothing, it doesn't help you really and truly find yourself" (Jhabvala 39). Responding as outsider to the "smell" which poor people in India exude, Lee notes sympathetically that it is because "they don't have the opportunity to wash well, or

change their clothes very often". Decisively rejecting Gopi's desire for sex in the hotel room overlooking the monuments they visit, she gives in within minutes hoping she can explain herself to him, and they could be "closer in understanding". "...She was glad to be doing this for him, and, at the final moment, thought to herself that perhaps this was part of the merging she had so ardently desired..." (55).

Raymond rejects India on aesthetic grounds. He misses his mother's taste in literature and music. His regular correspondence with her-sometimes even two letters a day -reflects a mother-dominion which provides a resistant force to India's visiting Gopi's house he is forced to conclude that "... aesthetic living isn't something they ever pay much attention to" In a year off from the publishing firm he works in, he visits the sights in India, and enters into an apparently deep relationship with homosexual currents. Neither Raymond nor Gopi come true - to - life in Jhabvala's portrayal. She rests content with Raymond as the representative of the rational west, misunderstood for his "coldness" by Indians: "self - control, a certain stoicism he had grown up with and used all his strength to develop - these two came under the heading of coldness and were equally reprehensible" (Jhabvala 206). Raymond is characterized as a sensitive being, kind to his Indian servants, helpful to his western counterparts in India, seeking to save them from India, and ultimately preserving himself for a journey to a home he remembers nostalgically.

Banubai, the spiritual Indian 'mother' in the novel hates the Swami, and labels him "dangerous". Viewed ironically by Jhabvala for the sexuality she generates under the guise of spirituality, she is Asha's spiritual counselor in Banaras. With a weakness for "nice-looking boys" as much as for sweets, she is able to command devotion from neither Asha, Lee nor from Gopi consistently.

Jhabvala is able to separate the stock attitudes of the Indian about the Westerner and vice versa, since her expatriate identity is sensitive to both sides of the matter. Lee, witnessing the young woman, a dowry death, finds the whole business bizarre, but the Indian community's reaction, through philosophy is to say, "such things happen", and "who knows what goes on". A submission to Fate and Destiny (Gopi to his arranged marriage), and individuals to the Guru, whatever the tragedies that ensue, constitutes the Indian philosophical tone. The irony is turned against the West when Gopi realizes the casual meaning of Lee's apology for ignoring him: "Gopi was no longer as impressed by apologies as he had once been. Living with Raymond, he realized that these people said sorry very quickly, perhaps even took some pleasure in it..." (Jhabvala 33).

Gopi, the spokesman for simple, perceptive India, makes fun of British: "How these people cared for views". His stereotype image of Western girls, contrasts them with their "inexperienced, unknowing" Indian counterparts: "Everyone knew that Western girls were brought up on sex, lived on sex". Ironically, the earlier generation of Britishers represented

by Asha's English governess Miss Hart, has believed: "it was eating all that spicy food that made Indian boys and girls grow up so quickly for it heated the blood and caused premature lust" (Jhabvala 56). Jhabvala's satire exposes Indians like the lady Minister of State, who is proud and complacent about her communal centre 'Shantinivas', because it has "the old type of privies, and it has now been proved by German doctors that these are best type for health, especially for women who are carrying." (Jhabvala 102-103).

The western characters look with skepticism the purity of Hindu religion which glides between the sexual and the spiritual with an easy conscience: "The lord has many aspects..." Indian's spiritualism is pathetic in such organizations as the University of Universal synthesis whose founder-president is an old man cheering up at the sight of good food. His thesis again functions through the stereotype about Indian's and Westerners: "For the Westerner the mind comes first, then the heart. With us it is topsy-turvy, or vice versa. It is the aim and basis of my University to unite these two tendencies of the human constitution..." (166).

A New Dominion or *Travelers* is a novel that contains four major characters who travel from Delhi to the holy city Banaras and then to Manipur. The novel's title suggests the themes operating at different levels. On the surface the New Dominion refers to a new India, characterized by an Indian chauvinism that has replaced British imperial arrogance. It is a novel about a new economic entrepreneurial in India in which modernity creates new kinds of stress within the patterns of traditional life and class position.

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